

April 18, 1848

It is just a year ago today, my dearly beloved and revered father, that I tore myself from your arms to set forth on my voyage into this new world. Ever since my arrival here my thoughts have been with you and I'm reminded daily of what happened a year ago.

A whole year has passed since our parting, dearest father, but the time has gone by quickly enough because of the many things I've seen and experienced. I'm sure it has with you too, and I trust the year just past has left no marks upon your general state of health, but that it remains the same, so that when I return in two years from now I'll find you absolutely unchanged. True, in your dear letter which I was so very happy to receive, you did mention having had a cold, but I hope it was just one of your little winter colds which always pass by quickly, leaving no ill effects.

Your handwriting is still so fine and clear and the hand that held the pen so firm and strong. Willrich admired it too and we were both so pleased to see it.

Your letters brought us the greatest joy and happiness and we ran quite some distance to meet the returning messenger who had been sent to fetch them to be in their possession the sooner. We were so happy over our dear little Julius' letter and ever so pleased with the neat and exact way in which it was written. Again and again I gaze longingly at the dear picture of you two and wouldn't exchange it for all the treasures in the whole world. It is such an excellent likeness, especially the one of you, and it's hanging over my divan and I often converse with you in spirit, dear father. If only the distance between us weren't so great - but I bear it willingly in the thought of seeing you again.

I hope you were already in possession of the letters I have written you at the time we received yours here. Yours arrived on February 13th and I meant to answer them at once, but a lot of things kept me from it. I hadn't been well for quite some time and was suffering from a severe attack of rheumatism, which I probably got from working out in the garden. I also suffered a good deal from headaches. You know, dear father, how I've always been plagued with these.

We had some very hot days during the month of February, but these were often interrupted by an extremely strong and cold wind from the north (these are called northers), often bringing freezing temperatures with them, and as I wasn't too well acquainted with the Texas climate I probably hadn't protected myself enough against such sudden changes. However, I'm quite well again now and busy at work out in the garden every day with Willrich.

We miss the farmhands and I wish we could get them here, for as our garden is quite large there's much to do in it, especially in trying to transform

raw, uncultivated land into rich garden soil. It's true we have a German laborer who does all of the digging, but Willrich has to help a lot and does most of the work. The chap, though not young in years, has the mentality of a child; however, he is honest and tries hard enough.

We have sold our slaves because they always ran away. It is said here that the Germans don't know how to handle Negroes - are too good to them, and Willrich above all! The black people, we are told, are often in need of whipping, and neither of us could stand for that. At present we have a hired Negress and when the opportunity presents itself we want to buy two half-grown children, hoping they may learn to become attached to us.

I regret to report that the Americans in these parts, with just a few exceptions, have proven to be self-interested swindlers and cheats. One of them, who had taken a fancy to our Negroes, persuaded them to run away, hoping to buy them cheap after keeping them in hiding for over four weeks. When the Negroes hear of having been sold they then reappear. This particular chap had, however, miscalculated, for Willrich wasn't willing to sell them to him under any circumstances. Of course we had no proof that he kept our Negroes hidden and couldn't accuse him of it to his face, for then he would have sued Willrich, and justice here is weak, ineffectual and can't be counted on. So after trying different ways we finally managed to get hold of our Negroes again and then Willrich sent them down to Houston, where they were sold.

I was rather sorry, for the Negress was a fit and able woman, but of course was forced to follow her husband, otherwise she wouldn't have stayed back during his absence of four weeks; then all of a sudden one morning she was gone, for he had come for her. But that's all over now and I don't want it to annoy me any longer, so instead I'll tell you about our garden on the south side of our house and which promises to eventually be come very lovely.

It's still in its early stages and for the present the entire garden has been planted with vegetables, but even that is something quite out of the ordinary in these parts, for the Americans raise no vegetables whatsoever - with the exception of sweet potatoes. These, by the way, are excellent and taste exceedingly good, especially if prepared sweet sour, by no means like frozen potatoes, but really very palatable. We are just now busy planting a lot of them ourselves.

The so-called Irish potato is being planted here too, but it's of an inferior quality and not as good as ours is in Germany.

If you could but see our cabbage you'd be pleased, for it is doing very fine. We are quite curious to see whether our cauliflower will form any flower clusters. It is already of good size and I think it will. Because of having to get everything in readiness for our garden, we got a rather late start with the planting, especially as Willrich had to do it all by himself, for George is no longer with us. He is on

his own since last November, for which I really can't blame him, for when one gets to be 26 years old, one loves independence.

So for two whole months Willrich had no one to help him. He had to drive his own ox cart to fetch wood and water, which could only be done with his team of oxen. We do have a grove of fine oak trees within five minutes walk of our house, but it would mean to cut down these trees on the spot.

It always takes us one-half hour to haul our water, and this we do in my splendid large cask, used only for that purpose and which has become invaluable to us, for all copper products are shockingly expensive here. Two very poor wooden buckets painted gray, \$1.00. A very inferior wooden trough, in which I really wanted to wash my butter but is only good enough for bread mixing, a half dollar. Everything is scandalously high in price, but the butter has become much cheaper. During the winter it brought 30¢ a pound, now 20¢ and soon only 15¢. I'm not going to sell any more, but after wrapping it up well shall store it for the winter market.

I see I've again wandered from my subject and so let me return to our garden. Willrich worked tremendously all this spring and on the one side of our house has planted a very nice orchard of fine grafted apple trees, which for the greater part have started growing. He dug holes three feet deep for the trees, which were then filled with a mixture of sand and cow manure. This was a terrific job and the reason why so many things were planted late, especially peas, which are put into the soil as early as January. Why, in the middle of March I saw pea-pods in La Grange as long as my finger. However, we can match anyone with our cabbage and in two weeks we'll be eating kohlrabi and in eight days from now, early turnips. We've been eating radishes for the past four weeks and our watercress has already gone to seed. Our cucumbers and also our snap beans are in full bloom, as is the mustard seed.

We had our first ripe blackberries beginning of March. The berries are large and fine and grow wild in the prairies around us. For the past week I've been drying mushrooms, which are coming up in great quantities because of much rain we've been having.

We have to forego eating peas this year for having planted them too late, but some of the sugar peas will at least furnish us with some seeds. We are certainly not lacking in good vegetables for you must know, dear father, in Texas there are many leaves and stalks of plants which in Germany are classed as weeds, but here are mixed with the radish leaves as well as those of the Swedish and early spring turnips, and together produce a really fine spinach. There's absolutely no waste and the cows and pigs are not deprived in any way, for they look out for themselves and find their own food.

The first year brought with it many privations and self-denials, but when all difficulties were overcome and surmounted, we looked back upon it with a feeling of pride and satisfaction. It will no doubt sadden you to hear that for over three months we had neither a scrap of butter or a drop of milk, but we got by nicely, and oh how wonderful did the first cup of coffee with milk and the first piece of cornbread with butter taste to us! Never more marvelous than at that time, early in March, and oh how slowly did I sip my coffee and munch my buttered cornbread. Truly it seemed like nectar and ambrosia to me. I certainly hope we'll have both milk and butter next winter, for black coffee and dry cornbread aren't very good and one has to be hungry indeed to get them down. And yet how many hundreds in Texas who never have anything else - morning, noon and night - but black coffee and dry cornbread and think nothing of it, but are quite well and very happy.

We had excellent salt beef all winter and plenty of eggs, so that I could even sell some at 20¢ a dozen, a good price, and my hens laid all winter. Three days before Christmas two of my clucks had cute little chicks, one had 12, the other 11, of which I took good care and with the exception of the young fryers, which we ate, are now all grown. This summer these young hens will lay eggs, and thus it goes on all the year through.

In February we ate some of the little roosters and they were very tender and good and I wished at the time that I could share them with you, dear father. So you see we aren't exactly suffering, even though in the beginning there were many things we had to dispense with and inconveniences to overcome, but one gets used to that and the pleasant climate helps make everything bearable.

The winter here really doesn't exist, for the weather is very mild and only when a sudden norther arrives does it get unbearably cold. Then ice as thick as my finger forms in all the vessels containing water and the water holes from which we fetch it also have a crust of ice. However, with the norther over, and it never lasts more than two or three days, we again have the mildest and most agreeable weather. Sometimes these northers arrive twice in one week, but that hasn't happened often this year, for we have had an unusually mild winter. Anna and Otto have been running barefooted since the beginning of March, which Otto was passionately fond of doing all of last summer, which was probably just as well, as both he and Anna possess only one pair of shoes. So I let them run about on their own soles and it agrees famously with them, for they are both fat and healthy and have a wonderful appetite, devouring cornbread all day long.

On Sundays and for special occasions they wear their shoes, but are always glad when evening comes and they can get rid of them again. However, on rainy days it's apt to be very disagreeable, for our yard so far has not been paved, nor will the children stay out of our garden, where the soil is muddy and sticky and big lumps adhere to their bare feet - with the result that these two youngsters

come in with the loveliest boots of natural leather. Thank goodness it doesn't hurt them any; on the contrary, they become hardened and no doubt will always have a strong constitution.

April 21, 1848
In the afternoon.

After planting potatoes with Willrich the entire morning out in the refreshing rain, I want to spend the rest of the day in a festive manner by chatting a little with you, dear father.

We are filled with apprehension regarding all reports the newspapers arriving from Europe bring us. The first news about the French revolution reached us two weeks ago and now we hear that the unrest has also broken out in Germany. The latest English papers report it and we are very anxious about you, especially I who am prone to worry. Oh, if I only had all of you here how tranquil and content I'd feel and how easy would lie my head at night. I hope to hear from you again real soon, perhaps our letters will cross each other again. Willrich is terribly interested in this revolution and wonders whether our Hanover will remain quiet. Naturally we are very eager to get more information. Willrich speaks of nothing else, and believes and hopes that the revolution may drive others here to these parts.

George, who is spending Easter with us, sends you greetings and wants you to know that if you were to recruit a corps of volunteers and command it, he would come over and be your Lieutenant.

We expect Carl in June, for it seems peace is near in Texas and the troops are being dismissed. Willrich hopes to have a sturdy and efficient helper in him, for he says Carl likes to work and does it well.

If you haven't heard of Pauline's engagement through her letter to Gretchen, you no doubt will have learned further details in my letter to Gretchen. We are very glad about it, for he is considered one of the most respected men in the entire settlement. The wedding will take place in March.

Charlotte has grown quite a bit and so has Franciska. The latter is quite useful in many ways, even in driving cattle and looking for our oxen. She also milks the cows and really can do a lot, if she wants to, in spite of being so young. Anna is a very smart little rascal - Otto's boss and protector - of whom she takes motherly care, with the exception where eating and drinking is concerned, for then she feels entitled to come first - being the older. Both of them send greetings and kisses to their dear Grandpapa and to Lula (Julius). Anna remembers Elise very well and sends her greetings, too. Otto is a handsome little fellow and often reminds me of Julius in his mannerisms, especially the way he

shrugs his shoulders when he has to stand attention after having misbehaved - that's exactly the way Julius always did.

But now let me answer some of your questions, which I shall do gladly.

(1) Has the economy stove been set and been put to use?

Unfortunately a large stone hearth had been built before we arrived, which would mean it would have had to be removed and, as there are still so many other things to be done, the Stove has to wait, but it will certainly be put up some day.

(2) What is your bread like and what is it made of?

The bread is both healthy and palatable, if correctly made. It is made of maize, generally called corn here, which we grind three times through hand mills set coarse or fine. After grinding we sift it through a sieve so that only the coarse groats remain, then it's exactly like grits and white as can be. If we want it fine we sift it through a still finer sieve, and then it is almost like our wheat flour and can be used for cake and many other purposes. The groats are fed to the horses. However, it is very troublesome to make bread in this way, for it has to be done three times daily, invariably at the very moment when the hearth is already filled with pots and pans, and to these must be added two pots of bread with their lids filled with red-hot firebrands, which throw off a terrific heat.

(3) Does the soil produce wheat, rye, barley and oats?

Wheat, rye and oats thrive fine, but wheat is not grown, as we lack water mills completely and those driven by horses are installed only for corn grinding. There aren't any windmills as yet. Barley is not grown, but buckwheat instead.

(4) How are your seedlings doing?

Can't be judged as yet, for so far we haven't been able to select the land in which to do our seeding.

(5) The potatoes grow very large and bear very full, but are not of the European quality. Ripe by end of May.

(6) Peas, green beans, wax beans, carrots, soup bunch

The first three do exceedingly well. Carrots are supposed not to grow, but ours look fine though not ready to eat just yet. Our soup bunches consist of celery, leeks and parsley and are flourishing.

Basil, thyme, dill, parsley root, spinach, sorrel, caraway - none of them have come up as yet, but may still appear after it has rained.

Letter from Elise Willrich to her Father.doc, continued

This is a translation of letter written in German by our Grandmother, Elise Kuckuck Willrich, in April 1848, in her home at Mt. Eliza, Bluff, Fayette County, Texas, to her father, George Ludwig Kuckuck, in Lüneburg, Germany.

There was no signature.

*Minnie Groos Wilkens
June 15, 1952
San Antonio, Texas*