

GREETINGS FROM BERN. A Report of a Finnish Writer, September 2005

The Writers' Union of Finland sent a letter to all its members at the end of May 2005 with an invitation for one writer to go to Bern, Switzerland. Reading those lines my heart just jumped: this was something I had been wishing for, ever since I started to work with a manuscript concerning the Swiss family I belong to.

Treuthardt, the maiden name of my grand-mother, is an old family in Simmental, and I had heard many stories about Gottfried, her father, who left Därstetten in 1876 at the age of 22 and came to make cheese and to start a big family in Finland, then in South-West of Russia. Gottfried and his father Johann were not alone: 154 Swiss cheese-makers moved to Finland during the years 1860-1922.

I was very glad to be chosen to visit Bern, to be the first Finnish writer in this programme. The time-frame was one month, September, but because of a conference announced several months earlier I could stay there about three weeks. They were lovely, inspiring weeks!

The Writers' Union of Finland had invited, for July 2005, Daniel Himmelberger, the President of BSV (Bernische Schriftstellerinnen und Schriftstellerverein), to visit Helsinki with his wife, to stay in a little villa in the heart of the town. Also another writer from Bern, Hans Burger, came there in July. He, as a friend of Finland, he had visited our country many times over the years.

Heidi Corradi, Abteilung Kulturelles, was kind enough to come to the station at my arrival in Bern late one night. Settling in the apartment as well as in the town was easy, for I already had a few friends there. I was invited to their home, or they took me to tours around the town, or explained how the bike-rental system worked. (I do miss the electric bikes of Bern!) I tried not to burden everybody too much. I also met with all the staff of Abteilung Kulturelles, very helpful and kind people providing me with necessary information.

Writing this report my thankful thoughts go to Bernischer Schriftstellerinnen und Schriftstellerverein and the Himmelberger's as well as Hans Burger and to Peter Schranz with his staff in Abteilung Kulturelles: Heidi Corradi, Christoph Reichenau, Elisabete Rodrigues and Bojan Tesic.

Furthermore I was offered a warm contact in PROGR by Katrien Reist van Gelder and Eva Winkler in Atelierprogramm. I am very grateful for their concern, too.

It was pleasant to stay in Speichergasse 4 in the Old Town. The apartment was big, yet very cosy, in one word a pleasant home. Before I arrived I knew there would be another person to share the apartment, a female artist from Prague and accustomed to live alone I was a little bit worried whether I would adjust or not. But there was no problem what so ever, as Katerina Seda seemed to be a charming person and a young, talented artist.

With Katerina I had many interesting discussion about life, philosophy and art, strange enough, for neither of us spoke fluent German. I should have been able to talk it quite well having studied German at school, but because of mere laziness I had not used the language for thirty years. Well, speaking German was one of the good, unexpected things in Bern.

Visiting Simmental was very exciting and emotional for me. The first trip was done with Daniel Himmelberger who took me there with his car. Daniel's help was very much needed and made it easy for me to go there later on my own. I met many relatives, took photos and got plenty of new material for my book. Also the history of Bern is very interesting, but I could do only two visits in Historisches Museum. Three weeks was quite a short time for all the investigations that I had planned.

The writers' exchange program between Switzerland and Finland seems a splendid idea and worth while carrying on in the future, too. Our world needs people who cultivate the tolerance and

understanding for each other. The best tools for this work are personal contacts and travelling to other countries.

Helsinki, 27th of September 2005

With grateful thoughts

Liisa Mäntymies