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Season's greetings from the forest

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I have said before that I doubt God meant Denmark to be inhabited during the winter, although the invention of insulated houses and cast iron fire stoves has now made it bearable. We might have another mission here though, because feeding the birds just outside the window gives us a great pleasure watching the frantic life when they fight for the best sunflower seed or bite of lard.

The view is especially fine from my corner window, where the scenery often diverts my attention from the monitor. Apart from a great variety of birds we have daily visits by chipmunks, which have developed skills to hang head down from a branch feeding directly from the container with seed. Occasionally a deer with two calves join the party, which often includes also a lady pheasant. Among the pretty birds are woodpeckers and the colourful wood magpies. Out of consideration for our owl I am also feeding the mice. The owl's nest is less than 20' from my window, but the only chance to see her is normally in the spring.

In our serial about the house we can now issue a report of completion. The furniture has been arranged and we are now slowly unpacking all the boxes of long forgotten frills, which would make an interesting flea market. However this would require a sunny lawn, which is in shortage these days, so we probably end up passing it on to the local red-cross second hand shop. I have always followed the rule: Don't throw away anything if you have room to store it. When we moved from our previous big house we did a serious sorting out and took several carloads to the Salvation Army. However one year in a small motorhome has changed our habits, so we have found out that we are doing just fine with much less of everything.

With this attitude I feel that Christmas is no longer the Feast it was meant to be. Starting in October with shops merchandising Christmas and with the drumsticks moving ever faster, the crescendo of TV-commercials, handouts and hurried shoppers would have been unbearable – had we not lived in this solitary forest retreat. I receive the US Today by e-mail and have noted that even in the world's consumer society no. 1 a movement is under way to reduce the consumption. And when I look at the shops displays and catalogues I realise with a good portion of old man's wisdom how well I can do without all that. Of course this is an attitude of the affluent society in which we have had the luck to be born and raised.

We are also happy to see that our two girls have taken the first successful steps into their future independent lives. Camilla completed last summer her year as au pair and spent the holidays with friends in Spain. In August she was admitted to a social welfare study combined with a trainee service in the local child-, old age- and handicap institutions in our municipality. She is living in our flat on 1st floor in my mother's house and to the pleasure of both is a regular dinner guest with grandma. In this small town the supply of young boys is limited, so she has become a frequent user of the chat facility on the Internet where she has met – and later visited in person – several friends.

Anja is following the same path and is enjoying her year as au pair with a wonderful family on a farm in the countryside. She is taking care of 3 children between ½ and 8 years. The family is very engaged by animals and accommodate pigs, horses, cattle, turkeys, chicken, ducks, geese, rabbits

and of course cats and dogs. Some of them live in the house and if a leg is broken or the mother neglects a young animal, it is being nursed in the kitchen. Unlike the family Anja is very interested in food and good eating. Therefore she was invited to take over the cooking and she is now serving all of mom's favourite dishes. It is said that the family has by now put on some weight. We do not see Anja very often because even during the weekend she likes staying on the farm, especially if she is alone and can turn up the radio. As you may recall from our Tour de Europe report, Anja and I had a great holiday together last summer. Next year Anja intends to follow Camilla's path with the social welfare education.

Now that the work on the house is over, Benthe has got a new job on the local Grundfos pump factory. She is working from 3 p.m. until 11 p.m., which suits her well. Especially during the winter she enjoys sleeping during the dark mornings and having almost a full day off before work starts. Her job is connecting and testing electrical controls on motors used for the pumps. Actually this part of the factory will be moved to a new plant in Hungary, where the wages are much lower than in Denmark. Around 400 employees will lose their present jobs. However most people expect to be offered employment in another production here of a newly developed pump, which is so efficient that if all European users would convert to that type, the energy reduction would correspond to half of Denmark's total electrical consumption.

And myself, I am continuing with some consultancy work, although not to the same extent as before our American journey. Also in that area I can do with less. I have some flexible tasks as board member in various companies, which indeed is very interesting and a fine way to exert influence without having to do all the work myself. Then I am taking Spanish lessons – actually it is a mistake as I wanted to learn Italian (a follow-up of our summer trip), but all seats were taken when I applied for the Italian classes. In comparison with Italy I do not find Spain very exciting, so I am now turning the eyes towards Mexico and South America.

Finishing off we would like to recall the fine summertime here in the forest. We are surrounded by nature and in June the brooms and lupines are adding their Technicolor to a beautiful symphony. We hope the picture gives you an impression.



We hope that you are all well and from all of us to all of you we wish a Merry Christmas and all the best for the New Year.

Anja – Camilla – Benthe - Søren