

Letter from Elise Willrich to her Daughter

Sept. 26 - 1849.

This is the third time I'm starting a letter to you, very dearly beloved Gretchen, and hope to be able to finish it; for up to now, I've always been overcome with grief and was so upset emotionally, that I had to postpone writing, again and again.

It was on the first anniversary of our arrival here in Texas, that we finally received the letters from our beloved homeland for which we had waited and hoped so very long, but how dreadfully did their contents, with the news of my beloved father's death, shock and affect me! You, my sweet Gretchen, who also love your own father dearly, will understand and harbor no ill feelings towards me, that, though I was very glad over the happiness which has come into your home, I had only thought and mind for my great loss.

It will take a long time before I can console myself and think of his passing with composure, for it was because of the great distance between us, that I felt so much closer to him. I had gotten so used to telling father everything concerning us, in spirit, for he was interested in the minutest detail. Everything we attained and accomplished here gave me special joy, because I knew I'd give father pleasure when I wrote him about it. My thoughts were with him constantly, he was still so strong and his mind so clear, that I always hoped I'd see him once more on this earth, though it probably would not have been possible next summer.

But God did not wish it, and my good father is now at rest in his cool grave. He didn't have much joy or pleasure during the last years of his life, and his only daughter was denied the happiness of comforting him and making his last days easier. I thank God for his quiet and peaceful end and that, though my hand couldn't close his eyes, another dear and trusted one did it for me and was present to receive his last sigh. He didn't pass away among utter strangers!

It is well with father now, more so than with us! However, there's still so much that binds us to this old earth - concern over the existence of our children, whose future one would like to feel and know secure - and still can do so little about it without the help of Him above who always knows best and leads and guides us.

For you, my dear Gretchen, it must have become evident that life has taken on an entirely new meaning! Everything has gained in importance when one lives and cares for such a sweet little creature, which, because of its own helplessness becomes so precious and claims one's entire attention. How happy your kind August must be, he who has always shown affection for children, even when belonging to strangers. I can well imagine how much your happy home has gained. May God keep your sweet little child.

I feel greatly honored, dear Gretchen, that you also want to give your little daughter my name! May your little one be blessed with all its parents' fine

attributes, for then she is bound to become a great source of happiness to you. May she inherit from me the love I have for her mother; there's nothing better that I could give her. God bless your dear little child, our first grandchild, and let it always be well and happy.

You generous child thought of us in your usual kind way and provided us with so many wonderful things, and what great joy they would have occasioned if only they had reached us. But even so, your affection and kindness made us extremely happy. We regret deeply that all the trouble you had and went to was for nothing, as well as your work, of which we learned from August's letter.

Otto mourns over his harmonica which didn't arrive, and Pauline naturally is very unhappy over the loss of all the lovely things which had been meant for her. Your dear Papa also regrets his wonderful pipes and I my lovely bedroom slippers, though the latter probably wouldn't have been big enough. Our hands and feet have all grown much larger; the heat seems to expand them.

Under no circumstances would I have you, my dear Gretchen, undertake such a tedious piece of work again, at the cost of your eyes and time, which you now must give to your dear little one.

Many thanks for all the reports regarding friends and acquaintances. I hadn't heard for such a long time, having waited in vain for letters from my kind father, and was just about to write again. Did my last letter to father, which left here in November, arrive and who received it? Did it also reach my brother Otto? I had written to make up his mind about immigrating to Texas, and asked him to bring with him our Julius, for whom I long and yearn.

Now that you have a dear little child of your own, you will understand how difficult it was for a mother to decide to leave such a young child behind when undertaking such a long voyage, and that it was only because of the love I felt for my kind father and the wish to give him comfort and some diversion during his declining years, which could possibly compensate for the separation from Julius.

True, he won't have the same opportunities for an education as he would with you, for so far we have no school here, but we should have both a preacher and a school by next year. Our county is thickly settled and there are many children, and the people living around us are almost all cultured and well educated, and that is why our settlement has been called by others the High German settlement, and all its members strive to have their children well bred and educated. I think, on the whole, it will be better for Julius to receive his education together with that of his brothers and sisters, though I gladly admit a mother's love has a lot to do with it.

My brother Otto will, I believe, like it here, especially as his present confined way of life won't be nearly as beneficial as the outdoor exercise in the fresh air he'd have here. I will therefore continue to try and persuade him to come to us, for now that I have become accustomed to many things. I like it here very much and I always think others would, too.

I'm harboring a secret hope that the political unrest in Germany will drive some more of our dear ones to us, because of the dissatisfaction and discontent

with their life over there. How about it, Gretchen, if your August should be among those, would you be willing to undertake such a voyage? We are very anxious about how things will develop in Germany, and your Papa doesn't think that much good will come of it - time will show, If only Uncle Ludwig and Theodor would come over with their families, how happy we could then live here together. I imagine that every father of a more or less large family must now be gravely concerned regarding the future of his children, for, should he submit to the old yoke, the subjugation to servitude will undoubtedly be worse than ever, and if he doesn't, then bloodshed will be the order of the day.

November 5.

Here I am, still writing my letter, or rather, I have not been writing for I haven't been well and had to avoid all excitement; - now, however, I am well again and will try to finish,

Carl is with us and is helping us farm; he is very strong and healthy. I shall try to purloin some of his shock of long, yellow hair to send to you.

Your dear father, who works untiringly, is well; may God keep and preserve him. His tobacco crop turned out well and the tobacco is excellent, and you can tell your dear August, it's smokable!

March 12 - 1850.

I didn't get very far with my correspondence, but now shall let nothing interfere with completing my letter. While writing the last time, I was interrupted by the arrival of a visitor, and the following day Pauline appeared upon the scene. She had been very ill and still was when she came to us to recuperate under her parents' care, as our place is considered a very healthy one. Not alone did Pauline recover from her fever, but she also gave birth to a little daughter who however came into this world pitifully weak and small, because of Pauline's illness, but who has since improved considerably, just as has our dear plump one who had lost a lot of weight. Both are now well and hearty.

Shortly after Pauline's confinement, another lady moved in on us who had come to consult a skillful physician and at the same time wished to take advantage of our good air, care and nursing. And on top of all this, it happened that unfortunately I, too, was once again expecting and was feeling very wretched indeed - and all this kept me from writing. On December 29th 1849 I gave birth to a small, but very lively little girl. This little one, named after both Uncles, Louise Theodore, keeps me busy all day long and lets me accomplish nothing.

Today Franciska is taking care of her so that I can finally finish this letter. We are all well. Charlotte is following your and Pauline's example in putting on weight. Franciska, although quite tall, is still preserving her neat and slender little waist. Anna is also a healthy number and Otto is a sweet youngster who can already ride a horse all alone. Two days ago he accompanied his father all the way to La Grange, which ride chafed him

considerably, but didn't prevent him from riding over to see Pauline next day.

We celebrated yours and his birthday with a big children's party. Please accept my best, though belated wishes for your birthday. Remain well and happy with your August and your dear little child. May God give you health and peace and keep trouble and unrest from you.

Write soon and keep on loving your faithful

Mother Elise.

In case my brother Otto should not be able to make up his mind about coming over to us, then I must ask you, dear August, to interest yourself in Julius' behalf by making inquiries regarding a reliable family under whose protection he could undertake the crossing. It would deeply grieve me if my brother shouldn't or couldn't manage to break off over there, but I must have Julius come to us under any circumstances and I hope you, my dear August, will give him your brotherly assistance in every way. As long as Julius will have to live in Texas anyway, - what future would Germany have to offer - it will be for his own good to get here, the sooner, the better.

I wish the Willrich Brothers would decide to come over to us, before everything goes topsy-turvy over there, and then you, August, must join them and become farmer and then we'll all of us be here together.

Your sisters, Gretchen dear, send you heartiest greetings and will write to you shortly. A lady, who has been living here with us and wants to return to Germany in a few months from now, will deliver these letters.

And now, Gretchen, should Julius and Otto come, I'm asking you to please send along the following things:

- (1) Several lbs. worsted yarn for Papa's sox I think you know what kind.
- (2) 1 lb. white cotton thread from Achenvolls, of several thicknesses.
- (3) Several lbs. white knitting cotton No. 28.
- (4) Several spools fine thread No. 280 - 300.
- (5) Knitting cotton.
- (6) Two spools twist
- (7) If possible I'd like to have an entire bolt of blue and white printed linen, either striped, checked or dotted. Not too nice, but suitable for clothes to work in for the entire family, for boys and girls alike, both big and little.
- (8) An A.B.C. book for Anna and Otto, neither of whom can spell as yet.
- (9) One doz. crochet needles, fine and coarse.
- (10) One fine knitting needle.
- (11) Several sheathes of gray binding thread.

- (12) One roll fine string.
- (13) 1 lb. thread No. 30.

Have Julius bring with him stout shoes and pack a11 of his clothing with the rest, for even though too small for him, we can use every piece here. All the bulbs you can get together (but no seeds) without causing you too much trouble, like Queenscrown, Lilies, Tulips, Hyacinths, Narcissus, etc, etc, packed in buckwheat chaff, also cuttings from Gardenias, of good quality.

Once again - farewell.

Translation of letter written by our Grandmother, Elise Kuckuck Willrich, to her stepdaughter, Gretchen Keuffel, in Lüneburg, from September 26, 1849 to March 12 - 1850 - at Mt. Eliza, Bluff, Fayette County, Texas.

Minnie Groos Wilkens, July

1952.

