

My Writing Life

November 2013

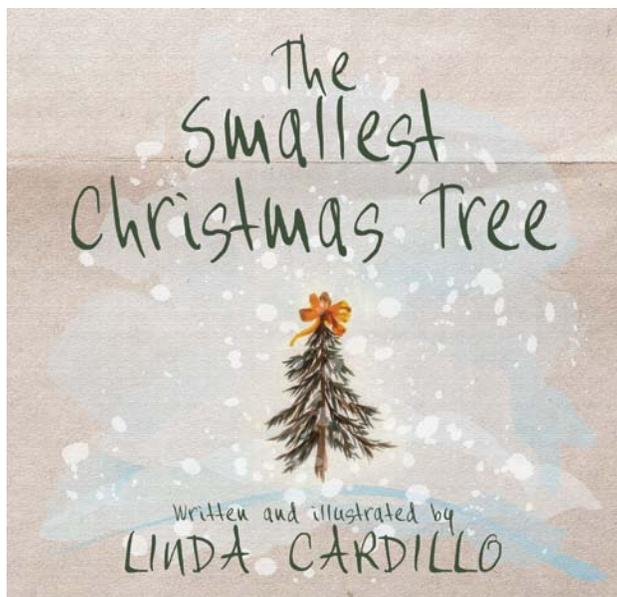
Twenty-five years ago, when my husband and I first moved our family to Germany, I wrote and illustrated a special book for my children as a Christmas gift. I decided to share it this year because I thought it might resonate with other families who are facing changes in their lives.

As we head into the rich but often intense season of the winter holidays, I hope you will take a few moments to savor

The Smallest Christmas Tree with your family.

Warmest wishes,

Linda



Papa says "No Christmas tree this year," because the family is going to be away from home visiting their grandparents.

Mama is frazzled because the family has just moved into a new house in a foreign country and she needs to find the dishes, not the Christmas ornaments.

But ten-year-old Jack and four-year-old Maria know what is truly important about celebrating Christmas and get some help from a tree with a mind of its own.

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The Story Behind the Story

Twenty-five years ago my husband's company offered him a position at its headquarters in Germany. We gladly embraced the opportunity and took off on an adventure that had an extraordinary impact on our lives. Our children were just turning four and ten years old; I was ready to take a sabbatical from my career as a business researcher and writer and devote time to writing a novel; and we had always hoped to live abroad.

In August we crated up our household in New Jersey for shipment to our new home and packed suitcases to take with us on the journey. We left New York on the QEII, experiencing the excitement of sailing out of New York Harbor past the Statue of Liberty and off on our adventure.



After a smooth Atlantic crossing we landed in Southampton, spent a few days visiting friends in England and then crossed the channel to begin our new lives. Up until that point, the adventure had been a vacation, filled with sunshine, sea breezes and relaxing family time.

When we arrived in Germany in early September, however, reality set in. First, I was foolishly unprepared for the rain and cold that greeted us, and spent our first morning (a Saturday) rushing to a department store before it closed at noon to find warm jackets and long pants for the kids. We had left America in sweltering 90-degree heat and had packed accordingly! When I returned from

the store we learned that the house we had expected to move into on the following Monday had been rented to someone else.

The company moved us into a two-room hotel suite while we house-hunted. From there, we enrolled our son in school, our daughter in kindergarten and began the process of acclimating ourselves to a new language and country. We had consciously made the decision to live in a German village rather than an expatriate community, including German schools for the children. Although we knew it would be challenging at first, we thought, what was the point of living overseas if we surround ourselves with other Americans?



Despite our intentional decision, however, it was exhausting and frustrating and pushed me further out of my comfort zone than I had ever ventured.



It took three months to locate a suitable house. In the meantime, we continued to live in the hotel. During the day, when the kids were at school, I scoured the countryside with a real estate agent for a home. In the evening, I supervised my son's homework with my one year of college German and fed the family with two minibar refrigerators, a one-burner hotplate and one pot!

Oh, and did I mention that my husband had gone back to America to oversee the end of a research project? He expected to be gone two weeks but could not return to Germany for over two months.

But by the end of November, I had finally found a house, wonderful friends with whom I am still connected (warm greetings to Ursula, Beatrice and Nickie!) and some confidence in navigating daily life.

Our furniture arrived in its shipping container and we began the process of unpacking and settling in. Because we had planned to fly back to America for the Christmas holidays

we decided to forgo decorating a tree that year. Who even knew where the ornaments were?

As you can imagine, it was a great disappointment to the children, for whom ritual and tradition were particularly important that year of great upheaval.

What happened as a result of that decision is the story you will find in *The Smallest Christmas Tree*.



And yes, the story is true.

I hope you will enjoy reading it with the children in your life as much as we enjoyed living it.

www.lindacardillo.com

The Smallest Christmas Tree is also available on Amazon, but without a personal inscription.

