

Northern Accents

N M U D E P A R T M E N T O F M O D E R N L A N G U A G E S A N D L I T E R A T U R E S

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- St. Nicholas was a monk in Patarra, a village in what is now Turkey.
- He attended the Council of Nicea in AD 325.
- He was made Bishop of Myra while still a young man.

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IN GERMANY, A CHRISTMAS-SEASON CONTEST: SANTA VS. SAINT NICHOLAS

The following article is from the Christian Science Monitor.

SAINT NICHOLAS, GERMANY - Peter Hahne does not like Santa Claus. In fact, this German television celebrity is promoting a "Santa Claus Free Zone," calling on people to distribute anti-Santa stickers.

The problem, as Mr. Hahne sees it, is that American-style Santas are crowding out Saint Nicholas, the traditional Christmas icon of this hilly Germany village named after the 4th-century bishop. "Santa is a symbol

of consumption," Hahne says. "Nicholas was a real bishop [who] taught us what's still very true today: giving does not make us poorer. It makes us richer." To many Germans, Santa's spread is an unwelcome

reminder of the encroachment of American commercialism into Europe.

"People are starting to become critical of commercialism in every respect," says Hermann Bausinger, a cultural anthropologist at the University of Tübingen. Indeed, Hahne's lament

selling Advent calendars - minus chocolate or cartoon figures - by the hundreds of thousands.

"The demand shows that people are yearning for quietness, spirituality, and a sense of meaning again," says Bishop Margot Käßmann, of Hannover,

Germany.

The village of Rattenberg in nearby Austria isn't even allowing commercial stands during its Christmas events this year. Instead of focusing on gingerbread cookies, there will be songs, story telling, and a live nativity scene go-



German students at NMU enjoy St. Nicholas day at Stammtisch.

has struck a chord: Across Germany, initiatives are sprouting to push commerce out of Christmas. Protestant churches throughout Germany this year launched a "Christmas in December" initiative,

ing through the village to "go back to what Advent means originally," says Ger-tie Doblender, Rattenberg's Christmas events coordinator.

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HOW SPANISH ARRIVED IN MY LIFE

The following article is the first part in a narrative series about Professor Maria Offer's initial encounters with the Spanish language.

It was on that day, when spring hinted its arrival and winter threatened to stay, that the course of my life changed forever. I was a sophomore in college the day that I rode my bike over to St. Michael's church, which was not far from Northern's campus. When I arrived, I dismounted my bike, parked it outside the church and went inside to sit with a group of friends and listen to a doctor who would share her experiences of working in a Salvadoran refugee camp. I simply wanted to learn more information about Central America; I was not expecting my world to be shaken up. Beginning that evening, I would embark on a new journey, leaving behind my familiar, comfortable path. I would question what I once held as true and I would begin the long, complex process of learning a new language. What I did not foresee was that learning a new language would allow me to see another way of thinking, living, and caring about others.

In 1981, Dr. Cindy Lack had traveled to Honduras with "Doctors without Borders," an international humanitarian aid organization, after she completed a residency at Marquette General. Now she had returned to share her story. Her slides flashed to rooms partitioned with curtains, the sick waiting for medicine to be spooned out like hope, providing momentary relief from a life of pain they could not escape. Around the Salvadorans' makeshift homes of cardboard, wood, and tarpaulins, we could see carefully cultivated gardens, like silver beams of

sunshine reaching between thick, dark gray clouds. With the next slide, we sat peering into the faces of sick women, waiting for their turn with the doctor as they held babies suffering from malnutrition.

I remember their eyes the most. Through the children's eyes, I saw homes swallowed by fire and a childhood stolen by war. These truths were denied to me in the white-washed textbooks and biased news of the '70s and '80s. As my eyes met theirs in the image of the slides, I saw children who were too weary to play, too weak to laugh and run. The spark of childhood was absent from those eyes; only pain reflected in them now.

I could see truth in their eyes, an undeniable truth that the Channel 4 News cover-up could not hide. At that moment I realized that what I had been told as truth was a sham. The news media, controlled by large corporations with economic interests in Central America, would not want this other story to be told. Cindy talked about her experiences, sharing the story of pain and destruction, of families fleeing from their homes as the Salvadoran Army, supported by the U.S. government, bombed mountain villages and scorched their cornfields, their milpa, their sacred corn, which fed their children and sustained their culture.

While Cindy showed a slide of several families crowded into a single room, images from my memories flashed to the four-bedroom house where I had grown up, with two cars parked outside and to summer vacations on the lake and ski vacations in the winter. In the next slide, a mother held a child suffering from dehydration due to

contaminated water. In my mind, I revisited the sterile waiting room of my youth, with *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Highlights*, and Dr. Seuss books on coffee tables. Two boys with tattered pants and no shoes playing in a mud puddle brought back my own memories of a swing-set, hula hoops, and wading pool on a manicured lawn in suburbia. I was beginning to understand how the "Land-of-Plenty," related to plenty of others who suffered as a result of the U.S. economic policies that preyed on raw materials from Central America: bananas, sugar cane, cotton, and coffee beans.

Images of fire, homes in ashes, bombs exploding, and children running burned in my mind and shattered my view that the American government was founded on principles of freedom and justice for all. In the image of the faces that Cindy captured on film, we could see their desire to live in peace. In this moment, I was jerked out of the slumber known as the American Dream; I knew I would not rest under that blanket of denial again. I saw disparate images as I looked first through one lens and saw families torn from their homes and then looked through a different lens at my own privileged childhood. In this refracted light, I saw a common humanity.

"...I saw children who were too weary to play, too weak to laugh and run"

SPANISH CLUB UPDATE

The Spanish Club is open to all students at NMU no matter what language background you may have in Spanish. This semester the Spanish club has been active in holding meetings every Wednesday at 5PM and often going to Border Grill to chat and have some good Mexican food. Earlier this semester the club participated

in the lip sinking competition in JXJ and was quite good! For the rest of the semester, the Spanish Club will continue to hold its weekly meetings and will be having a fiesta before the end of the Semester where students can make any food dish they would like and bring it in for all to enjoy!

By Jesse Greenleaf



ST. NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

But guarding the holiday is getting harder. Every year, Christmas decorations come earlier. And Santa's red suit is obscuring the emphasis on the charity that St. Nicholas embodied centuries ago as a monk in what is now Turkey.

Rarely seen years ago, Santa Claus is on the march here, on wrapping paper, television ads, or as chocolate figurines filling supermarket shelves.

"Christmas has switched from being only a celebration within the family and the church to being a public event starting late in November and going on through January," says Mr. Bausinger.

Especially troubling, say villagers here, is the shift in tone of the letters children send to Saint Nicholas on his namesake holiday Dec. 6.

"In these letters, children show they're thinking of somebody else," says Sabine Gerecke, who has read the

4,000 letters flooding her village so far. "That's the spirit of Christmas."

One child wrote to say he's struggling with shyness. "Dear Nicholas," Adrian wrote, "Can you give me a bit of courage, please?" Tobias and Sebastian wrote to say thank you. "Among all the presents you gave us last year," the two brothers wrote, "the most beautiful was our little brother Felix." And Michael has pledged reform. "St. Nicholas," the rambunctious second grader promised, "I'm going to get better."

But missives like these are becoming rare, volunteers say. More children are writing gift wish lists, addressed to Santa.

The myth of Santa Claus evolved from the fusion of two figures: gift-bearing Saint Nicholas and the representation of the infant Jesus known as "Christkindlein" (Christ child), which later became "Kris Kringle." After

Dutch immigrants brought Sinter Klaas to the US, German immigrant Thomas Nast drew a lasting image of a

man with the white beard and sparkling eyes. Then in the early 1930s, Coca Cola, in need of a spokesman to boost sales, tapped the merry figure, completing his path from saint to salesman.

Gerecke doesn't believe anti-Santa stickers will bring children nearer to the heart of Christmas.

But telling them the story of the real, charitable Saint Nicholas, she says, will help keep the spirit alive.

"Christmas is a time when one looks inside oneself," says Phillip Tengg, a vocational teacher who six years ago started Pro-Child Christ, a group based in Innsbruck, Austria, that promotes traditional celebrations of Christmas. "It's something for the heart and not only for the eye."

By Isabelle de Pommereau, correspondent of the Christian Science Monitor

“And Santa’s red suit is obscuring the emphasis on charity that St. Nicholas embodied centuries ago...”



**N M U D E P A R T M E N T
O F M O D E R N
L A N G U A G E S A N D
L I T E R A T U R E S**

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Knowledge of languages other than English and sensitivity to other cultures are becoming increasingly important as we start the twenty-first century. Efficient transportation and instantaneous communications make contact with people from around the globe more and more frequent and vital. Technological advances offer exciting new opportunities. Northern Michigan University's Department of Languages seeks to open doors to students in their wide-ranging pursuits through the study of languages and cultures.

G E R M A N C L U B U P D A T E

In the past, the German Club has participated in events such as the Women's Right's Fair and Fasching. The members have raised their money by selling popcorn at Campus Cinema movies on Saturday and Sunday nights in Jamrich 102.

Jessica Hekkila has put a good amount of time and effort into the German Club. Hekkila has been the president of the German Club prior to the winter 2005 semester. Right now, she is studying in Germany and will be back by this summer and ready to take German

Club under her wings once again.

As for this semester, many good ideas have been discussed for the German Club to participate in. Such things include an open house to allow students around campus to see this club's potential and taste delicious German foods; entertaining other language clubs to learn about other cultures through games, song, and food; building up the German Club's funds by hosting bake sales around campus and asking for donations; continuing German Jeopardy, where topics such as art, history, places, and culture are included; as well as celebrating German holidays. The German Club has thus far had a German game day in

February. There, members and non-members came together to play Taboo in German. Those who did not know the language or who were in the lower classes were given a dictionary. Before the semester is up, the German Club hopes to have a German song day, a German Video day, and participate in May Day along with the Socialist Club.

Many of its members are students who are or have already taken a German class either in college or in high school. German Club, however, stresses that it is for people who have an interest in German culture, not only the language.

By Elle Madison

