WE LIVE IN A GLASS HOUSE. Not literally — our house in small-town Dillenbarg is nothing like the dream home of modern architectural design. Ours is a figurative glass house, and we call it that because we are as much on display there as would be in one of those sprawling 1952 ranch models exposed on four sides to the public and the California sun.

Why? This small incident, I think, puts it pretty much in the proverbial nutshell: One day, as my resident-officer husband was going out the front door with an armful of baseball bats, he playfully shook one at me. A German boy standing nearby called, "Watch out, or it will be in tomorrow's paper that Mr. Healy beats his wife."

Not that we mind. In the first place, we are virtually Dillenbarg citizens now and the townspeople's interest in our affairs is the usual curiosity small-towners have about their neighbors. Besides, we are in the unique position of being the only Americans residing there, and since it is in an official position, what is more natural than that our comings and goings are public property?

When we first came to Dillenbarg a little more than a year ago, I was alternately tagged as "Mr. Healy's daughter" and "Mr. Healy's mother." My grocery-shopping was the object of closest, but silent scrutiny. People stared openly at our house as they walked by and stared at us on the street. They guessed at what we ate, how much money we had, how old we were.

ALL THAT SEEMS a long time ago. Everyone knows our relationship now; my shopping expeditions are invariably the occasion for an exchange of recipes, the promise of a sample of culinary art or a dinner invitation; the extent of our funds has been estimated pretty accurately, I think, and our ages are generally a matter of record. What's more, it's a wonderful feeling to walk down the street of a small town and be able to shake hands — after the European fashion — with almost everybody one meets. I never could do that in Philadelphia, Pa.

Apart from what we call our "social success" in Dillenbarg, and by that I mean our acceptance as part of the community, our life there has had a broader — and much more important — aspect: my husband's job and, incidentally, mine. To tell about it I must go back to the beginning.

We came to Germany in the late fall of 1950. My husband, formerly a political science instructor, was given a short period of training in Washington for his first Foreign Service assignment and, following our arrival, there were subsequent training sessions at Frankfurt-on-the-Main and Wiesbaden. We then learned that we were to go to Dillkreis (Dill county) in the north German state of Hesse. My husband was to be the US resident officer or, in common alphabetical parlance, the KRO, there. The US resident officer — and there have been approximately 140 of them in the US Zone — became known as the grass-roots representative of his government in Germany.

Dillkreis is north of Frankfurt and west of the university city of Marburg, with borders touching both the British and French Zones. Dillenbarg, the county seat, nestles in a scenic valley on both sides of the river Dill, part of it perched on the lower slopes of the forested Westerwald mountain range. Most of the county lies within this rocky and infertile forest which extends to a majestic high point above Dillenbarg and then falls abruptly into the Rhine Valley at Coblenz.

IN THE MAIN, the resident officer's job is to effect the broad Department of State policies filtered to him through the Office of the US High Commissioner for Germany by programs adapted for the so-called grass-roots level. As his country's personal representative, he is also charged with winning respect and friendship for America. His every move is geared toward democratizing German life, but not Americanizing it. When he pushes plans aimed at increasing civic consciousness through better-trained citizens, he presents the democratic ideal but not necessarily the American one, even though it bears the American stamp. Furthermore, he must be a keen political reporter and keep the schedule of a country doctor.

In "our" Dillkreis, the economy is based on a combination of small gardens, similar to our truck gardens in the States, and small industries. There are sharp contrasts...
in living standards. One sees women doing backbreaking farm and garden work while their husbands are putting in long hours in the local factories and coal and iron mines. On the other hand, Dillenburg has a top-drawer Kurhaus and Tennis Klub set, with comfortable homes and shiny new cars.

Dillkreis has a total population of approximately 90,000 (recently increased 10 percent by the influx of refugees) living in three towns and 67 villages. As in most of Germany, no one resides on the worked land. The majority of Dillkreis inhabitants are Protestant in religious belief. Politically they are predominantly Socialist. The area, rich in historical interest, belonged at one time to William of Orange, the duke of Nassau. It is in the shadow of his former castle, now a towering tomb, that we have lived for the past year.

MY HUSBAND WAS EAGER from the start to begin a series of “open house” discussion meetings in our home, and we decided that although it would take a lot of “elbow grease” to get ready, we would plan to have the first one early in January. Our house was empty when we moved in except for a bed and a gigantic desk with equally gigantic lion’s paw legs, so making it livable was a big undertaking. We finally got the last bit of painting and settling done on Christmas Eve and when the New Year came were all set for our initial informal meeting with the German townsfolk.

Aside from the open house which we announced in the newspaper as a regular Friday night event, many other meetings were scheduled to be held at the Healy menage. Two reasons were behind this planning. First, the rented office space was not large enough to accommodate large gatherings and, second, we were trying to win friends and promote an ease of acceptance of programs through informality. Looking back, I am glad it had to be that way, for the 100 or more meetings, film programs and other sessions which have already taken place in our living room have kept me in constant touch with the program.

About 30 guests appeared for the first open house. Although my main task was (and still is) to act as hostess, I was busy answering questions in my pidgin German and remembering the hard-to-pronounce names for future meetings. Somehow, there was very little stiffness and in no time at all we were all engaged in a lively discussion. Our German guests said they liked the idea and would be glad to come again. A definite theme — Europa Union — was decided on for the following Friday and a discussion leader chosen. The ball was definitely rolling.

The popularity of the open house grew. Since my husband was working toward the development of media for free and open expression throughout the county through the Gemeinde (community) forum, it was decided to pick a discussion leader from that organization for each of the weekly meetings in our home. It worked beautifully. Well developed discussions on a variety of subjects have been held, among them: United Europe; World Citizenship; Denazification; What Can We Do for Our Youth?; What Can We Do for Freedom?; Could a Dictator Rise Again in Germany? and Better French-German Relations.

THE DISCUSSION TECHNIQUES displayed have impressed everyone. A former Nazi propaganda leader appeared at a recent meeting and he made a typically emotional neo-Nazi speech. After he stormed out of the room, one of the Germans said quietly, “Well, there is a great difference between argument and discussion. Some can only argue, but others can discuss — and a government can be run only by the latter.”

When the weekly attendance figure passed the 100 mark, we decided to move the Friday night gathering to more spacious quarters in the Kurhaus. This was accomplished without any loss in popularity or informality — principally through the aid of the local press, and by having some excellent guest speakers and a wise choice of discussion themes. My husband and I continued to greet the guests at the Kurhaus door. This winter, the open house is being held twice a month, once in our house and once in the Kurhaus.

One evening there was a guest panel leading the discussion which included French, British, German, Dutch,
Belgian, American and Italian nationals. The attendance approximated 500. The meeting provided an excellent opportunity for the discussion of better understanding between Germany and her neighbors. Before the meeting, we had an informal dinner at our home for the guest speakers and their wives, and we also arranged an after-dinner press conference for the panel members.

I soon learned that Friday was not the only day in the week for which I had to plan special activities connected with my husband's busy schedule. Keeping pace with him meant attending youth meetings and other public gatherings and filling invitations to speak on such subjects as: Women in a Democracy; The Division of Powers; Political Representation; Freedom of the Press and Music in America. The limitations imposed by my lack of fluency in German turned these 'speaking' engagements into a question-and-answer period in which I was able to manage pretty well and which worked out better in the long run.

Both my husband and I have spent a lot of time with young people of the community. We have visited classrooms and participated in school parties, and students often come to our house for one kind of get-together or another. Since last summer, girls of the 1951 high school graduating class have been meeting with me on Wednesday evenings for an English class, and after all these months everyone in the group still attends faithfully.

My husband and I planned several essay contests for county youth under 20 years of age. One of them was assigned the subject "What the German Federal Government Means to Me." We took those who submitted the five best essays to Bonn for a two-day trip to the German capital city, during which government buildings were visited. The two whose essays on "My Suggestions for Better Understanding among the Western European Countries" were adjudged the best we took on a five-day trip, during which we visited five countries.

Recently we have introduced into Dillkreis the idea of debating teams. With our living room as an auditorium, a trial debate was run off one night not long ago; affirmative and negative teams from the high school participated. The audience included 80 representatives of Dillkreis youth organizations. Many teams are now being formed, and a tournament for the county championship is to be held this winter.

I have joined my husband many times on his visits to the various town mayors throughout the county. These informal chats with town officials and their wives have created an atmosphere of easy friendliness which lends itself readily to the free exchange of ideas.

Last winter, I began to feel that I had progressed well enough in the German language to invite 14 women active in county affairs to a meeting at our house, with the ultimate goal of helping them to form a women's organization. The group started out as a bimonthly coffee hour but gradually talk of projects was introduced. Welfare ultimate goal of helping them to form a women's organizations, schools and hospitals. Our group worked together baking cakes to take to such institutions and arranged for several entertainment programs for them with local youth groups providing the cast.

In the meantime, I had written to friends and organizations at home asking for contributions of used clothing for our county's needy. Recently, I received from the Friends Society 1,500 brand new caps for babies which were distributed for Christmas throughout the county.

Packages from the States have also included books, religious and recreation materials, song books, and lists of names and addresses of youths wishing to correspond with Dillkreis boys and girls. The names I turn over to groups in the local youth forums; books are presented to churches and schools.

Eight months after our first meeting I suggested to my German friends that they form a women's club. They eagerly accepted the proposal — the long period of meeting and working together had at last paid off! Organizational details are now virtually completed and an active women's group seems assured. I did not attend the initial meeting — we were determined that the club should not have even the slightest foreign stamp, which my presence might have meant.

My husband and I feel that our participation in activities of various communities of Dillkreis have won us many friends and have made "our" job easier. Among these was the 700-year celebration of the city of Herborn, in which my husband took the part of King William of Holland. We are members of the tennis club, go often to local entertainments and accept as many social invitations as possible.

This past year in our "glass house" has been a happy one, producing countless richly rewarding hours. Although we are sometimes tempted to change its nickname to "Frankfurt Station," with all the interruptions and all the rushing around that name implies, we like it, and we'll be a sorry pair when we leave Dillenburg.