

German student, family have much to celebrate



German exchange student Tim-Rasmus Kiehl looks forward to spending a quiet Christmas with his host parents, David and Karen Tuschel of Charlotte, Notre Dame

What does Christmas mean to you?

RON FERRARA, freshman:

It's a special time to gather with the family and to celebrate the birth of Christ.



AS TEENS SEE IT

KARA BEDNAREK, sophomore:

It means family and togetherness and everything shared between the family. That's about it.



GINA PAULINE, junior:

I think it's a time for sharing, because if you don't get to talk to people during the year, it's a good time to get together.



By Sean McNamara
Freelance writer

Reunification will be the theme of Christmas this year for the family of Tim-Rasmus Kiehl, 19, a West German exchange student studying at McQuaid Jesuit High School this year.

Kiehl's family lives in the small town of Sharduetz, which lies only five miles from the East German border along West Germany's northern coast. For the first time in nearly three decades, Kiehl's relatives in East Germany will be able to travel to the West for Christmas.

"I would like to be home now, especially now that all these events are happening with East and West Germany," Kiehl said of November's dramatic demolition of the wall that symbolized barriers to travel from East to West Germany. For previous Christmases, Kiehl and his family could see their relatives only by traveling to the East, which — although possible — was extremely difficult and costly.

This Christmas, Kiehl hopes for the reunification of the two Germanys, something that only a few months ago seemed impossible to him.

"In September, when East Germans went through Hungary (to escape to the West), I talked with my host father about reunification," Kiehl recalled. "I thought, 'No way, it's so far away.' Now it almost seems that with all of the changes in East Germany — people demanding reforms and reunification — that it might be possible."

Hope for reunification runs especially strong among East Germans, Kiehl said, because their living conditions compare poorly against the relative prosperity of West Germans.

"Even the physical appearances of the houses is different," he said. "There is no color on the walls in East Germany. Everything is falling apart. People don't like it there. It's pretty bad."

Kiehl — who will not return to Germany until June, 1990 — also perceives differences between Germany and the United States, particularly with regard to the celebration of Christmas. Families of both nations gather around the Christmas tree, a tradition that originated in Germany, but Americans place much more emphasis on the commercial aspects of gift giving, he said.

Kiehl acknowledged that German Christmas celebrations have superficial aspects, but observed that Germans emphasize the holiday's religious aspects more than U.S. citizens do.

"Christmas is very important for Christians in Germany. It seems that on Christmas everyone listens to Christianity and listens to what the Bible has to say. But it doesn't last long," he said. Kiehl said he misses his family in Germany, but he is looking forward to spending a quiet Christmas with his host parents, David and Karen Tuschel of Charlotte. He will not be left out of the celebration with his family, however, because he has sent an audiotape.

"So on Christmas Eve they can play the tape and it's almost like I'm there."

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