

# 2011 Xmas News from Herrliberg, Switzerland.

**Spring 2012** has arrived a little early – after all, it's still only 2. December 2011, but today even the bees were out (looking thoroughly confused) and the temperature rose to a grand 12°C. The picture above is the view from my office window.



We usually get a couple of rounds of snow in the beginning of November (a token reminder for everyone to get those snow tyres on), but that just didn't happen.

Anyone who doesn't quite get the idea of global warming, please come and see me ...

Contrary to last year, there is truly very little evidence that Christmas is only just around the corner. The Zürich Christmas lights, "Lucy" (in the sky with diamonds), were switched on about 2 weeks ago (as usual subject to some controversy and debate), Christmas decorations turned up in Migros around mid-October, but those don't really count.

With no snow and with Spring having arrived this afternoon, one has to just make do. Therefore, ignoring all of that, I'll just crack on with the Spring ... uh, Xmas 2011 newsletter.

**Julefrokost.** This has now become a tradition, which while quite a bit of work, is actually really nice. Last years julefrokost went entirely according to plan, including a mid-afternoon walk ("så man kan få slået fis fra sig"), so let me take a quick look at the preparations for the one we're planning for next Saturday, 10. December.



*Ye olde mincer*

Two new but essential elements this year: the mincer (kødhakker) and the proper Danish Christmas beer (juleøl). For Christmas last year, my sister gave me an old-fashioned mincer. Being only too aware of my struggles over the last couple of years, she'd spotted one in a shop and promptly picked it up for me for Christmas. For the preparation of frikadeller and leverpostej (a Danish variation of paté) this shall come in very handy indeed.

**Julebryg**, i.e. Danish Christmas beer, is brewed especially and only for Christmas. Now that we're quite well organised for food & snaps, the proper beer is really the last bit of the puzzle. So, sometime early November, I posted a question to a mailing list, asking about getting hold of Danish Christmas beers in Switzerland or southern Germany. Initially there was no response, but after a week or two, Marianne in Männedorf offered to bring crates of Tuborg Julebryg. Therefore, Julefrokost 2011 in Herrliberg will be accompanied by cans of genuine Tuborg Julebryg!



Preparations are otherwise progressing according to plan – I have just today completed *Tuborg Julebryg* making three leverpostej. Getting hold of the ingredients can be a bit of an enterprise but I'm getting the hang of it now.

**Saturday.** This year, we're doing the Julefrokost on a Saturday which enables Jens Rönker to take part too; on a Sunday he would otherwise have to leave in the afternoon to go to Walldorf (Germany) for work the next morning.

Menu-wise, one exception this time – no blodpølse. Previously only George and myself have partaken and as I forgot to

put in an order with my mum, I've had to skip it this time around. It's a pity, but there'll be plenty of food anyway.

**Christmas 2010.** We went to Denmark to celebrate Christmas with my family – my sister hosting the event again, as she has been doing for a couple of years now. The drive north took the usual 12-14 hours and was perhaps a bit more stressful given the quite icy and snowy conditions this time. The worst bit was from Flens-burg and north to Århus although primarily because of roadworks in Denmark. Courtesy of enormous potholes caused by the frost, we almost lost a front wheel just before crossing the bridge over Vejle Fjord.

**New Years Eve.** Upon our return from Denmark, we celebrated New Years Eve together with Jens and Yoon-Hee as well as Jens' parents, Margot and Karl-Heinz. Very enjoyable, although to be honest, I do not

remember quite how the evening began, nor how it concluded. I blame this squarely on the Feuerzangenbowle prepared by Jens and Karl-Heinz.

For those of you who can't be bothered with Google, a Feuerzangenbowle is a mixture of redwine and spices (star aniseed, cinnamon, lemon+orange peel etc), plus a sugarcone saturated/doused with rum, then lit and drop by drop slowly added to the mix.

Served in generous helpings, it is very enjoyable and thoroughly dangerous. You have been warned.

**Sportferien.** Moving quickly on, in February Aksel continued his ski & snowboard lessons on Flumserberg.

In the finishing down hill race, to everyone's surprise, including his own, he won a 3rd place out of 44. Didn't seem to make much of an impression on him but I can assure you his parents were well impressed.

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*Aksel and I sat on top of a London tourbus*

**A riot in London.** Nadine had a meeting in London in March, so we decided we would do a bit of an outing for everyone. Nadine went ahead at the beginning of the week, Aksel and I then joined her Friday evening. We stayed in the Méridien on Piccadilly and Saturday night we went to Chinatown for dinner. Aksel had a great time, being spoiled by just about everyone. As we strolled back, we slowly started noticing one, then two, then three helicopters hovering overhead. Helicopters are commonplace in Switzerland but highly unusual hovering over central London. By the time we were back at Piccadilly Circus, we had to be quickly waved through two police cordons (everyone in full riot



*Aksel looking very tired after winning the bronze medal at Skischule Flumserberg.*



gear, plexiglass shields, helmets and batons) right outside our hotel. Back in the room we could follow the pursuing onslaught on TV. The next day we went out to inspect the damage, and to go for a ride on one of the famous London doubledecker tour busses. (bit of an anti-climax after the entertainment of the previous night).

**Penny Gardner** came to see us in May, but quite unusually, she only stayed for about a week. She's got herself a hobby now, an old cottage in Devon, so we're expecting to see a lot more of her for the next few years. (she'll need somewhere to recuperate and get away from the stress).

Towards the end of May, Nadine popped over to Nassau in the Bamahas for a week to do some work. (well, that's what she told everyone ...)

**Jazz.** In June we looked after Delia's dog, "Jazz" for a week or so. Delia Lenoir, a good friend of ours, had to go to Paris to sort out the house after her grandmum, who had passed away earlier that year. I quite enjoyed looking after him, taking him out for a walk three times a day etc. Jazz also seemed to be enjoying the new arrangement, he was quite happy to have a new alpha male in the pack.

**Mid-July or thereabouts,** Nadine's mum Penny came to visit us, and brought along Aksel's cousin Viktor. Just as last year, they stayed for two-three weeks until we all flew to Greece together:



*Aksel piloting the boat on our way to Vourvourou*

**Summer holidays.** Last year I was not really impressed with the price/feature ratio of the house in Vourvourou, so I did some research to see if we might improve on that this time. It turned out that far superior features were easily

available, and at a somewhat comparable price. Having decided on a place in Psakoudia, we went to Greece again, but this time together with Jens and Yoon-Hee and their two children, Tim and Mark. Greece has long been a favourite summer haunt of Jens' parents but Jens had never been there himself, so having mulled it over for bit, we decided we were going to try it together.

**Psakoudia** was probably a bit more on the touristy side than we have otherwise encountered in Greece. Not in a bad way, just different.

Virtually within hours of arriving, Nadine made friends with the neighbour Zoé and brought back two bottles of genuine (i.e. homemade) tsipouro, and a homemade jar of "sweet-of-spoon" made with cherries. All Nadine had really wanted was to borrow the washing machine ...

According to Jens, the whiff of the home-made tsipouro when poured over the customary couple of icecubes, was much like nail varnish remover, i.e. acetone. (granted, there may have been a very slight resemblance).

The beach in Psakoudia was okay but actually nothing much to write home about. However, it did have service which meant frappés and loukouma (large sugar-covered doughnuts) pretty much on-demand. Nevertheless we did end up going out to Vourvourou a couple of times, the first time by boat, subsequently by car. Having brought beers and soft drinks in a freezer-box plus a supply of gyros for lunch from our favourite place in Nikiti, Vourvourou was almost better than last year. We even got acquainted with one of the locals, "Captain" Vasilis, who showed us where/how to spot the octopus' nest.

**Sandra,** Nadine's cousin, came for a short visit in September – she'd been to London for a week to do some work and took the opportunity to stop over in Zürich to come and see us. On her way back to Thessaloniki, we put her on the train to airport, kissed and waved goodbye etc. About an hour later the phone rings: "the flight is cancelled, the air-traffic controllers in Greece are on strike, I'm coming back". We thought it was quite amusing but somehow Sandra didn't quite see it that way.

**My kidney stone.** Halfway through Herbstferien, on 5. October, I had a kidney stone. This is a unique and excruciatingly painful experience, I would not wish it on anyone. It "hit" me on a Thursday morning – I could barely walk but somehow I managed to drive down to see my GP. Here I got a shot against the worst pains, only to be hit by even worse about 5 minutes later whilst having a blood sample drawn. Then I spent about 15 minutes writhing on the floor in his reception area - after which I was able to get up and drive home. That day, until the drugs really started to work, I had another 3-4 "attacks", all rendering me virtually immobile. It was over after about a week of varying degrees of pain.

**Mamma Mia.** Only three weeks ago, we went to see the Mamma Mia musical in Halle 11 in Oerlikon. It was completely packed. If you get the chance, definitely go and see it, it's well worth it.

**Mimi Jessen.** My 96-year old grandmother passed away in last days of December 2010. Bit of a long story, poor family relations and such, but living abroad, we have not really been able to maintain much regular contact. I have however visited her a couple of times when in the 90s when I worked at Amadeus in Erding (with cheap flights to Kastrup) and Nadine and I also got to meet her in 2003 when we celebrated her 89th birthday in Dragør with the rest of the "eastern" family.



*Tiger enjoying the early March sun in the grass/hedge.*

**Tiger**, "our" wild cat, is becoming a bit of a fixture in this newsletter as well as in our lives. He is still wild, there is still no petting him and he'll run away or hiss

and bare his teeth if you get within a meter of him. He turns up just about every day, sometimes for milk, sometimes to enjoy a nap on the blanket outside my office door. The closest he comes is when he wants a closer look at the milk-carton when I pour a bowl for him.

**Spanchek.** The two biggest changes this year were 1) Marino resigning in July and 2) us hiring on Herbert Rohr in November. Marino's resignation was a surprise, even if not entirely unexpected. Five years is enough, he's built up a very decent experience, so it was really just a matter of time before he felt ready for the next step. I started advertising the position on [www.monster.ch](http://www.monster.ch) right away, repeated it for another month, then put up a second ad on [www.jobs.ch](http://www.jobs.ch). I got a few applications, even three from Germany, but until Herbert Rohr, nothing really suitable.



We're slowly preparing to begin working with external investors, i.e. venture capital. We have to speed up the growth, it's just taking much too long. To accommodate future external investors, I expect to increase the share-capital and reform the company as an AG. After that, I will start looking for investors. I don't have an actual timeline just yet but I expect we can get started once we've closed the books for 2011.

**Christmas in Denmark.** Uh, no, not this year. My mum's place is being renovated, so staying there would have been really awkward and tiring for everyone so we're staying home this time. Aksel is not entirely happy with this compromise "... I get many more presents in Denmark!", but that was hardly about to cause a change of plans. We've invited Delia and Jazz (the dog) to join us for Christmas Eve.

Well, that's all for now - as usual, I'll finish by wishing you a very Merry Christmas and a happy New Year!

