

Greetings from Montana!

Each year, the winter holidays – Christmas, Hanukkah, A'shura, others, and especially in the US also Kwanzaa, bring opportunity for a festive communion and reflections. They invite us to concern ourselves with essentials, for which one or the other of us may not have had time during summer months. The short days and long nights during winter allow us perhaps more readily to experience fruitful silences and a slowing down while enjoying the warmth of fire and burning candles, the fragrances of traditional cooking and baking and not to forget, joyful music and mulled wine. But for most people it represents the yearly – more or less joyful – togetherness with family and friends and the giving of gifts.

Winter here came slowly. On November 30 we still had such warm temperatures that I was able to leave my jacket behind while working outside. But then a fierce cold and snow came upon us, though still quite bearable. Today, while I am writing this letter, my cabin doesn't seem to get warm at all and I am wearing layers of clothes. We had **minus** 17 degrees C last night and I was concerned about the two dogs and how they would survive this cold. Earlier attempts to keep them in the house were so challenging that I did not wish for a repetition. They, however, must have cuddled and warmed each other in the doghouse. For in the morning they did not wish to return to their kennel. They ran around in the snow, loving it, leaving me surprised and relieved. They even ran away and returned only after two hours with deer bones in their jaws, which must have been lying around somewhere after hunting season, not found by coyotes.

A few days ago I went to Billings. Unfortunately I had not thought of the maddening Christmas traffic that had was in full bloom and in vain I tried to get through quickly with my long list which always accompanies me when going "to town." It certainly was very helpful that I am driving a Subaru now. Gabriele opened a car account for me two years ago, and through Michelle quite a sum had been accumulated. So when Gabriele, after she settled with the insurance, added another large amount, I was able to purchase a newer used Subaru. I still can't believe that I can drive now whenever I need/want to drive, comfortably and securely through mud and snow and with much lower costs for gas. Gabriele and I also don't need to juggle, who needs the car when; such a relief for both of us.

Nevertheless, it was not an easy matter for me, to accept the "gift" of the car. So many items were on my list for Living Spring that I did not know any longer where the priorities were. A dream helped me to make the decision, but after the decision was made, all dream pictures disappeared and it was as though they had not existed. Now, however, it was clear, the car is also not mine. My heart is filled with laughter!

After our neighbor's cows could only be on pasture here for one and a half months due to the flooding last summer, they left in the middle of November and with them also Syrup, the mare. Walt, the neighbor, haltered her to bring her back after all the cows had arrived home. But since he had not yet delivered the ordered hay and

Syrup had joined his gelding, and since I still had trouble with the generator at the well, he agreed to keep her through the winter months and bring both horses over in spring. What a relief this year!

Michelle has started to work at the Roundup hospital as assistant to the CEO – a very good position. She has also started to do some musical shows on the local radio and plans to do some interviews. With that she moved with a joyful heart through a door quite new to her although much wished for! Gabriele is still in her still expanding business of bookkeeping, taxes, financial counseling and a QuickBooks expert. She has recovered quite well from her car accident in spring, even though walking is still painful and difficult for her at times. Adele, a good friend of hers, came almost every day in the beginning to massage her foot. She still does this sometimes today. A loyal soul, “our” Adele. (She also speaks German very well!)

All three of us have become provocateurs and speakers for better water for the Roundup community. Contacts to the Montana EPA and to the offices of representative and senators have brought surprising insights and developments. Gabriele studied diligently the laboratory reports and is in touch with the EPA office. Michelle dived into planning processes. Both are quite engaged. We sign our letters with “partners in living” which, of course, we are. I am currently involved in assisting a neighbor to bring back an illegally deported Mexican worker. Because the lawyers, who were hired by the neighbors, were suggesting letting the case rest, even though they confirmed that the deportation had been an illegal action, we approached the ACLU and asked for their support and intervention. The ACLU did accept the case, about which we are very happy. The Neighbors were so discouraged at times that they, too, wanted to give up in bitterness and disgust (of course, it is always the government’s fault). But I believe it is people who need to be addressed and dealt with and I keep encouraging them to not give up, since there was still a lot that could be done, last but not least going to the press. I reminded them of Nazi Germany and that it could only come about because people sat in their living rooms, disgusted and head shaking and did not get involved. At least, not enough people to make a difference. So I wrote the letters and Walt signed them happily and we are very interested at what will develop now that an investigation has been initiated. This will also certainly have consequences for the county court in Roundup.

The road through the state section, quite damaged by the flood, is still not being built and will probably not be built before spring of next year. The dealings with the State for a modified entrance only came to a satisfactory conclusion at the end of November. Now we can only hope that we won’t have another flood next year.

The continuous bickering about the government, when so much locally needs attention, was getting to us. So now Living Spring in action! Always, when seeking visitors have asked me what one could possibly want/find in Roundup, my answer is always the same: If you want to be somewhere, because you get something there, don’t go. Go to where you can give what you have and where it is needed. Nothing creates more unhappiness than to be full of that which could be given but isn’t, the unused seed.

How and where will you spend the holidays? Will you have guests, will you be a guest? We will stay home. But we don't know yet whether we will be only the three of us.

I don't feel like writing anything reflective about Christmas. It seems to me, everything has been said and said often enough. But my heart is reflective and has a desire to come into your living room and be with you. With what and how Life is touching you and what you do with it and what you learn from it is something you will only recognize, appreciate and practice as an awakened being. And it is then also, that you will listen to within. There is one thing that I would like to share with you, however. The other day, someone said in a phone conversation:

"But Christa, suffering belongs to life, doesn't it?"

Quite an understandable question, reflecting the opinions of most people. However, it met with total rejection within me. Like a hand lifted, a stop sign against the obscurity of lies. The intensity surprised me.

"No, I do not believe that suffering belongs to life," I heard myself say, my brains empty and without explanation for the "No" except the hint that I believe that Life, and with that also Divine Order have nothing to do with suffering, even though I have seen much suffering and have suffered much myself.

However, the answer appeared to be absolutely true. Later, still walking around with this answer, feeling light and clarity within, I heard: ***Suffering does not belong to Life; it belongs to the illusion of life.***

I bring this to you as nourishment and reminder. A truth, born in the manger of my heart, in the warmth and certainty of Life eternal. May your heart also become and be increasingly a manger of that Truth which liberates, and may you celebrate that Truth every moment, every day and throughout all seasons.

In Joy, with best wishes for blessed Holidays, and with the words of John Milton from *Paradise Lost*:

The mind is its own place,
And in itself can make a Heav'n of Hell,
a Hell of Heav'n

I greet you sincerely,

Christa