

100 N. 12th St. Apt 1004
Lincoln, Nebraska
December 9th, 2023

Dear Friends:-

As the year is hurtling towards its close, it is time to wish you what is in such short supply right now: peace unto all.¹ We hope this letter brings you a small measure of joy the way good news from you always does to us -- or that, at least, reading about our humdrum lives makes for a good soporific on a winter's night. ^{cold}

All you probably want to know that said humdrum lives are happy: we love each other, love our home, love our work, cherish our time with friends and family, and have no major health problems.² This year has ~~not~~ brought any big changes: Mark continues to put undergraduate students to work at the ^{→ play!} university³ and won two well-deserved teaching awards this year. He is getting ready to move his office / workshop / curiosity cabinet to a new location over the winter break. Antje is busy with two half-time jobs, working remotely as a research assistant. She is writing footnotes for the letters of the writer Charles Chesnutt and editing his short stories.⁴

When we are not working, we try make time for daily walks together, ^{adding in} ~~with~~ unambitious hikes, occasional road trips, and get-togethers with friends on the weekends. Mark still takes his camera everywhere, while Antje occasionally tries her hand at making as well as studying art.⁵ But the most memorable time of the year were our travels, both on our own and with friends and family. This year, there were three trips: Antje's mom Imke and sister Judith came to the US for two weeks just after Easter, and we spent some time with them in Colorado (and then here in Lincoln). This was their first joint visit, but Imke also decided to make it her American farewell tour. No more dreary transatlantic flights -- and more reasons for us to go ~~to~~ ^{visit}

¹ Here, the author is making a pathetic attempt at avoiding politics while also acknowledging the cognitive dissonance of chirpy holiday greeting in very dark times, nationally and globally.

² Minor health issues were resolved: pesky cataracts (Antje) and kidney stones (Mark) are now gone.

³ The University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), Nebraska's land-grant university, founded in 1869, and Nebraska's largest employer. Mark has been roaming the halls of its Electrical Engineering department practically forever (undergraduate 1976-1980, masters' degree 1980-1989, Ph.D. 1989-2001, Professor of Practice 2006-present). One of Antje's two jobs is also with UNL. The other is with the New School of Social Research in New York City.

⁴ Charles Waddell Chesnutt (1858-1932) was a Black American writer who was at the height of his fame just around 1900. His main works can be found at www.chesnuttarchive.org, where his correspondence is gradually being added to the digital archive. Oxford University Press is planning to publish a scholarly print edition of his complete works—eventually. And perhaps Antje has become just a wee bit obsessed with him, because yes, that's 40+ hours a week of nothing but Chesnutt work.

⁵ The breezy hobbyist tone is deceptive. Antje took a printmaking class for non-majors that was not for the faint of heart. Many tears were shed and long hours spent at the printing press. It was fabulous nonetheless.

Germany!) Then, in early summer, Mark tagged along to two of Antje's conferences. We got to explore Boston and New York together, for a week each.⁶ And in August, our friends Andrea and Peter came from Hamburg for a joint road trip through the Colorado Rockies and the Nebraska Sandhills. Seeing the familiar sights with new eyes was a truly unforgettable experience.⁷ We hope to travel together again next summer when we go to Germany!

When we are here at home (that is, most of the time) we also see Kati, Rhaine, and the grandkids, ^{plus 3 cats and Suki the dog} regularly since they live only about 3 miles from here. (Occasionally, Antje's morning run takes her there.) Kati continues to work long hours for the same hair stylist as before,⁸ while Rhaine is completing her coursework at Southeast Community College.⁹ The grandkids change and grow by leaps and bounds. Jupiter is now 8 and in 2nd grade; she loves to read (especially cartoons and comics) and always plays "library" in our book-lined guest room.¹⁰ Apollo, now 4, loves to sing with his Oma and is mostly busy embodying various superheroes. Both kids are a joy to be around -- energetic, smart, funny, active, and curious about everything.

Kai and Christine had more changes in their lives than any of us others, although they are still in Lakeland, Florida. After they both graduated last December, they worked all spring on their rock musical, which was performed at the Orlando Fringe Festival in May.¹¹ This summer, they moved house, and after some part-time gigs, Kai started working full-time as a theater tech assistant.¹² And they got married in October ^{and their 3 cats} in a small ceremony with friends. Mark and Antje will go see them ^{over} winter break and soak up a little Florida warmth before returning to the Frozen North.

Happy holidays! Be in touch; come see us. And again: Peace. Love. Understanding. It would get us so far! With best wishes for a new year, we remain,

and Ollie and Jill (the cats)

Sincerely yours,

Antje
& Mark

⁶ She gave papers (on Chesnutt, whom else?) at the American Literature Association and at the Society for Textual Studies conferences, both new venues for her, and had not been to either city for decades.

⁷ If you really need something to fall asleep to, there are always the travel blogs at www.knowledge-junkies.org (text by Antje; photography by Mark). The 2023 blog covers Boston and New York with a long coda about August.

⁸ "Blown," a salon where they don't cut but "do" hair as well as glamorous make-up—Kati's special talent!

⁹ Dean's list at SCC each semester! Next step: transitioning to a B.A. in psychology at UNL.

¹⁰ As the daughter and friend of many fabulous librarians, how could Antje not be completely charmed by this?

¹¹ "Liza Battles the Instruments of Destiny" was described by one Orlando Fringe reviewer as mixing "80s-style hair metal with 8-bit chiptunes" and its anthem as having "a melodic hook as catchy as anything in U2's *Spider-Man* musical." The album is available on Spotify and Apple Music.

¹² At Polk State College in Winter Haven. Antje has fond memories of seeing Kai perform there in "Next to Normal." But behind the scenes work—music directing, composing, and sound design—is their true calling.