THE SUMMER OF OUR INNOCENCE

Tales from my Childhood

1933-1949

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Cover: My mother with her children, Habelschwerdt 1941

This collection of stories was first written for my daughter Susanne in 1982. For this edition it has been edited and enlarged.

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She was a big woman who frightened me when I was a young boy by her monumental snoring at night. A comfortable, round face with a full mouth, which she had even in her old age, full white hair that she wore in a bun at the nape, but let down at night, all made her appear warm and trustworthy, only the ironic twinkle in her small, brown eyes gave me a warning that she was quite able to destroy me with her sharp tongue.

I loved her dearly, my grandmother. She is the true archetypal woman in my life, the "One-Who-Knows". She is the origin of all my best sides and of some of my greatest

handicaps. She bequeathed her eidetic mind to a number of her many grandchildren, but to me she also gave her vitality and her thirst for life.

So perhaps it is no surprise that the earliest memories I have, are connected with her - or was it because she protected me from the fear that the arrival of the twins put into me? For I had been sent to Breslau into her care when, after I had been my mother's only child for two years, two siblings arrived at the same time, threatening my singular position.

The twins were born in Breslau late in November 1933.
A faded old photograph of the family taken in the garden in Glatz shows us five. My mother full and fertile on a wicker chair on the left concentrates all her radiance at the little bundle of Gerhard in her lap. My father sporting the infamous, fashionable brush of a mustache on his upper lip, wearing nickel glasses and gray breeches holds Christine. I stand in the middle between them, robbed of all my self-confidence. It must have been in early summer 1934, the lilac bushes behind us with their intoxicating smell are in full bloom.

Toilet training on a frightening commode having failed, Großmutter put me on an enormous, white, enameled chamber pot, with which I learned to slide expertly around her living room. With special fondness I remember the lion's claws on the feet of the heavy dining table. Großmutter laughed that she should tack a mop to my pot and get a free polishing of her parquet. There was a large doll with many petticoats and lace panties from which dangled, cotton-filled cloth legs that were sewed to the body at a very unrealistic angle. She had porcelain hands, one with missing fingers. The doll had belonged to my mother. There were also a yellow, horse-drawn mail carriage complete with a postillion with a handlebar mustache painted on his porcelain head, and a mechanical mountain of Bethlehem with a crank on the back that my uncles turned to make the shepherds run in circles, the smith swing his hammer, and the angels fly. These marvels had been made by my mythical grandfather, who had been a mining engineer in Oberschlesien, before he had died twenty years earlier.

It must have been just before Christmas, because this was the only time when these old toys were ever taken out. I slept on the green sofa in the living room that had been turned by Uncle Gerhard with the open side to the wall, so I would not fall out. At night before falling asleep I listened to the conductor pedaling the bell of the clattering tram as it rounded the street corner downstairs and to the ticking sound of the gas meter in the dark hall of the apartment. It was a cavernous, fin-de-ciecle apartment on the third floor, full of dark Wilhelminian furniture. The four or five rooms surrounded a central hall, which being windowless was lit by three gaslights even during daylight hours. In one corner the chimes of a grandfather dock counted the hours, in the other near the door was the ticking gas meter. The mighty doors all had two leaves, and the ceilings were so high that Tante Grete had to climb on a chair to dust the candelabras.

Tante Grete, one of Großmutter's sisters, who had lived with her since grandfather's death to help care for the five children. One small room contained the water-closet, the next one was rented to Fräulein Hundt, a rotund "old maid", whom I never quite trusted despite the candy with which she tried to bribe me.

On Saturdays Tante Grete filled the enormous, portable zinc bathtub, of the kind that Marat was murdered in, with huge amounts of water that she had heated for hours on the kitchen stove, and I was condemned to suffer a thorough washing by her hands. I hated

Saturdays....

I remember Großmutter's apartment so well that I could still draw a floor plan with most of the furniture in their correct places, or describe the pattern on the frosted window panes in the entrydoor to the hall. I remember the names and faces of the other people that lived with her: Uncle Gerhard, Tante Grete, Fräulein Hundt, visitors like Brigitte and Tante Magda, but I cannot describe Großmutter to you.

For four evenings I tried to revive her, to make her walk and talk to me again, to see her in her kitchen as I see Tante Grete, but all in vain. Then last night she appeared to me in a dream. The first thing I noticed was that she was not at all a big woman as I had thought to remember, she was really petite, with the small bones of my sister Christine. She was sitting in her dark gray and black dress in a shabby wicker chair that I remember so well, a worn bare cushion underneath and another in her back. I knew the cushions were there, because she had asked me to tuck them behind her many times. She had her hands in her lap and there was a smile around her eyes. Somehow she was on the balcony of the room at Tante Magda's house in Gelnhausen where she lived with Tante Grete during the last eight years of her life, but the room was the one in Breslau. I had trouble speaking to her because my voice was strangely choked, and she did not seem to hear me. Finally I shouted: "Großmutter, ich bin der Rolf, sag' was!" - Grandmother I am Rolf, say something, - but she didn't answer. And then I noticed that it was not really Großmutter, but - the Wolf from the picture in the book of fairy tales, from which my mother used to read to us! He was sitting on that chair all dressed up in a lace bonnet Grandmother had never worn and said in the high-pitched voice my mother used to affect in that story: "So daß ich Dich besser fressen kann." - So that I can better eat you up. - I knew, of course, at once, what had to be done, took out my knife and cut open the Wolfs belly. And out jumped - no, not Großmutter - but my mother and my beloved cousin Brigitte all white from the chalk the Wolf had eaten to raise the pitch of his voice!

I woke up laughing - I do not often have such dreams - wondering at the strange ways of the mind. And this morning I suddenly realized that Großmutter in her chair is my Icon, that her image is not a picture of her but She. And that She is a part of me. And that this is the reason why I cannot describe her to you. When I understood that, I began to see much more, that she reappears, reincarnate again and again in my life: as my own mother, her daughter, who together with her raised me in the beginning, in Brigitte, her granddaughter, who at another time in my life taught me to love a woman, in my sister Christine, and in Susanne, Barbara's and my Californian daughter...

Großmutter's name was Anna. And before my inner eye arise visions of the disturbing sculptures of Anna Selbstdritt "Anna-Self-Thrice" in the village churches of my youth showing Anna, the mother of Mary who is the Mother of God all in one. You could open these wooden figures to find inside Anna's womb Mary, inside whose womb was Christ on the cross. But clearer yet and closer to the truth, in Athens: Persephone and Kore raising Tripolemos between them on the famous stele from Eleusis...

One vision engenders another, from very deep down surfaces a picture. which I had forgotten: Brigitte, my cousin, and I playing Mary and Joseph cradling the Christ-child between us in the Christmas room in my grandmother's apartment in Breslau, arguing over who should be Mary and who Joseph. This must have been the first time I met Brigitte - in 1935...

I was again sent to Breslau in August 1938 when the political tensions on the Czechoslovakian border, 30 kilometers from Glatz where we lived since the advent of the twins, had become so high that we feared an attack any day. A Czech airplane had been seen flying over the city, and all along the border, on the Czech side, a chain of fortifications behind barbed wire and tank obstacles were rising.

It was in the middle of my first school year and mother had given strict instructions that I was to do daily homework exercises, since I was missing school, and writing and spelling had turned out not to be my greatest strength. Since Großmutter no longer felt up to this task, I was sent to Tante Irmgard the intelligent, charming. slender, small breasted, new wife of Uncle Hans, mother's youngest brother. I still remember the light in her modern apartment, and her beautiful smell, when she hovered over me trying to guide my awkward hand, went right to my head. She became my Lieblingstante, whom I simply fell in love with, and all girls whom I met later would have to live up to her memory.

The shadow of disaster was thickening over our heads like the huge, gray, noisy Heinckel bombers that streaked in formation over Tante Irmgard and Uncle Hans' house one morning. I had never seen planes of that size before and they came very low. I remember being able to see the black Iron Crosses painted on their wings, but my pride and excitement about our Luftwaffe could not quite overcome the fear they produced in my belly.

It too was in Breslau that I saw Our Führer in person, in 1938 just before the great cataclysm was to start. Over the objections of Großmutter, who called him a Parvenu, and the more restrained admonitions of my parents, I had hung a picture of Adolph Hitler - in the dark evening suit of his Amtsantritt of 1933 - over my bed. So, to see Him in reality was a very exciting prospect. The occasion was the grand 1938 Sports Fest in Breslau, which had been selected for its closeness to "Unserer Volksdeutschen Jugend" in Czechoslovakia and Poland. All Breslau was on its feet: The city floated in a sea of flags and banners. Excited, gay faces - exactly as Leni Riefenstahl's movies show them. Hundreds deep, people lined the route of His coming. I had, small as I was, tunneled my way through the masses right to the rope held by SA-men with brown storm-hats secured by leather straps under their chins. The cheer and noise rose ecstatically, I raised my arm with everybody, shouting at the top of my little lungs - and then He rolled by. Standing in His magnificent convertible Horch with six chromed exhaust pipes on either side of the engine hood, one hand on his belt buckle, the other raised to the prescribed angle of fifty degrees with respect to the horizontal. - I checked my arm and found it wanting.

On the way home from this rousing occasion I overheard Tante Grete discuss the threatening war with an old lady in the streetcar. Both were survivors of the previous war and were weighing our chances of defeating France. They came to very gloomy conclusions, but then Tante Grete could be scared out of her wits by anything, like Spiders, mice, and my fiddling with the Volksempfänger. The Volksempfänger, the people's radio, a square, black, bakelite box that could be purchased for 29.95 Reichsmark, was the great invention of this time, far greater than the Volkswagen. It contained, as I soon found out, only one radio tube, and a simple feedback knob. Großmutter had bought one, as soon as it had become available. It stood on a white doily on a cane stand under Großvater's picture, and every evening she and Tante Grete reverently listened to the voice of their favorite political commentator. At

home we had a huge polished walnut Blaupunkt with five ranges, a green magic-eye and a single knob control that defied my technical understanding. So, to dig in Großmutter's Volksradio was a great temptation heightened by a strict edict against it. "Junge, Du wirst das Radio noch kaputt machen!"

Most depressing was that I was regularly sent to bed, when His voice came from the radio ranting and exhorting his Volksgenossen for hours. When I came home the war had already started, officially unannounced for another year and not much noticed "German troops since the early morning hours are crossing into Czechoslovakia liberating our Sudetenland." They passed right down the street behind the hedge of wild vine in our garden: Guns, tanks, trucks full of singing young soldiers, for hours, all through the night. We children sat in the bushes watching this parade of exciting toys, until we were forcefully dragged into bed by Magdalene.

Magdalene Weich was our new Kindermädchen. She stuttered badly. The rumor - which I was not supposed to know or understand - had it that her father had beaten her up when he discovered that she had come home with gonorrhea from a visit to her uncle. mother had taken her in to replace Lucy, the last one whom she had sent away after only six moths, when one morning it was discovered that she was four months pregnant. Her fate had been sealed when one of my father's colleagues rolling his eyes and clicking his tongue reported that he had seen her briefly illuminated by the headlights of his car in a park with a soldier "in voller Blüte", in "full bloom" months ago. I passed through that park every day on my way to school trying to imagine Lucy in full bloom...

These were hard times for everybody. My mother, four years after the twins, was pregnant again. The child had been her great wish, a last one, she was nearing her fortieth birthday. I cannot remember her clearly from that time, but I do remember that her control over us grew less as the day of her confinement neared.

We lived in the former Herrenhaus of the Götzhof, the feudal farm of a minor germanised Slavic nobleman at the edge of the old city of Glatz. The Hof had recently been sold to the city, and the main building with its meter-thick walls had been renovated into three apartments. We rented the largest, two stories and a basement facing a narrow garden along the "Kanal," a brook in a deep, walled channel that had once served as part of the city moat and more recently as one of its sewers.

We children slept for a while in one large room downstairs, next to the furnace room of the central heating system, a wash-kitchen, where in deep fog the biweekly wash-day was celebrated, a coal cellar that also housed our winter supplies of apples and potatoes, and a large kitchen. Upstairs were the living room, my parents bedroom, and a dining room with a huge, ancient mahogany table with carved legs that I, being small, had to dust with a rag every Saturday, and a set of matching chairs with woven cane seats. The table and an equally ancient, heavy sideboard had come to us as an inheritance from Aunt Hanna, a mythical widowed relative of my paternal grandfather, whom father had one day gone to bury. An idea that left me in confusion for days, because father refused to take the spade along that I had dragged into his car. Mother hated the heavy old pieces, but it seemed that fate had singled her out to live in second-hand furniture all her life. The piece-de-resistance of the dining room, however, was a dumb waiter, a small elevator to the kitchen below, which never lost my

interest. As proud as she was of this contraption, it was demonstrated to all visitors, my mother was in constant fear that I might put one of the small twins into it for a ride to the kitchen, and heavy edicts forbade my playing with it.

Her fears were not unfounded, the twins would follow me like sheep. I remember vividly how I seduced them to playing "crossing the ocean." We were in the engine room of a huge ocean liner tending the fire under the boiler. The twins dragged buckets of coals from the coal cellar into the furnace room, where I shoveled them into the fire. My mother noticed nothing until the safety valve of the heating system opened with a fierce hiss and an explosive bang that scared the daylight out of me. She came running, saw what was going on, and in tears raced upstairs to open all radiators. Scared as I was, my pride badly hurt, full of good intentions I ran after her turning all the valves shut again. This broke her patience. I cannot remember her ever hitting me so hard, and she had a very loose hand. Hitting me with the back of her right hand, where she wore her wedding ring, and kicking me with her foot she locked me into the coal cellar, where utterly miserable, sitting on the pile of coals we had just recently so happily shoveled into the furnace, I contemplated the injustice of this world and my beloved mother.

Fire played a great role in my imagination in those years. I do not know why. I used to hide in the bushes in the garden at night and watch the smoke coming from the chimney of a bakery across the street making myself sick by imagining that the bakery would catch fire any minute. Perhaps these fantasies had something to do with the over-life-size mural of Saint Florian on one of the walls of the Götzhof. Florian is a saint who was especially revered in these parts. On the mural he was flying in a red coat, a fancy helmet on his head above the burning city of Glatz. The flames shooting out of the Rathaus were hungrily, but in vain licking at his coat. In his hand Florian, effortless, held an enormous white chamber pot of the same shape as the one my grandmother had put me on, from which he pored water into the burning city. Underneath it said : "Lieber, Heil'ger Florian behüt dies Haus, zünd and'rer Leute Häuser an. " Dear Saint Florian preserve this house, light other people's houses. Being already preoccupied with the role of firemen, this confusing message made a deep impression on me. And so it should have been to nobody's surprise that one night the Celestial Fireman would appear in his full glory and true to his ambiguous nature set our house on fire. It was a mightily frightening blaze from which I awoke screaming.

Mother tried to soothe me: "Rölfchen, es ist doch nur ein Traum, Sieh doch, er gießt das Feuer wieder aus!" "Rolf, my child, it is only a dream, look he is pouring the fire out." - But I only calmed down, when my parents took me into their bed and held me tight between themselves. - The only time that they ever permitted me such an extraordinary intimacy.

All during that winter the old farmyard in the rear of the house waited half in ruins for its conversion into more apartments. There were the former stables with broken windows and the smell of the disappeared cows still hanging in the half dark gloom. Rats scuttled into the corners when I ventured to explore the place. In the center of the yard still sat the foundations of the Misthaufen, the dung pile that belonged to every farm in the area, complete with an overhead monorail into the stables. And on the far end of the yard all kinds of rusted milk cans and abandoned machinery wasted in the former vegetable garden.

This was for months the playground for me and the son of one of the former farm

workers, who now unemployed had become an enthusiastic full time member of the Party. We did not socialize with this family, and my meetings with this boy were always conducted in secrecy. We invented many strange games, like competing at pissing into one of the old milk cans, or torturing half-dead rats that my friend had hunted with a slingshot, or throwing stones into the remaining Windows in the abandoned buildings. But it was I who came up with the idea of throwing large, semi-hard lumps of earth between the wheels of cars passing on the street. Somehow seeing the missiles breaking up right under the moving cars gave me a great thrill, until one driver stopped, got out of the car, and tracked me down hiding behind the door of the old stable. My friend, being faster than I, had long disappeared, and I had to face the angry man all by myself. He threatened to notify the police. I felt my innards drop and had to run home very quickly. My mother thought that I had got cold playing. Everything would have been forgotten in due time, had not two weeks later a policeman in full uniform stood at our door. I panicked, begging my completely mystified mother, not to let him take me away. When I finally confessed my crime the policeman sternly demanded my extradition, but in the end, seeing the cold fear in my eyes, he smiled and explained that he was only checking on the present whereabouts of Lucy...

After this incident my mother had a serious talk with father and asked him to take me with him more often on his overland trips.

2. Glatz 1938

Birth and Baptism of Dieter, Trips with Vater, A Pilgrimage to Maria Schnee, The Liberation of the Sudetenland, Schlagsahne and the Trip to the Scheidemühle, The Summer of Our Innocence, Frankfurt, The Schmidts, Koserow and the Baltic Sea

Our long expected, new sibling made his appearance early one morning in June 1938 in my parent's bedroom. He had been delivered by the midwife when we were still fast asleep downstairs. She was still hovering with hot towels over my exhausted, happy mother when I was taken by my father to look at the new brother. I had never seen a newborn baby before, and he turned out to be revolting, shriveled like an old man with almost as little hair, screams coming from a gaping, disproportionally large mouth, a complete disappointment. But my parents were happy.

Soon afterwards Dieter was baptized by Grandfather Grohs, who being a Pastor had baptized us all, and who in his great robe, with his long white beard and enlightened irony always appeared to me as the closest relative of God himself. Everybody had come, both of father's parents, Großmutter and Tante Grete, two couples, the men old suitors of my mother and good friends of my parents from their Wandervogel years, a few new friends from Glatz. My parents never were very social. My father, awkward and shy, hated social gatherings of all kinds except at such heraldic occasions, and mother by nature gregarious though unsophisticated had made up her mind very early in their marriage to support him. The tale

was that even at their wedding they had refused to serve wine. But this time there was a great gathering at our house complete with two hired women who prepared, while we were in church, a Mittagessen for everybody at a long table in the garden. It was a splendid, sunny day full of colors, smells, and the chatter of the guests. The dessert was, I remember it so clearly because otherwise we were forbidden that titillation, ice cream.

Thirty years later on my parent's last visit to Pacific Palisades, Barbara prepared a large dinner for them and all our family and dearest friends. It was then that father with a choked voice recalled this day.

On a bicycle trip with my brother Gerhard to castle Ludwigstein south of Göttingen in 1953 we met another of the old Wandervogel friends of my parents, who shocked me by saying: "You are so much like your father. He also laughed all the time." - And I at that time could not remember having seen my father laugh! Only now I realize that all my happiest memories of my parents are from the time before 1944.

Father taught at a state-run vocational school for farmers in Glatz during the winter, and in the summer, when the farmers were needed in the fields, he traveled as government consultant through the villages distributing advice on new methods, inspecting seed potatoes, grain crops, and animals.

In the year before I started school, I often went with him in our three-cylinder, two-cycle, front-wheel drive DKW convertible on his tours of the villages. Many brief pictures come back to me now: the time I fell into the duck pond, and father wrapped me in newspapers for the way home, or the great hoof-and-mouth-disease plague where we had to wash our shoes and hands in Lysol at every farm we visited. Or the pilgrimage to Maria-Schnee with the peasants from a village particularly dear to my father. We were a member of the tiny Protestant minority, mostly civil servants sent by King Fredrick II, the Great, to the newly acquired, Austrian Grafschaft Glatz after the Seven Years War, and I felt distinctly different from our catholic Mitmenschen Yet at the same time I was fascinated by their strange churches, which so strongly assaulted all my senses. Sometimes on my way to school I would steal into the church of the Minorit nuns, a large, dark, overwrought building of the Silesian Baroque full of gilded angels, spiraling columns, and clouds of incense. It never failed to produce a deeply mystical shudder in me, and my clothes smelled for "holy smoke" for hours thereafter. By companion our church. influenced by the pietist Herrenhuter Gemeinde, the Moravian Brothers who even by Protestant standards were iconoclasts, was bare white and unappealing, adorned only by a huge realistic eye within a cloud surrounded by a triangle over the altar. God knows, what Masonic mystery confused the pastor's mind, who had it painted. This monstrosity always distracted me from the good words of Pastor Schicha's Sunday school that my mother insisted sending us to every second weekend.

So the pilgrimage with the villagers added many colorful puzzles to my young mind. It was, of course, an honor for my father to be invited despite that we were Protestants. We were picked up very early in the morning at our house by a bus full of women with colorful kerchiefs and wide flowery skirts and many starched petticoats underneath, who were already in a very gay mood. I don't think that there was much drinking, but to have a whole day off from the heavy farm work was enough to make everybody happy. There was much singing on the long ride through the countryside. Someone played a mouth organ, another an accordion.

The white shingle covered pilgrimage church of Maria Schnee - Mary's Snow - hovered on top a steep conical hill at the foot of the Grosse Glatzer Schneeberg. The trees had just grown new leaves and everywhere flowers were blooming in the meadows. The steep path to the church was covered with cobble stones, interspersed by steps in the steepest places. Of course everyone went on foot, but a number of women made the ascent on their knees. My father explained that they probably were working-off some sin they had committed. Sin? what monstrous transgression could that have been? I could not imagine anything sufficient for such a severe punishment, and mother's hints at the dark mysteries of evil did not enlighten me much either. It disturbed me for months.

The inner sanctum of the church harbored a venerated sculpture of a Schutzengel-Madonna, who held her huge coat open to reveal dozens of little people taking refuge beneath it. The altar was surrounded by a circular ambulatory. There were altars to a dozen of saints all hung with votive offerings left by pilgrims, whose prayers had been heard: legs and arms of various sizes cut from silver sheet, crutches, figures of babies or mothers who had prayed for a child, paintings showing a rescue from lightening or a flood or fire - a fascinating display of the sufferings of mankind. These offerings seemed quite appropriate to me, after all mother in her evening prayer at our beds every night would never forget to ask help from God for a sick friend or a distant relative.

Mother bought a couple of small votive candles, which I was allowed to light. Maybe this is the origin of my fondness of peasant churches wherever I found them later in Bavaria, in Russia or Greece, which I can never leave without lighting a candle in memory of Susanne, some friend - or just to cheer up the loneliness of the saint on the altar.

During the winter of 1938-39, after the liberation of the Sudetenland, we often visited former university friends of my father's on the other side of the old border. One was the owner of a Bohemian Glashütte, a glassblowers kiln, deep in the woods of the Sudeten mountains.

It was a huge dome shaped brick structure that must have measured 50 meters in diameter under a conical shingle roof on open wooden trusses. All around the perimeter of the kiln were access holes through which one could see vats full of orange glowing, molten glass. The glassblowers would reach into the vats with ten meter long tubes and scoop out a apple sized drop of the melt, which they then proceeded to blow into a larger and larger bubble re-heating the glass in between. An assistant, a young boy usually, stood by to help in supporting the tube or putting a mold around the glass or in the end to spring the final form off the blower's tube. The heat from the open furnace doors was ferocious. The wooden structure surrounding the kiln was not very tight. So from the one side the workers were fried and from the other frozen, especially in winter. Many were in poor health, and tuberculosis was widespread. My father discussed social and economic problems and, of course, the all pervasive political situation with the owner.

As a member of the German speaking community, the owner had had a very rough time during the last several years of Czech rule, and had become an outspoken supporter of Hitler. But like many other educated friends of my parents, he had a very low opinion of the NS-party rank and file. Most of his workers had Czech names, but spoke lGerman. Their standard of living was even poorer than that of the mountain peasants of the area. Business was dying because of the competition from the large, modern machine-blowing glass factories.

Father recommended to upgrade the quality of the glass, to change to blowing only art-glass, vases, bowls, and wine glasses and to revitalize the skills of the glass cutters. Later this kiln and a number of glass cutters were heavily subsidized with orders from a German government work project that father was involved in and that sold high quality art-glass mostly as an export. As a farewell present a cutter engraved a large vase for mother before our eyes with wonderful grasses and flowers. The vase was still around, when we had to leave our Habelschwerdt eight years later.

Already during the last year before the war certain foods were hard to find, one of them was Schlagsahne, whipped cream. I don't know why, but just as there was a "the-German-woman-does-not-use-makeup" campaign, there was one against the institution of the Konditorei and whipped cream, good coffee, and cake. Maybe the reason was, as a Russian friend suggested in a different context decades later, that all revolutions are puritanical initally, but more likely it was simply, because the "uneducated" party hacks did not feel at ease in the coffee houses.

Luckily for us the institution had survived in old k.u.k.-Austria, of which, before the first World War, Czechoslovakia had been a part. So thanks to its "liberation", whipped cream became accessible again - just across the border, and my mother's longing grew beyond reason. To the end of her life mother loved Kaffee und Kuchen mit Sahne above anything else, notwithstanding her over-weight and our and her doctor's admonitions. - During the war Sahne had become a mythical substance to me, which, if not the end of all ailments, would certainly herald the end of all deprivations. I had never seen the stuff, and the substitute mother prepared by beating flower, sugar, egg whites, and canned milk with an egg beater was not very convincing.

The expectations with which we set out for the other side of the mountain were close to supernatural. I even remember the name of the place, it was called Die Scheidemühle. The name was derived from the metallurgical operation of separating gold and silver, but it lends itself to all kinds of unprintable puns in German especially in conjunction with Sahne, cream. It was in the middle of winter, and the only way to get there was on skis through the deeply snowed in woods. - There was also the another reason for skiing. In order to cross the former border one had to have a permit, and simply wanting to eat whipped cream was no excuse. Exposure to the decadent k.u.k. debauches across the border was certain to undermine the German Will To Fight...

The trip to the Scheidemühle turned into a minor disaster. It began to snow heavily. Being afraid that the border patrol would discover us, we lost our way several times, and when we finally found the place, it was so crowded with Sahne-lovers that it was like a steam bath. And I did not like the fluffy stuff at all. So. all I got was a glass of Skiwasser, ice cold water with a shot of raspberry syrup, nothing special. My mother however gorged herself, and was it because of the strain of the ski trip, the heat in the Gästestube, the unaccustomed butter fat, or because she was four month pregnant, on our way home she had to give up all she had eaten. l felt vindicated and did not feel tempted by whipped cream again until twenty years later, when in America we discovered that it is a nostalgic remedy against home sickness.

The summers of my childhood are like beacons in the river of time: 1947, Brigitte and the summer of my first love, 1943 at the mill of the Schmidts, the summers of 1942 and 1940

with their epic family convocations on the Island of Wollin in the Baltic, 1938 the summer of the Great Flood, and in the beginning, in 1937 the Summer of Our Innocence at the beaches of Usedom, where I first fell under the spell of the Sea.

We drove North in our new DKW. father at the wheel, the roof down, everybody in white racing caps, the three children in the back, mother as navigator. We drove for two days on the just opened Autobahn through Breslau and Frankfurt-an-der- Oder, around the Reichshauptstadt to the tiny village of Koserow on Usedom, one of the two Islands in the estuary of the river Oder. We could have been on the posters for the New Germany: The Promising, Young German Family - a year after the Great German Olympics, nine months before Dieter was born, and two years before the Fall of 1939... I see the sunny day, when we were breezing down the Autobahn full of national pride and excited wonder. Mother distributing Ohrfeigen on the backseat whenever the Heilige Ordnung was in danger, and father driving as slow as the car would let him to allow mother to hold Christine's blank behind overboard, because she absolutely had to pee and stopping was forbidden on the Autobahn. And then she couldn't, because the wind had cooled her off. And green meadows and trees flying by, and a picnic at an Autobahn stop with a threatening bull just on the other side of a single wire fence. Our first great family adventure.

Two days we spent in Frankfurt with Uncle Gerhard Schmidt and Tante Käthe, father's sister and their five children. They were much better off than we poor, secure civil servants: Uncle Gerhard as the technical director of a chocolate and coffee factory lived in a palatial villa with a three-story central stairwell that had a Skylight on top. There were a cook and a Kindermädchen, who was supposed to keep us eight children under control, while our parents were lunching on gegrillter Fisch, the latest innovation, talking for most of the day.

I preferred cousin Jochen, a year younger than I and of similar disposition, to his brother Peter who "looked funny", because, we thought, he had been born in Bolivia, and besides - Peter was a year older than I and refused to accept my leadership. Hartmut their in-between-sibling, was too much of a dreamer to interst me. We rampaged through the house from cellar to attic, and then having been banished from the house by the grown-ups for being a nuisance, we played Räuber und Gendarmes in the labyrinthine garden. The younger children, the twins and Sabine and the remaining Schmidt brood were condemned to be the Gendarmes.

I also remember the Wintergarten, a glassed in veranda on the second story where Uncle Gerhard raised exotic plants, which they had brought back from Bolivia, where they had spent three years on a coffee plantation. An enormous yellow and brown orchid was in bloom with an aroma somewhere between vanilla and chocolate that permeated the entire house. I still can smell it today and still have not found such an orchid again.

Tante Käthe, who carried her hair in two thick braids wound around her head and wore loose, embroidered white blouses over hand-woven skirts, was a tall woman with a big mouth that all feared, and especially my mother. She had a way of making deadpan pronouncements of high accuracy followed by a deep laugh, which made more sensitive souls shudder. I took an immediate liking to her. A sympathy, which was, I am afraid, never reciprocated, but which I kept faithfully despite mother's dislike of her.

On the fourth day, looking for the ferry to Usedom we got lost among brackish swamps

on a back road. Eventually we arrived at a heavily guarded gate of a large military complex, where we were told to immediately turn back. My parents puzzled for a long time what this was, no map showed its existence. Later during the weeks at Koserow we were treated to the spectacle of navy maneuvers on the horizon and to occasional, mysterious contrails in the sky. It was Wernher von Braun's Raketen Versuchstation in Peenemünde.

We found the house my parents had rented in a pine wood a few yards from the edge of the limestone cliffs high above a sandy beach and the quiet, transparent sea. A haven of peace where one could hear Time breath in her sleep in the sun Spots under the trees and between the reeds around a shallow lake in the distance.

For years after this summer I dreamed of and searched for this Paradise Lost elsewhere. And then, when I had almost forgotten that dream, on a lonely sojourn in Moscow in 1976, I ventured into a Komissariya on Oktyabrskaya Square, a kind of high- brow pawn shop where one could exchange fin-de-siecle bric-a-brac inherited from one's grandmother against Japanese hi-fi sets and other contemporary trinkets. And in this incongruous place, between old samovars, lace dresses, and Tsarist tea sets I found a whole wall of Sunday paintings by the mothers and grandmothers of my Russian friends: a family on the sun-drenched porch of a datcha, a woman reading under the trees on the edge of the sea... Sentimental pictures, maybe even Kitsch, certainly meaningless except to those who are fortunate to remember the hovering noon hours during the sun-baked Summers of placid Eastern Europe.

3. Habelschwerdt 1937-39

First School Year, The Great Flood, Moving to Habelschwerdt, A new House on Gartenstrasse 1, Mother Establishes a New School, The Glass Eye of Herrn Glusa

Not long ago Walter, one of my colleagues at work, exasperated by my obstinacy in an argument on some technical matter, asked me: "Did you ever go to school? And did they ever succeed there in teaching you anything that you did not already know?" This curious question precipitated a long examination of a good part of my past. The answer to the first question is yes. My mother made sure that I went to school despite all adversities of these turbulent years, even if that seemed impossible to all except her. And the sad answer to the second question is no, not much I am afraid. Looking back over my school years I cannot remember more than two teachers who really taught me something, but I do remember - with relish should I say - scores of colorfully freaky teachers who were let loose on us. In part this was caused by the soon to start war that ate up the best and left the old and the incapable. So it comes that my vivid school memories are a depressingly long list of cruel pranks, which I played on teachers too dumb to deal with their pupils, and numerous other misdeeds, for which mother to my great embarrassment would invariably come to make amends.

It seems that I remember all girls I went to school with, but only few exciting subjects

that I had to study. I was with the exception of a few difficult years not a bad student, but I cannot say that I ever liked to go to school. My brother Gerhard by contrast never did anything like that, always had excellent grades, and went purple when in his first school year one of his female classmates kissed him in front of everybody. He was forever held up to me by my mother as the great example I should emulate. Unfortunately I never asked him whether he liked school.

It started comparatively well. I entered school, a Zuckertüte in my arms, in Glatz at Easter 1938. These were the early years of the Great Concordat between Hitler and the Holy Sea, which the Protestant minority, although not being part of the agreement, benefited from, because the Catholics were promised catholic schools of their own. For that reason the Evangelische Schule I entered was a beautiful building with all amenities one could expect of a modern public school like a gymnasium, sport's facilities, trees, and clean, tiled toilets. It also was on the opposite side of town. I had to get up at six to reach the school after a forty minutes walk down the Herrenstrasse, where we lived, underneath the Stadtbahnhof, across the bridge over the Neisse, past the church of the Minorite Nuns, along the old city moat, past the synagogue that was soon to burn, and up through the park, where Lucy had lain in bloom.

The first-grade teacher was a kind man, who tried hard to make me write the difficult Siütterlin letters of the old German alphabet the right way round and not the left way round. - I guess I was, like Susanne a born "lefty", but having been forced to write with my right hand, "Du bist aber linkisch, wie sieht denn das aus!" I became ambidextrous. Not a bad asset, but later this slight of hands probably encouraged me to study physics instead of architecture as I should have.

Otherwise I remember only that the daughter of one of my father's colleagues, who went to the same class with me, complained to her mother that I was always laughing at her (auslachen). My mother defended me by telling Frau Doktor (the degree was her husband's) Hirsch, the girl's mother, that I only smiled at her daughter (anlachen), which was quite true, I thought.

And then I had a problem that was, incredibly, to haunt me throughout my school years. Not to have to change for sports in public, mother put us into Turnhosen, sport-shorts as underpants instead of the normal briefs. They were red, green, or blue but did not have buttons in front or a slit, through which one could have taken out the male object when needed. I learned to do this expertly enough through my shorts' right leg, and that was, what now in the public toilet of the school got me into trouble. For months I was the butt of my classmates' rather cruel jokes... This idyllic first school year soon came to an abrupt end. The school was closed during the fall of 1938 to be refitted intto the Party Headquarters of Glatz. Evil tongues were claiming that this had been the intent behind the construction of the modern school from the beginning. Who knows. This was the time when I was sent to Breslau to become the charmed pupil of Tante Irmgard.

I never saw school in Glatz again. In the Fall of 1938 father was transferred to Habelschwerdt, a small town some twenty kilometers further south. For a while we remained in Glatz until a new house was found, and I traveled with father to Habelschwerdt every morning. There I was sent to the Habelschwerdter Volksschule, which had not been segregated yet. It was a zoo. Eight or ten students sat on one long bench, pupils from different grades had

to share the same class room. Discipline was a joke, despite the teacher's frequent and merciless paddling with a cane of the most recalcitrant students. My mother was near outraged, and since I still could not master the difficulties of reading and writing, decided at once to send me to Fräulein Krzyscz for Nachhilfeunterricht, special coaching. This kind lady, who despite her dangerously sounding Polish name meaning "cross" was plump and pleasant, and who later became the first-grade teacher of the twins, quickly taught me to read and write. But this special treatment, Nachhilfeunterricht, a recurring torture I had to endure on Mothers hands throughout my school years, always looked like Hilfsschule, the school where to the intractable cases of stupidity or discipline were sent by the state. I felt disgraced.

However there was consolation in Ulrike Keller, the daughter of father's new director, with whom I walked home after school to wait for my father at her parents' house. I soon fell in love with her. I do not remember what went on between us, I am sure it was harmless enough. Ulrike must have lasted for a long time, because I recall getting badly embarrassed, when years later mother teased me about her.

Just before all this happened there passed the Summer of the Great Flood. It started one day, when I was still in school in Glatz. It simply began to rain for days, rain like nobody could remember ever having seen before. On the fourth day a delegation of mothers appeared in school to claim their children, because the Neisse, normally a quietly gurgling river was threatening to wash away the great iron bridge on our way home under the guidance of Frau Dr. Hirsch - who in my eyes had sunk several notches since Christmas, when on a party for her daughter at their overstuffed apartment, I had discovered that the Hirsch's Christmas tree was hung over and over with pink cotton "snow", a terrible faux-pas in our family code of good taste... - Our little group set out to find an alternate route home. All streets in the lower town were cordoned off by soldiers and firemen. We walked for two hours to cross the river on one of the old stone bridges uptown, and I can still see the great stream covered with trees, furniture, and dead cows rushing north a few meters below the bridge. There was no school for us the next day. It was still raining in streams. One bridge had, infact, given way, and the rumor was that the pioneers had been called in to blow up its remnants before it could be spilled downstream and cause more damage.

That night the Kanal behind the Götzhof became a torrent and submerged the entire lower level of the house under four feet of water. father rescued me - mother, the twins, and Dieter were vacationing in a rented farmhouse in the mountains - by carrying me barefoot, his pants pulled up, through the dark water upstairs. I was truly frightened, listening to the rain and the shouts of the firemen, who had come "to pump us out."

Ever since that time I have had the recurring nightmare of having to walk across a bridge where through the half broken pavement I could see the gurgling water underneath, ready to swallow me up. - The last time I had this dream 1980 in Georgia, after our friend Merab had driven Cornelius, Barbara, and me across a swaying "suspension bridge" over the river Kura with only inches to spare and half the boards gone.

A new house was found in Habelschwerdt in October of 1938, and the great moving started. My mother was an expert in moving. Weeks ahead she made a scale drawing of the floor-plan of the new house and pushed little paper snippets, representing our furniture, around in its rooms. The moving expedition, two vans followed by us in father's car slowly

crawled south past the Leim- und Seifenfabrik, the glue and soap factory, - a tiny abattoir specializing in the final flaying of dead horses, a landmark not only because it stood all by itself in the middle of nowhere, but also because its stench could be smelled for miles, - over the Melling, the Lime-Kiln-Pass where to my continuing puzzlement stones were "burned" to steam and a dangerously corrosive fine white powder - along the Neisse into the picturesque old town overhanging the river.

It was the northern half of a duplex. In the southern half lived Frau Medizinalrat Futter the talkative mother of our pediatrician in Glatz and her fat, confused daughter, who was forever studying architecture. The house was so new that the earth that had been removed from the hole for its basement was still lying as a huge mountain in the garden. It had a kitchen, a dining room, a Herrenzimmer, my father's room, and a glassed-in veranda on the first floor. On the second were two bedrooms, a toilet, and a bath with a large, white-enameled cast-iron bathtub and a coal fired hot water boiler for the weekly bath-feasts. There was also an attic and a basement with a coal cellar, a wash-kitchen, and the main attraction a Luftschutzkeller, a reinforced air-raid shelter, complete with a gas-tight door and a sandbox in front of its window. Each room was heated separately by a coal burning "Kachelofen," enormous tiled affairs that once heated kept warm for a whole night.

Such were the timely amenities of a government supported, house in the young Germany of 1938.

Ours was one house of fifteen all identical duplexes on a new street at the western edge of town. Usually they were rented to the lowest income groups. The Gartenstrasse, however, was occupied by lower middle-class and civil service families, and everyone "owned" their houses. We lived at Gartenstrasse 1. - Oh, for the bourgeois arrogance of our family: besides Frau Medizinalrat Futter, Herr and Frau Laube, a county clerk, across the street from us, and Herr Bankmann Otto and family, a bank clerk at the Habelschwerdter Sparkasse were our only social contacts. All other families were - sorry to say - below our (educational) level!

All this sounds like a great improvement, but the house was much smaller than the one in Glatz, and moving the furniture in continued deep into the night. Especially troublesome where the "Schränke," the huge, oaken wardrobes that we brought along. To this day there are few built-in closets in German houses, and therefore every family owns several inherited, often medieval, wardrobes to keep the clothes in. Ours would not fit in or pass through the narrow hall and staircase. The final solution, adopted around midnight, was to saw them in half, carry them in in pieces, and once in place put them back together again with special clamps.

The surroundings of our new home, having been fields only a year ago, had been converted into a morass of "plain dirt" by the wet summer. Mother who had grown up in apartments in the city was heartbroken. father on the other hand rediscovered his rural past. He had gown up in the Lausitz south of Berlin. He immediately began planting his long time dream, a garden of "typical local plant specimen".

We children occupied the only dry spot, the mound of earth left by the construction crews, where we began to dig a system of tunnels and fortifications for our plasticine army. They resemble those we have seen on the other side of the old Czechoslovakian border. Our army consists of two-inch-high soldiers made from an early plastic that had the disheartening

property of dissolving in the rain when forgotten outside. There were many frighteningly realistic leg and headless casualties among our troops due to such neglect. But without mercy the war of the headless soldiers continued until the snows made an end to it.

As soon as we were somewhat settled mother decided to change the course of my education. Resolutely but slightly flushed she appeared at the office of the rector of my school demanding my right to a protestant education. The protestant community of Habelschwerdt was tiny, maybe thirty or fifty families all from the educated middle class under the vicar ship of Pastor Schicha, who I guess in no small measure due to mother's single minded campaign soon became a close friend of my parents.

Pastor Schicha, like my parents was a moderate man. He was neither a religious fanatic nor a member of the militant New Christian Church around people like Niemöller, who became more and more of an anti-Party, anti-Hitler political movement during those years.

Father, perhaps because of his inability to make easy contact with other people, throughout his life saw the church as a place of "communion" in the literal sense of the word. In a indefinably mystical way he went to church - where much to the embarrassment of his children he often fell asleep during the service - to seek the emotional and moral support of a long chain of forefathers who had belonged to the same faith. - Those were his words not mine. - My practical mother on the other hand was much less spiritually inclined. Letting her husband provide the philosophic-ideological reason-d'etre, she considered the church an educational institution for her children. In her later years, when father could not hear well any longer, she did not consider it below herself to ridicule his religious beliefs as "Hirngespinste", literally cobwebs-of-the-brain. - Could she have felt with true feminine instinct that religion like ideology and philosophy was, as one young woman many years later put it to me, "the sorry products of the male mind that men had made up to protect themselves from their inherent fear of death," and which woman had no need for? - But no, she was not the person who could have voiced such insights.

The result of mother's campaign was that two separate class rooms were established in the old Volksschule for the children of the protestant minority. And there I went together with Ulrike. The classes were much smaller, and we had separate desks for only two pupils each. I shared mine with Ulrike for a while until that lovely arrangement was judged too distracting by teachers and parents alike. The quality of education in the new "school", however, was only marginally better. We got a male teacher whom I remember as the greatest freak (ha! ha!) of my entire school years. His name was Herr Glusa.

The poor wretch was trying to be an immaculate Follower-of-the-Führer, no trace of his protestant past in sight. He also was a decorated veteran of the first World War with several bad scars to show. Rumors among us students had it that he had a silver plate replacing the part of his scull that a French shrapnel had blown off, and that the plate had a small lid with a miniature hook and eyelet that he would open in the teacher's room during intermission to let off steam.

Maybe this was a cruel fabrication, but he did have a glass-eye in his left socket. And he had the uncanny habit when driven into a corner by the women, my mother, Ulrike's mother, and a few others who guided the fate of the little school, to start screaming hysterically with a high fistular voice, "Aber meine Damen, was wollen Sie von mir, was soll ich

tuen? ich bin kriegsgeschadigt" - but ladies what do you want from me, what should I do? I am a war-disabled veteran - and plop out his glass eye into his hand to prove the point... Where upon Ulrike's mother was said to have breathed a high scream, have fallen to the floor, and have promptly fainted.

Herrn Glusa's cherished hour was Turnen that discipline, which my maternal great-great-grandfather, Turnvater Jahn had introduced to Prussia in the revolutionary year of 1812, and which is now known by the euphemism Sport. Lehrer Glusa referred to it as "Wehrertüchtigungsübungen," and my classmates simply called it "Ehegymnaslik." - Oh, how can I ever explain the sentimental-macabre subtleties of my mother tongue to my California born children who have grown up in this sterile, cellophane-wrapped, far-western culture - perhaps "para-military exercises" and "para-marital gymnastics" might make an inaccurate but comparable pair. And while Lehrer Glusa's sadistic glass-eye kept watch, the shrill blasts from his master-sergeant whistle excited the rhythms of twenty para-pubic boys engaged in horizontal pushups in the schoolyard. - Afterward we were allowed to play "Völkerball."

Perhaps it was during these scout masterly hours in the early morning, perhaps during his meetings with our mothers that the nasty rumor was started that Herr Glusa in addition to his "Dachschaden," the damage-to-his-roof, and despite the existence of a wife and proof to the contrary by way of a teenage daughter, had another more unfortunate and undocumented deficiency elsewhere...

As the *Opera Buffo* of this second school year inexorably ground on into the fateful year of 1939, Herr Glusa taught every morning another randomly chosen pupil to stand in front of the class, raise his or her arm to the prescribed angle, exclaim 'Heil Hitler!", and without stuttering recite the "poetic" propaganda of "Our New Times". We were even given grades for this performance. There was no escape, and even my parents found it prudent, not to endanger us by protesting, especially since much of the poetry in question was of much older vintage, sacred and unexamined in its content for generations. It was a vicious process from which curiously enough only our ignorance and grotesque humor saved us.

4.The Year of the War 1939

Exploring the Horizon, Peace Doves, Searching my Memory, Kristall Nacht and the Jews, Rationing Cards and Rumors

Nineteen-thirty-nine, the Year of the War. All the memories of this fateful year, as I slowly drag them to light on this sunny California day, forty six years later, radiate a curiously idyllic quiet.

Around our new house there was a whole new world waiting to be explored, full of surprises and unknown delights. I had learned to ride a bicycle at Tante Irmgard's house in Breslau just before we moved, and there was no holding me back any longer. I took off on the old lady's bike that the Kindermadchen used. It was much too high for me, I could not reach the saddle and had to ride standing on the pedals. "You look like a trained flea in a circus act,"

my father laughed as he followed me on his touring bike to check out my arm signals and driving safety. I passed the test, and was hence allowed to more or less go wherever I wanted. There was no traffic in those days.

The horizon became a new challenge.

Immediately behind our garden began the fields, and in the far distance to the west one could see blue-in-green the wooded hills rise. The fields were cut by a Landstrasse that passed a few last houses, wound its way clearly marked by old beech trees through the near distance up the knob of the Wasserwerk, the spring where our water came from, and disappeared in a sweeping curve over the hills into the unknown. All I knew was that it lead to the village where Hilde, our new Kindermadchen came from.

To go as far as her village would, I was sure, not have met with mother's approval, but she was in the hospital for some mysterious surgery, the stitching of a ruptured perineum that went back to the birth of the twins. It must have been in late August, because I remember bringing my hospitalized mother a glass vase for her birthday, and that I, although I had bought it from my own savings, still felt bad that it was not a self-made gift. - Such were the unwritten rules of our family. - In her stead Tante Crete supervised the household. I felt certain that I could charm her, and so one morning I set off with my bicycle across the horizon.

It was a much longer ride than I had anticipated, and there was a lot of pushing the bike uphill. Starved and out of breath I reached the farm where Hilde's parents lived two hours later. They had just come home from haying in the meadows and were sitting down for their "Mittagessen," the main meal, when I arrived. The smell of the "Buchtein," baked yeast dumplings generously covered with plum compote, that her mother had prepared is still in my nose. I was treated royally, and not only to food - but also to a liberal sampling of assorted "nicht stubenreiner Witze und Flüche," non-house-broken jokes and oaths. Hilde's father must have found a special delight in corrupting the "well-bred" son of his daughter's employers. It was from him that I learned the "Worst German Oath": "Verdammtes ausgenuckeltes Hilhnerarschgewinde!," which is as funny as it is untranslatable. You can only learn it by heart. There is nothing like it in English.

After lunch my host went outside, caught two pigeons, and before my innocent eyes proceeded to wrench their necks, wrap the dripping birds into brown paper, and present them to me to take home. "Fur Deine feine Mutter!", for your gentle mother, he said. Beyond my fascination and disgust with the blood soaked package I quickly realized that they would make an excellent peace offering to the temporary lady of the house.

When I arrived home two hours later, I was greeted on the stairs by Tante Grete breathing fire and holy brimstone. I had never seen her so angry, but the language she used to scold me was thirty years out of date. "Du Lümmel, du niedertrachtiger Lümmel" she screamed, "Ich werde Dir's zeigen!" You lubber, you disgraceful lubber, I'll show you! Afraid to hit me she waved a wooden kitchen spoon in the air. I had a hard time to control a giggle. Meanwhile the unaccepted sacrifice of my two innocent pigeons made a bloody spot on the floor.

Sometimes I would take the twins along on expeditions into the fields, to the edge of the woods, or to the Sigritz, a mysterious, wooded area amid swampy meadows to the north

that was so far away that one could not see it from our house. There we built houses among the trees, played games of getting-lost-and-finding-each-other-again, and collected bunches of buttercups for mother, to assuage her anxiety over our long absence and my bad conscience for having seduced the twins.

There were new friends, whom I made on our street, and I became a fully accepted minor Indian Chief in the games of Indians and Sheriffs that we played in the backyards of our street or in the little wood around the Wasserwerk. I even graciously introduced the twins to these games: Gerhard, in exchange for the privilege of playing with the older boys, would readily volunteer to let himself be "tortured on the stake", while Christine became a good squaw.

There were also real fights, for instance with the "low-class" boys from the neighboring FlurstraBe led by the Mann-boy. "Mannla Hup-hup-hup" was a rough, stocky boy a little older than I, who wore his left leg in a brace and limped. His mother's name was Mann. He had no father. "I am Miss Mann" she pointedly told my mother, who had come to protest an ambush her son's gang had made on me.

They would hide in the small wood on our way to school that harbored the "Schlachthof," the municipal slaughterhouse, of which one only saw the red brick roof of the villa of Frau Schlachthofdirektor Schigulla, whom mother considered "a rather ordinary woman", but who owned the only telephone in the neighborhood, and because of that was destined to help save my father's life in the year of 1945. I never passed this ominous clump of trees, where pigs screamed their last scream and cows were shot, and where the FlurstraBe gang would lie in ambush, without apprehension. But, of course, as always there were good reasons for these ambushes. Whenever we saw the Mann-boy limp down the street, we would shout his cruel nickname and run as fast as we could. I knew very well that at close range, I was no match to him.

Those are the pictures I see during my waking hours, square snapshots of a seemingly wonderful year of my childhood. But somewhere deep down below these idyllic stories hover un-namable shadows of long forgotten fears that now come back to haunt my dreams during these nights of intense efforts to recover the past. But in the mornings all I can see of their presence are the clouded waters, the monsters have vanished again.

For a while I tried to use well known historical facts as keys to the doors of the hidden part of the labyrinth.

Like where were you on the 3rd of September 1939? But despite all efforts no picture of that day, on which the war broke out, will surface. And so this autumn, in which our victorious armies stormed Poland in eighteen days, and Stalin helped us to finish them off in the winter thereafter, only remains in my mind as the washed out, much later, much overexposed frames of another war movie.

Neither did a recent emotional, soul searching evening with my Jewish friends Ben and Jean produce any really new understanding from the murky bottom of my memories. Ben, six years older than I, is a survivor of the Amsterdam ghetto. His knowledge has made him old, gentle, and forgiving. It is his wife Jean, who grew up in New York, who relentlessly drives my interrogation. "What about the synagogues? You were old enough then to remember them

burning. And how about the beatings and smashed storefronts of the Kristallnacht?

There simply wasn't a synagogue in Habelschwerdt, and there were only two Jewish stores: a Woolworth's and Pieck's Spielwaren, a toy store.
Yes, I remember one morning, weeks after all the synagogues elsewhere in my Fatherland had burned - or as was the case with the one in Glatz, had refused to burn because of the rain and the incompetence of the local SA-troops - the windows of both stores were smeared with antisemitic slogans like "Judenschweine Raus!", which a pained mother had to explain to me. But there were no broken windows or beaten up "jüdische Mitmenschen" in our quaint, little town, - or at least not yet. -

"And later?" Jean pushes me on, "Go on, don't give up!"
Well, later during 1942-43 when the old Pieck couple and a Jewish doctor and his family were picked up and deported to the "labor camps" one night, fear and apathy had taken over and people walked away, slowly, backwards, with averted eyes, so as not to catch the evil cancer that marked these outcasts - just as it happened to me once in the Soviet Union when in 1972 I was accosted by undercover agents on a busy Moscow street. Within seconds everyone in sight had disappeared, and I was left in a large void in the middle of streams of shoppers...

"So you knew what was happening to the Jews?" says Jean with bitterness.
No. Yes, the Jews were sent to "Arbeitslager" to work for the "Rüstungsindusterie," the defense industry. The full extent of what had been going on in these "work camps" we only found out in 1945. Yes, there were rumors. In fact, they were swarming like black flies all over the drugged conscience of Germany, but like the bizarre humor of the day, nobody did take them seriously lest shame would have killed us all.

"Try to stay with pictures that you are sure of remembering from that time and not later." Ben says to ease my pain.
Yes, there is the disturbing incidence of the "Judenseife," Jews-soap, like lemon- soap not Jewish soap - there is a fine distinction between the two in German - that I do remember from that time.

During the winter of 1939-40 suddenly all soap disappeared from the shops, because Our Führer had decided that the valuable raw materials contained therein were needed for our fighting army. Soap was replaced by hard bars made from a mixture of volcanic ash and some slippery, smelly binder of little or no washing power. We children were horrified, when mother with a sigh began scrubbing us with this "Ersatzseife" during one Saturday wash-fest. It scratched like hell. Then a new soap appeared, which would swim on water.

I do not know where it came from, whether Hilde or I had said it, but I see myself sitting in the bathtub, in the same, slightly muddy water the twins had already been scrubbed in, and all of a sudden the word "Judenseife" hung in the hot air.
Nor do I remember for certain whether then or much later the explicit commentary was added - although it is already implicit in the word - that this soap was made from the fat of dead Jews, but Hilde's giggle and an image of the Leim- und Seifenfabrik near Glatz appear as associations of this story in my memory.
Perhaps I remember all this only, because mother did not think it was funny, became unexpectedly angry, and forbade any further use of the word - or discussion of the subject.

"So what did she know?" asks Jean again, who without pity will not let me get away from this subject, and I realize that I begin to resent her American bred ignorance of the dark sides of the soul.
I shall never find out. Later, when I tried to understand these memories, my, parents would or could not talk about these times.
And now they are dead.

But the Jewish territory has been explored over and over and over again during the past forty years, first in the numbing shocks of learning the truth right after the war, then on my travels through Europe, and often very harshly by our Jewish friends and enemies in America. It is definitely a part of the murky bottom of my German soul but no unknown monster.

You see, there are dark corners in my memory that refuse to be named, and which have not been publicly examined for decades, and they are not as easy to describe to my Californian children.

For example.
It was during that first winter in Habelschwerdt that a man from the Party appeared at our house who wanted to recruit me as a "Melder," a courier for the civil defense system, just in case our remote place would experience an air raid. I was supposed to run - as I imagined myself already - from burning house to burning house, and under the falling bombs and the roar of enemy planes I would rescue people.

My mother, to my great disappointment, refused to give her permission, and so I joined my crushed father, who was, in this, his thirty seventh year, found "wehruntauglich," unfit for military service, because of some old heart problem. His greatest wish was to fight for Führer und Vaterland, and despite all that followed he never completely recovered from the shame of this verdict, which would have many consequences in the years to come.

He would have surely died in the war.

And from under the melting snows of that first war winter the rumors that had been borrowing like rats under its snow cover surfaced more bizarre than ever.

For example.
The old woman who lived in the ramshackle wooden house with a steep roof in a garden of flowers was arrested and "deported". She had been accused of having hoarded many hundredweights of sugar and sweets. We secretly went to peep into her house, in front of which a policeman stood guard for days, and the fairy tale of the Witch who lured Hänsel and Gretel into her Gingerbread House to force-feed and bake them in the oven became inextricably muddled in my mind with this first hoarder in our town.

And then rationing cards appeared.
Who of my children knows what those were? Yes, Cornelius was once in 1980 given a Russian rationing card from 1942 by a dubious collector in Tbilisi. It drove a cold shudder down my spine. I explained to him what it was. But who remembers the power these small green chits of poor paper used to have over our lives?

At first there were only "Fleischmarken," meat stamps and "Buttermarken." It took a year to bring out bread, tobacco, and clothes stamps, and stamps for everything one could think of. Money would not buy anything anymore, without the shop lady snipping off a few of the precious squares. And people went to jail over food stamps...

Now Susanne might understand the story of the second hoarder who was caught in "Our Little Town", a butcher who had secretly "schwarz geschlachtet, "black"- slaughtered a cow and sold the meat to his preferred customers. My mother used to buy from him, and I still see her in his shop accepting a plain-wrapped parcel of meat, for which she was not asked to deliver her precious Fleischmarken. When someone "informed on him" to the authorities, his wife tried to flush the remaining meat down the toilet, - but we to my horror - we had already eaten the forbidden meat. And what if the butcher had had a list of his preferred customers, and the police had found it ...?

At school during that time we loved to play "Who is Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?" To which the answer was: "Niemand" - but despite of how inconspicuous you tried to make yourself, you would get caught in the end.

And Fear began to make its rounds and Rumors mushroomed. Soon the old tale of the butcher of the twenties who had killed people and had sold them as meat was revived, and the children on the street began to find the odd-man-out by counting: "Warte, warte, warte noch ein Weilchen, gleich kommt Adolf mit dem Hackebeilchen und macht Hackefleisch aus DIR" - which I refuse to translate...

5. Der Mutterberg 1939

Friedemann and Gerda's Calendar, Mutter sends me to school with the Nuns, Bullo and Herr Schulmann, Father's Great Opportunity, Winter 1939-40, Scarlet Fever, Middle-Ear Operation in Breslau

A photograph taken in the Summer of 1939 by Friedemann and Gerda for their "Familien Kalender auf das Jahr 1940" that was to become famous in Germany, shows us all less my father.

Friedemann and Gerda were old Wandervogel friends of my parents. They owned a photographic publishing house in Glatz that produced a kinder calender - "Die gliickliche Deutsche Familie", an animal calender - "Der Deutsche Tierfreund" , and a wander calender- "Durch Wies' und Wald: Die schönen Deutchen Lande". They owned a beautiful modern house with a large garden that included a swimming pond with water lilies that Friedemann occasionally used as "location" for photographs of his female assistants frolicking in the nude: "The German Woman, does she - or doesn't she?".... Gerda, who would greet their friends with "Heil Hitler!" and the raised arm even in the privacy of her house, was unable to have children and therefore "adopted" Gerhard soon after we came to Glatz.

Gerhard was born the slower and smaller of the twins, and a movie made by father in

Glatz in 1935 showed how Christine already at such an early age recklessly grabbed an apple right out of her twin-brother's mouth. He was the second born. Somehow during his second year he had picked up a tuberculosis infection - from one of the Kindermädchen - and this remained a health problem until long after we had moved to Habelschwerdt.

Anyway, Gerda liked to spoon feed and croon over Gerhardchen-with-the- small-mouth. And soon a Kinder Kalender was conceived of which the twins became the stars - I was occasionally given a supporting role. The calendar became immensely successful all over Germany, and one could still occasionally find Gerhardchen and Christine tending their dolls in the fifties! As far as I know the star models never earned a penny, nor did their parents.

Friedemann later took up with one of his healthy and beautiful assistants, in the darkroom as the story went, and when she became pregnant, simply divorced Gerda - an act that cost him my mother's long friendship. Shortly before this affair, they visited us in Habelschwerdt and had taken a family portrait on the grass in our garden.

Father aptly dubbed this photo der "Mutterberg," because in the masterfully composed picture mother, sitting on an invisible rock in our garden, is literally covered with her children: little Dieter sits in her lap, Gerhardchen in a sailor suit standing to her right holds a flower that Dieter will soon grab. Tine in pigtails looks over mother's left shoulder, her head in perfect juxtaposition to mother's face. All three children are looking intensely at the flower in Gerhard's hand. I, also in a sailor suit, have been forcred by Gerda to kneel two-thirds out of the picture to the left and offer my younger siblings - who completely disregard me - my famous smile and another flower from the cress bed next to the house entry. But who notices these sibling rivalries? The charmed beholder is caught and drawn into the laughing eyes of my mother, who is wearing Großmutter's red garnet brooch in the decollete of a loose, well remembered silk dress printed with dark blue and white flowers. It was one of the most charming moments in her life...

In March 1940 the twins started school in Mrs. Krzyscz's first grade, and I became the victim - as I saw it - of another of mother's ambitious attempts at improving my schooling. Herr Glusa had strained her patience beyond her willingness to put up with him, and since she could do nothing to stop him from indoctrinating me with the nonsense of our times, she decided to send me to the Nuns...

The catholic nuns ran a highly reputed "Mittelschule" in Habelschwerdt, something like a junior high school but with a final degree that did not allow graduates access to the university, but provided bank clerks, railroad station masters, and middle-level civil servants with a general education.

It also provided the opportunity for me to skip one year of school, which mother hoped would put me into a group of more mature children and at the same time put a little more strain on my bored brain.

There was going to be a hurdle though, I had to pass an entrance examination. mother was not going to leave anything to chance or to my ignorance, and once again I was sent off to "Nachhilfunterricht." This time one of the nuns was hired to drill me in math, where Herr Glusa's education had lacked terribly. The good Sister Leticia was very competent, but regarded me, the Protestant Sinner, with as much distant distaste as I did her affected,

mummified womanhood. Despite all these efforts I was sent home after the examination with a note saying that I had failed. Mother was furious and arrived at the headmistress' office next morning to appeal my case. The nuns, already under close scrutiny by the local political authorities, made the mistake to waver, "Well, I had passed the academic tests, but was really a year too young for the school - and besides I had not been raised as Catholic..." That decided the case, and mother returned that very evening with my certificate of admission.

Yet it was all to turn out differently. After Easter vacation, when I arrived for my first class, the school had been usurped by the civil school authorities, and the nuns had been replaced by regular, male teachers selected primarily for their faithfulness to the Party line. And so I became the pupil of Herrn Schulmann and befriended Fritz, also called "Bullo" on account of his stocky figure.

Herr Schulmann was a broad shouldered man of fifty who taught us English, the expert throwing of mock hand-granades, and swimming, - or at least he made a valiant attempt to teach me how to swim in the ice cold waters of the Bergbad. "Grosse Bleiente", great lead duck he used to call me. Blue from cold, my teeth chattering I would desperately simulate the movements of the frogs - and sink. It was hopeless. My frear of the dark depths of water would keep defeating all such attempts for another ten years.

Herr Schulmann, I was soon to find out, also had his weaknesses, he loved to fondle young girls. On our first "Schulwanderlag," a daylong outing to the mountains on our last school day before Summer Vacations, I found him in the woods with both his hands on the freshly budding breasts of one of the most desirable girls in my class. They did not notice me, and I watched the two for a long time from my hiding place. My feelings were mixed, I was excited, there was jealousy, but there was also a trace of a voyeurist complicity that was new and disturbing.

It was left to Bullo to explain the "facts of life" to me. During a piano recital that we had to attend in the school auditorium, in a secluded corner way in the back, while we were being treated to a Mozart sonata sweetly played by "Herrn Schulmann's girl", he described to me in graphic detail to what use a man's unruly object could be put and where to put it.

The summer of this year brought "Our Victory over France," which proved all the old, unctuous survivors of the first World War wrong: We could defeat France!

Germany had reached a new height - the peak as it was to turn out - of her new-found self-confidence: The dishonor of the armistice of Versailles had been avenged, "der schmachvolle Vertrag von Versailles war gerächt. Unser Führer in der Uniform des Gefreiten des ersten Weltkriegs in diesem historischen Augenblick...", Our Fuhrer in the uniform of the master-sergeant of the first World War at this historical moment... - I still hear the fanfares in the radio that announced the Grosse Sondermeldung, still see the Wochenschau in the movies - Hitler strutted into the same railroad car as then, in the same town of Compiegne, and dictated an armistice to France that was fully as brutal as the treaty of Versailles had been: Like the Germany of 1918 France was to be split into two parts. Like the French armies in 1918-23, German armies would occupy a third of the defeated country. The other two-thirds were left to a tottering, unpopular "self-government." Like Germany then France would now to be bled white. Hitler had his triumphal revenge, - and in Prussia we finally could cease celebrating "Sedan-Tag", our last memorable victory over the French - the same battle the

British still claim for Wellington...

Late in 1940 father received a call - "einen Ruf," as the German saying goes - to join the newly created Department of Regional Planning in the Provincial Administration of Schlesien in Breslau. This totally new subject had been the invention of a Prof. Obst at the University of Breslau. It was an attempt to put regional planning decisions, such as the placement of heavy industries in formerly rural areas - one of the propagandist-political foibles of the Hitler administration - or the sanitation of farming in mountainous regions, and the distribution of agricultural subsidies by the government on a more rational, scientific basis. Originally a geographer by training Obst had been given the charter to collect a team of specialists from various areas to complement his own expertise.

It was father's great chance. Finally his work was to be involved with what he liked most geography, cartography, maps, and philosophy - or should I call it ideology, - in short with the *theory* of man and his ideas and not his practical problems. He had never really found a vocation in the teaching of the "boorish sons of peasants", as he would sometimes call his students in hours of despair, or in dealing with people directly. Mother every night in her prayers included an appeal that father might get this new job, despite the fact that it would separate him from us. Because there was neither a possibility for us to move to Breslau, nor did it make practical sense to her. In Habelschwerdt we children had a wonderfully undisturbed rural playground, a very small chance of air raids, and a house for ourselves. None of that would have been guaranteed in Breslau.

So she sacrificed her personal happiness to his. The formidable task and the daily chores of raising four children in a war economy now fell on her, and there was no telephone in those days, by which she could have quickly consulted father in case of need. Of course, there were many women whose husbands were in the war, and who shouldered a similar burden. At least she did not have to worry about his life.

Father would come home by train every other weekend. These weekends were no undivided blessing. Tensions and expectations between them must have often been as high as they were to become later after the war, when I understood more and noticed such things. And often I worried about father's visits too.

I had every reason to be concerned about father's homecomings, because mother would, often in tears, recount all my misdeeds to him, appealing to him to do something. Poor father, this shy and entle man must often have been in a quandary. Despite many other unusually democratic institutions in our family - for instance, there never was an "Extra Wurst" for father not even in the worst times, and we children were always allowed to participate freely in the conversations of the adults at the dinner table - there was no jury system and no hearings were given to the different versions of a "crime". So father was pushed into the unenviable position of a simple executioner of punishments for deeds that were often weeks old. I do not remember the reasons for such, for him uncharacteristically draconian measures, but on several occasions he badly beat me in his room with a heavy belt.

In Breslau he rented a room in Grandmother's apartment, and Grandmother also cooked for him. My mother would sigh: "Maybe she will teach him to appreciate good cooking," because father seems to have never savored anything. It simply did not make any difference to him what it was that he ate. - Yes, I now remember that I got one heavy beating for making

a scene over the fibrous remnants of the meat of some old cow that had been cooked for three hours in an "Eintopf," a vegetable stew at the beginning of the war: These were hard times, and I was to eat what was served at the table and moreover without any visible or audible complaints, period.

Maybe the arrangement at Grandmother's apartment helped mother over another worry. She was as jealous as she was sensual, and would often get quite upset over the escapades of other married men: Herr Laube's affair with some woman at a spa, or Dr. Futter's fling on his way to the Azores aboard a cruise ship of the memorable KDF. - Who remembers "Kraft-Durch-Freude?" - It translates quite literally into the pun "Power Through Fun", though Kraft in contrast to the English "power" is quite apolitical. It was the name of one of the more innocuous Party organizations dedicated to the ideologically sound recreation of Our Volksgenossen. - These and other such stories were related to mother over the sweet peas growing on the fence between our two gardens by Frau Medizinalrat Futter, the gossipy mother of our rotund, middle-aged pediatrician in Glatz. When asked by my mother on our next doctor visit about his trip, he cryptically answered: "Wonderful, wonderful, Frau Doktor. I can tell you, I danced through the nights like a young god!" Mother did not only pity the bereft wives, but would condemn philandering men with unusual vehemence.

I don't think her own man ever gave her true cause to be upset, he was much too proper for that and much too inhibited with women. But during the last two years of the war he sometimes brought home a no longer young colleague, Fräulein Felmberg. From my point of view she was no match to my beautiful mother, and she already exuded the faint odor of old-maid's desperation.

I remember the first time Fräulein Felmberg came to Habelschwerdt. Mother - who had absolutely no talent for a Grande Dame - was painfully cordial, and as always in situations where she found herself put outside her own center, slightly flushed and out of breath she showed a trace of a pout and her short nose was raised too high. I, who was so much like her and loved her, was painfully aware of her embarrassment, but Fräulein Felmberg seemed to notice nothing. Even father, made insensitive by his excitement and eagerness, seemed unawares. And then mother did what she always did in tight situations, she served coffee with a freshly baked Obstkuchen and real whipped cream - God knows by what illegal means she had obtained it - at a festively laid table on the veranda, and all drugged by her hospitality relaxed into a happy afternoon.

Irmgard Felmberg with unfailing devotion remained a distant reality, if not a part of our family throughout my father's life. Like so many young women of her generation she never found a man to marry; too many had died in the war. Unfortunately - I feel - father surely played a fully innocent role, and beyond a faithful caring fondness for this woman, he never allowed himself so much as to kiss her - it would rather have been she, who might have kissed him.

Winter arrived. The snow reached unprecedented heights. By early December we were snow-bound and had to go to school on skis. The water pipes in the exposed walls of the house froze and burst when the plumber tried to unfreeze them. And father was in Breslau.

On the third Advent the twins came down with a high temperature and a colorful rash. It turned out to be scarlet fever! I remember playing in a snow house that I had built in a drift

in the garden, fighting the fate that everybody prophesied would doom me too. There was no escape, that afternoon my temperature went up at a frightening rate, I simply collapsed shaking uncontrollably and was put into quarantine in the same room with my siblings. For some six weeks we had to stay isolated, confined to our room upstairs, to which only mother and the doctor had access. There was always the fear that little Dieter was going to get it too. He escaped, thanks to mother's meticulous precautions and the liberal use of Lysol.

The door to our room was hung with a large old carpet as an air-lock and to also keep the heat in. Every time mother left our room she changed her outer garments and shoes. Her first job every morning was to empty the oven and rekindle the fire. She prepared all food for us separately in an improvised kitchen in the upstairs bathroom. Hilde meanwhile took care of Dieter, of all shopping - on skis! - mother's meals, and my father whenever he came to visit. She now slept downstairs. These were the days before the invention of penicillin and the availability of specific vaccines. The good doctor, a modern, young man came every few days to the house and tried another new medicine on us. There was not much that he could do against the viral infection itself except to keep the peak temperatures down, but the real danger were possible complications due to more ordinary bacilli. The first sulfonamides had just been developed and he tried everything available. For weeks we all peed in the most beautiful colors, yellow, bright orange, and dark red.

After two week our rashes were gone, and our temperatures were down. We felt wonderful. Now came the problem of how to keep us occupied and from fighting. It was then that father began combing the toy stores of Breslau for games, cut-out paper castles, villages, and dolls, and for me tiny, meticulously cast replicas of ships. By the end of the illness I owned a whole navy. This was also the time, when I read my first book, written in Sutterlinschrifi. It came from Tame Irmgard and smelled for rosemary...

Then the peeling started, our entire skin came off in scabs, which at that time were still considered contagious by the superstitious. The doctor laughed and convinced mother that these were old-wife tales. But the "Second Illness", another attack in the third week, with more high fever and headaches was not. Mother's three little sheep were quiet again...

Regulations by the health authorities demanded three negative laboratory tests taken one week apart before scarlet fever victims could leave quarantine. It was mid February before we passed that test.

The feeling of freedom mixed with exhaustion, when I was allowed to sleep in my regular bed again, was heavenly. It was not to be for long. The twins did not suffer any complications, but I began to develop a fast increasing ear-ache. At first I tried to hide the pain from my mother, but during the night I simply couldn't bear it any longer. The doctor came in a hurry in the morning and diagnosed a middle-ear infection. After two more days father was called and came, wrapped me into three blankets, strapped me onto a sled, took me to the station, and with the next train to Breslau. There I was operated on by an ear specialist during the same night. I remember the sensations of my first full narcosis under the gentle hands of Schwester Lara - which was not her name but Pasternak's Lara, for reasons only known to my chaotic subconscious, thirty years later completely assumed her face and stature. I counted twice to twenty, the doctor was already scratching audibly through the bone behind my ear, before I gave up. I awoke still on the operating table overhearing the doctor

say that it would have been a matter of hours before the infection would have burst into the brain...

Schwester Lara watched over me for the next two weeks in the private hospital. Every day she changed the bandages that had been stuffed into the hole behind my ear, she got me the best food from the kitchen, and told me stories. I recuperated fast enough to be able to climb a chair on the third day when nobody was present and raid a parcel full of Christmas cookies in the wardrobe in my room that Grandmother had brought especially for me.

Later I shared a wonderfully sunny, large room with another boy whose tonsils had been removed. My bed was near the window, so I could watch the birds and squirrels jumping in the trees outside in the deep snow. Großmutter and father, Tante Irmgard and Onkel Fritz, mother's oldest brother, all came to see me and brought me presents, but it was the white bed sheets and the heavenly peace and quiet of those days that I remember best. I was allowed to stay in Breslau at Großmutter's apartment for another three weeks. I slept on the sofa in Tante Gretel’s sitting room that also contained Großmutter's small library. It was there during the afternoon hours, when the two women slept and father was at work, that I secretly studied the details of the anatomical cuts of the male and female body in Meyer's Conversationslexikon - the large German encyclopedia that did not exist at home - trying to finally settle the question of "how babies were made". - father, whom I had some months earlier asked that question, had quite bluntly told me that I was still too young, and that he would explain it to me when I would be eighteen...

6. Father and Mother 1939-40

Skiing with Father, The Riesengebirge, Birthdays and Christmas, Das Griechenlandbuch

Throughout my childhood there seem to have always been mountains of snow in winter, and I loved them. Then all the familiar world would be covered, and I could ski over the fields imagining that I was Sven Hedin crossing the white spots of Central Asia, where it said "Unexplored Territories" on the maps of great-grandfather's "Kiepert's Welt Atlas" of 1895.

And I confess that sometimes crossing the snow covered desert in Mammouth I still play this game laughing at myself all the way.

The story was - and there used to be an old photo showing me on much too long skis between the towering legs of my father, who was also on skis - that I learned to ski when I turned three. I don't remember, but by the year of 1938 I had become good enough to have replaced mother as the skiing companion of father.

Father, on one of our trips to the Sudetenland had bought me a pair of "serious" skis. I had to raise my hands as high as I could and their length had to reach to my fingertips - plus a little extra, since I was still growing. They had no steel edges, and the bindings consisted of two adjustable steel brackets with a leather strap over the toes and another around the heel,

but you could walk with these skis as well as run downhill. This was important, since there were no lifts then, and in order to enjoy a run one had first to climb the mountain. In case my children smile condescendingly, they should remember that Wedeln and Sid-slips had not been invented yet, and that I had to rely on snowplows, Stemmbogen, and Christies for the control of the two-meter-long monsters.

Skiing with father started a real competition between us. He had been skiing since the twenties, but I soon discovered that I had one advantage over him, I was much smaller. While he had to carefully snowplow or Stemmbogen down the steeper hills, I, not having far to fall, simply schussed down straight-line screaming on top of my lungs "Bahn, Bahn" to scatter any people careless enough to be in my way. I became more and more daring, and I think father enjoyed our shared time together as much as I did.

On Easter Sunday 1939, a year before the trip to the forbidden Sahnemühle, father and I climbed the Glalzer Schneeberg, which we could see on clear days from our house floating far to the east above the town. It still appears to me in my dreams like that.

It was our first real ski-tour together. The day was clear and the sun was already hot. Everywhere except on the mountain the snow had given way to the first spring flowers. father drove the car until it got stuck in a snowdrift. From there we skied up three hours to the Schneeberg Haus and without skins. The hut was still half buried in the snow. We collapsed exhausted on its steaming roof and lay there for two hours getting a sunburn. The snow-buried house, the heat, and sleeping on the roof left indelible impressions.

Encouraged, father took me on a much longer ski-tour of the "Riesengebirge," the Giants' Mountains in February and March a year later. We climbed on foot from Warmbrunn on the Silesian side of the mountains to the Spindler Baude at the crest, and from there skied for three weeks from one Baude to the next. The "Bauden," simple hostels, where the hiker could find shelter for the night and food, were weathered wooden buildings with steep shingle roofs. Several nights we slept in a room in the wooden attic of the Wiesen Baude on the southern, Bohemian side of the mountains, where I remember the water in the washstand was covered with ice every morning, but the heavy feather comforters kept us warm.

A year later, in late March after my ear operation. father and I skied the Riesengebirge once again. Because of my still partially open ear wound, we did not wander around this time, but stayed in one place at the Schwarzschlag Baude above Johannistal on the Bohemian side. The Schwarzschlag Baude was more like a mountain hotel and much more comfortable than the old Wiesen Baude. For a while Tante Käthe Schmidt joined us there with Jochen, Peter, and Hartmut.

It must have been already during the previous winter that father had brought me a model-ship kit from Breslau. It was a faithful replica of Columbus' "Santa Maria" with tackle and ropes, sails and cannons, and hatches into its interior. Unlike today’s models this was entirely from wood and no parts were "pre-cut", everything had to be sawed with a scroll-saw by hand, and the body of the ship had to be laminated from layers and finished with a rasp to conform to sectional templates in the plan. It was the closest thing to building a real boat.

In the beginning father helped me with the sawing during his bi-weekly visits, but soon I learned to do it myself. It took all winter to finish this model. Finally mother sewed the sails

on her sewing machine. This first model was followed by a "Panzerkreuzer" complete with an on-board reconnaissance plane. The tragedy was that there was no paint to be found in the shops, and all my ships remained "in-the-raw" and were never launched. In 1946 when we had to leave, I burned my navy, tears in my eyes, so it would not fall into the hands of the hated Poles.

Every time he came home father brought parcels with new things for his children. Most of them vanished into a locked closet in my parents bedroom where they were kept hidden for Christmas or birthdays. I remember all my birthdays. My table in front of father's bookshelf, was overloaded. The centerpiece was a "Schlesischer Streusselkuchen," a thin circular yeast cake covered with buttered crumbs surrounded by a carefully counted number of candles, real finger-thick candles that would burn for an hour. One birthday, it must have been 1941, when I was ten, there were such piles of presents that they spilled onto the floor, a hunter's horn, books, a kit for a racing-model sail boat, another one for a glider plane that never flew, and more books. Everything was individually wrapped. It took an hour to open it all.

Books became my most prized possessions, and I was given my own closet to shelve my "library" in. This was the time when I rifled my father's extensive geographic library for all and every of Sven Hedin's Central Asian travelogs. Dry as the sand of the Taklamakan as these books were, I devoured every word in them. Sven Hedin became the source of one of my most persistent longings, to see Tibet and the Taklamakan.

It must have been Christmas 1942 that father brought me my first technical book, a popular account of radio waves and what they could be used for, from a simple transmitter to early television. It started me on an attempt to make a transmitter myself - but this is a story that belongs to a later time. Then father gave me some of his old notebooks from his university years, chemistry, physics. I devoured them all.

One book, however, was to become dearer to me than all the others: It was beautifully printed, bound in wine-red cardboard with a golden Luftwaffe Eagle on its cover. father had discovered it in Breslau just before Christmas 1941. It was simply called "Griechenlandbuch" and was dedicated to the soldiers of the German Army in Greece by their Commander - as a Christmas present for the year 1941. A declaration of love to the defeated Greece.

Two young soldiers, students of classical literature and art had been excused from their military duties and sent to hike for months, completely alone through the war-torn, partisan-infested Greece, Ernst Kästner was the writer, and Fritz Kaulbach the illustrator. Kästner's Homeric hymn on Greek hospitality and Kaulbach's ether-thin line-drawings conjured up images of light that exploded in my mind like fireworks.

Father read to us from this book during the long nights of that hopeless, first Russian winter: it was then that I fell in love with Greece, its light and its people. And this book was the one I chose to take along, when we were deported in 1946.

I have been thinking about father while writing these pages. Who was this man, who was so impeccably resented by two of his sons that they destroyed their own lives? For that is, what I see to have happened to Gerhard and Dieter.

I never loved father the way I loved my mother. I did not admire him, he was the ultimate anti-hero. He considered himself a physically and spiritually weak man who had

married my mother mainly to counter-balance his weaknesses, his near-sightedness, his poor heart, his impracticality, and his awkwardness with people. He was the perfect theoretician. Long before Hitler he admired the elitist racial theories of Houston Steward Chamberlain and Gobineau, believing that man could be "bred" like the plants and animals he had to do with. - When my mother got really angry, she would accuse him of considering her a "Mutter-Zuchtschaf", a mother-ewe, for breeding purposes , and sadly enough she was not totally wrong, as father's scanty notebooks show.

And yet there were years of a very special comradeship between father and myself, even real friendship. He never was chummy. Almost all my interests in the sciences and the arts, in geography, in books, even in music were stimulated by him in the years before 1945. From him I learned more than from all my teachers put together.

Later during the years after the war, when I needed to separate myself from my parents, there was a long period of tension between father and me, but with Barbara's help I got over that and found my own understanding of him and myself. Why could neither of my brothers accomplish that? I always felt that we children were treated democratically quite equal with few preferences by either parent. Why should I be different from my siblings? Mother would always beat all of us when some fight had broken out between us - and often I was beaten the hardest, for I was the oldest and was supposed to be more controlled than my siblings.

Why then has this family fallen apart to the extent that Dieter will not talk to his siblings, and Gerhard in the year before he died refused to allow his parents to come and see him for the last time?

"There are many reasons," says Christine, the only one with whom I can still talk about such things. "You were the oldest, you suppressed us, you were mother's preferred child, your wife became our parents' darling daughter-in-law, your children were always better than ours, you are the oldest, you still try to dominate us, your wife is a b...." At which point I became so angry that I almost proved her point. This was two years ago when we were sitting up to our necks in the water of Stanley Bay, because it was so infernally hot in Hong Kong.

From her point of view she is right but also sadly wrong. Wrong because my siblings' most crucial problems derive primarily from their unresolved relationships with their parents. Since a few years I begin to see that my younger siblings were short-changed compared to me, by fate not by anyone's evil design. They never experienced father or mother the way I was fortunate to have known them. When Gerhard and Christine were ten the final year of the war was upon us, and father was no longer able to be comrade and friend. And their formative years fell into the depraved time after the war, where we barely managed to survive, and our family life became almost completely destroyed.

And as for father, he was 44 by the end of the war when his entire Weltbild collapsed, and not only that, it revealed itself as having been amoral or at least as having produced a nightmare of immoral monstrosities. He was a strongly "moral" person and despised opportunism, and because of that he possessed no flexibility that would have allowed him to adjust to reality. His must have been a terrible experience.

In pain, suddenly aware of my age, I try to visualize what happened in my parents' life

at the age of fifty, and it is most tragic what I see. The middle years of their lives were wiped out, they simply do not exist.

7. Pimpf 1941-44

Hitler's Cub Scouts, A Great Disappointment. Promotion, The NAPOLA

In the Fall of 1941, after months of begging, my parents finally gave in, and I became a "Pimpf," a cub-scout in the Hitler Jugend. The Volksmund appropriately related Pimpf to Pimpe or Rotznase, a snort-nose, Pimpel a blackhead, and pimpeln whining. But nowhere can I find what a Pimpf was before he advanced to become the Klein-Hitler-Junge. He seems to have sprung from His Master's Head complete with brown-shirt, white-on-red swastika armband, black neck-kerchief, leather knot, and corduroy shorts that were held up by a shoulder-strap and a belt with an aluminum swastika-buckle. An advanced copy of Baden-Powell's Boy-Scouts. Long breeches and high-boots were bestowed on him at sixteen, when, under solemn oaths to do Good and nothing but Good, to unquestioningly serve Führer und Vaterland, to impeccably hate all His enemies, and with much arm raising, the "Pimpf" was initiated into the Hitler-Jugend.

I had had the idea that this would be a game of Indians and Chiefs, hikes, adventures, and sleeping out-doors. I saw before my eyes pictures of great cook-outs in the woods with blackened pots and tents under our beloved white-on-red swastika-flag.

It was an almost instant disillusionment. Instead of games in the woods there were once a week three hours of "Dienst" in a dark and dusty basement room of the local high school. The only out-doors we saw was, when the sadistic Gruppenführer drilled and chased us around the school yard, forcing us to crawl through dust and snow in punishment for some minor transgression. And I the unruly, cocky son from an "educated family" had to suffer a disproportionate share of such exercises. Soon there was no escape, serving in the Hitler Jugend had become a "Pflicht für jeden jungen Deutschen," a duty for every young German. I don't think there was an explicit law to that effect. The sanctions were not named, but it was "understood" that parents, who withheld their children from the Ha-Jot would be made to feel their "asocial" behavior most unpleasantly elsewhere...

After a while I became resigned to the Dienst and had to eat less dirt. If we were not being drilled in the school yard, we were taught songs: old folk songs that the Wandervogel had already sung, Walter Flex's heavily sentimental, neo-romantic Kitsch, and "Lieder der Bewegung," the songs of the "Movement". A dangerous mixture. But we honestly believed with Goethe: "Wo sie singen, lasst Euch nieder, böse Menschen kennen keine Lieder" - where they sing there settle, bad men know no songs...

Ein Lied !

Marching in closed formation, three abreast down the Adolf-Hitler Straße, formerly

Bahnhofstraße: *"Schwarzbraun ist die Haselnuss, schwarzbraun bin auch ich, schwarzbraun muss mein Madel sein, gerade so wie ich..."*1

Nach vorne hören!
Ihr Flaschen seid aus dem Tritt: LINKS, zwei, drei. Vier...
Rechtsschwenk Marrrrsch!
Gerade aus!
Ableilung halt!
Achtung!...

Ein neues Lied!
At a memorial service for our fallen heroes, who lay somewhere under the snow in Russia. Standing motionless at attention, flag in hand, next to the unreal, corpse-less casket. Slowly rose the roll of the drums to a crescendo, a blast from the trumpets, and then like a wave: *"Wildgänse rauschen durch die Nacht mit stetem Flug nach Norden. Uns steht die Wacht. Habt acht habt acht, die Welt ist voller Morden..."*2
Immer das alte Lied.
Standing with raised arm before the black hole of a loudspeaker from which pre-recorded cheers and songs carried His crazed, screaming, disembodied voice to the silent, somber people. *"Die Fahne hoch, die Reihen dicht geschlossen, SA marschiert in ruhig festem Trill..."*3
Und noch einmal dasselbe Lied.
At Our Führer's last birthday, at night, carrying torches: *"Es zittern die morschen Knochen der Welt vor dem grossen Krieg, wir haben die Ketten zerbrochen..."*4
Das letzle Lied
we sang at the bitter end, tears in our eyes, to Haydn's music, the most beautiful, misinterpreted, misunderstood anthem of any nation: *"Deutschland, Deutschland über alles, über alles in der Welt..."*5

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1 Black-brown is the hazelnut, black-brown am I too, black-brown must my sweetheart be, exactly like me.." (One of the most popular songs of that time. Don't ask me why.)
2 Wild geese hush through the night with steady flight north. We are the guard. Beware, beware the world is full of murders.. (Walter Flex)
3 The flag [raise] high, close up the rows, SA marches in calm and certain step... ("Horst-Wessel-Lied")
4 The rotten bones of the world tremble [in fear] of the great war, we have broken the chains [of our enslavement]...
5 Deutschland. Deutschland [*we love you*] above all, above all in the world...

How they stick these songs, like brown glue.... I could still recite half a dozen more, forty years later...
Not long ago a German acquaintance in Los Angeles, older than I, suffered a stroke. He could no longer speak or write his name, but he sang - these songs - with a croaking voice. What a way to go. And what a perversion of the lowest level of the mind.

By 1943 I began to warm to the Ha-Jot: I was promoted to "Scharführer," the lowest rank, and was decorated with a short red cord to be worn between the left shoulder piece and

the third button hole from the top. I took it very seriously, and from then on, besides marching at the head of my little Schar, I had the honorable job of collecting truant buddies from their homes. Under the protection of my official uniform I triumphantly ventured into the poor-houses of the FlurstaBe and flushed my previous enemies out of their lairs. It was now on me to exercise my Schar in the schoolyard, and a sweet experience it was! I was even given special voice training for a while, in order to make my prepubescent voice louder and more "markig." I tried hard to emulate My Führer, and soon the authorities took note of me.

In the fall I was chosen for a special training camp, from which promising young Pimpfe were to be selected for the NAPOLA, the National Political Education School, which was to raise a new generation of top Party leaders. I was eleven. This was to be the only camp of my Hitler-Jugend time. We were mercilessly chased around, had to pass tests of bravery and courage, and even at night were subjected to all kinds of scares. One boy came crawling into my bed whining for his mother, another was caught peeing into the washbasin at night. He was stripped naked and court-marshaled to be beaten by the Gruppenfuhrer before the entire crowd. On the third day, vomiting helplessly, I collapsed.

Still, I returned home with the burning wish to join the NAPOLA. On a gray Sunday morning, two weeks later, the Bannfuhrer personally, appeared at our house in long coat, officer's hat, and full uniform, "Blood-Knife" dangling from his belt. My father took him into his room and closed the door. An hour later the man left, and a worried looking father told me that he had decided that I was not going to go to the NAPOLA.

I was mortified. Father took me for a walk and explained that his major objections were that I would not be taught any religion and that I would be completely isolated from my family. He admitted to being concerned that his decision would jeopardize my future and could have consequences for himself, but also that his decision was firm despite these possibilities.

I was cited to appear before the Bannfuhrer once more alone. He tried to persuade me to join on my "own free will", but despite my previous enthusiasm for the idea - surprisingly - I sided with father.

Three months later I was demoted for some minor "refusal to obey orders" and deprived of my Scharführer cord in a crushingly dishonoring ceremony before the entire Fähnlein.

This was in the spring of 1944. I walked around in a continual gloom for weeks and lost all interest in the Pimpfe. I was saved from worse consequences by an accident - or should I say by my mother?

This was the year of the Apocalypse, of Our Heroic Retreat at the Eastern Front, and of "Kohlenklau." Weeks before anybody knew what it signified, a black silhouette of a man in a heavy coat with a high collar, hat, and a single eye appeared stenciled on windows and walls all over Germany. Later it became known that he was Kohlenklau, the coal-thief who was robbing our struggling nation of her last resources: coals and potatoes.

And the rumor had it that through the vigilance of the people on the Ruhr Kohlenklau was caught, and to everybody's surprise turned out to be Benito Mussolini...

To fight Kohlenklau we were sent to the fields that autumn to help dig potatoes, the

most backbreaking of all harvesting jobs. For two weeks we crawled on our knees in the wet earth behind a Polish POW who in place of the drafted farmer led the horses of the potato-digger. During a break I teased one of the heavy Belgian horses and in revenge it kicked my knee. Within hours my knee blew up to the size of a small football. There was no more potato digging.

The wife of the farmer put me into her husband's bed, where I lay in agonies under ten pounds of feather bedding throughout the night. Next morning the Polish POW took me home on a cart.

Mother put me into bed with a pack of mashed, hot potatoes on my knee, - and there I spent most of that winter. Mother adamantly refused any operation of my knee for fear that the surgeon would mess it up, and I would end with a stiff knee for the rest of my life. She was probably right - or did she have the foresight others lacked? At the time my knee was completely healed, there was no more Führer, no more Deutschland, and no more Ha-Jot...

8. The War Drags on 1941-1945

The Summer of 1941 in Dievenow, Frankfurt a/O, The Gandparents Grohs, Uncle Hans falls in Russia, Family Convocation in Dievenow 1942, Aufbauschule, Konfirmanden Unterricht, The Debacle with Elisabeth, My Reluctant Confirmation 1945

Barbara my impatient critic, reading over my shoulder, complains: "When are you going to get to the important part, to the end of the war." Yes, the war was slowly growing longer, but if I were now to tell what happened in the end, it would sound as if it was all brought about by Our Führer and the Ha-Jot. Nothing could have convinced me of that then, I glowingly believed in our righteousness in this war and our Endsieg, our final victory. - Besides there are so many stories that beg to be told, sad stories and happy ones...

To recover from the long illness of the winter we spent the summer of 1941 once more at the Baltic Sea. father drove us there, the last trip in our DKW before it had to be put on bricks in the garage for lack of gas and a set of new tires. Again we stayed in Frankfurt, this time at the house of the Grandparents Grohs.

Grandfather Grohs was now retired and spent his time raising turtles in a large terrarium in his garden. They laid eggs like ping-pong balls! - which Großvater incubated in Großmutter's kitchen oven. In the evening he showed us and the Schmidt children his cabinet of naturalia and curiosa: mineral samples, stuffed birds, enameled salt vessels from Russia which his brother had sent him, and a velvet box with the biggest diamonds in the world. To every item he had a story, and he tremendously enjoyed fooling his innocent and credulous grandchildren. When he told of the diamonds that they had been a gift to him from an Indian Maharaja, I felt that he had gone too far and called it a bluff and the diamonds "glass pieces". Unfortunately he did not take this interruption humorously, called me an unverschämter Keri, an impertinent ruffian, closed the cabinet, and never told me stories again.

Großmutter Grohs had become a slight, bitter, old woman, very different from Grandmother Hammer. She talked incessantly and had a way of nagging everybody. Nobody, it seemed, really liked her, even her husband slept in a separate room, and when she started nagging him, he would shrug his shoulders, mumble: "Ich lasse meinen Drachen steigen!" "I let my kite fly" - and retreat to his garden and turtles.

This time mother had rented an apartment in a "Pension mit voller Verpflegung," American plan, in Dievenow on the island of Wollin. The beach was flat there behind dunes for miles. I remember that we played Rommel in Africa most of the time, the twins were camels, the parents the enemy. It was then that Gerhard found a golden wedding band in the dunes. father and he carried it to the lost-and-found, where it still was, unclaimed a year later. Gerhard was allowed to keep it, and later father had it made into a nephrite ring for mother that Christine still wears.

In the winter of 1941-42 Onkel Hans, Tante Irmgard's husband and mother's youngest brother fell in Russia. There was nothing left of him to bury. Tante Irmgard had just given birth to their second child, Angela. It was a great loss for the Hammer clan, and it was decided that we would all meet in Dievenow again in the following summer of 1942.

It was a glorious summer for us children. Großmutter was there and all her children and grandchildren: - Onkel Fritz Hammer and Tante Dora with Ilse, Fritz, Dola, and Ernst, Tante Magda Stölzel with Ernst, Barbara, and Brigitte, Onkel Gerhard Hammer and Tante Eva who had no children, Tante Irmgard with Renate and the newborn Udo, and my parents with Gerhard, Christine, Dieter and myself. A tiny photograph shows all thirteen grandchildren lined up like organ pipes behind Großmutter on the beach.

This time we could muster several armies in the dunes, and in the long evenings after supper we played Räuber und Gendarmes in the woods behind the house. The Stölzel sisters Barbara and Brigitte, who were in their lazy teens, became the objects of an endless number of practical jokes like filling sand into their bathing suits or stealing their clothes while they changed in their Strandkorb, their "beach basket". I cannot let this opportunity pass to digress and break a lance for this strange fixture of Northern German beach life. Every family rents one of these wicker love-seats from the "Kurverwaltung," the beach authority. It comes with a bonnet-shaped hood and a striped curtain against the ever blowing wind and the prying eyes of the neighbors. It is customary for its temporary owners to surround the Strandkorb with a circular sand wall, often decorated artistically with shells, to form a "Strandburg," a beach castle, so that the beach looks, depending on one's point of view, like a plain taken over by ergates, a cratered moon-scape, or the battle field of Verdun after the German siege.

This peculiar form of social behavior, never analyzed, has actually a many advantages to recommend itself, it creates accurately defined territorial rights on crowded beaches, defines unmistakable circles of privacy, and makes every ordinary, bourgeois family father an instant "Burgherr." It also lends itself to spying, romances, abductions, feuds, sieges, and other chivalrous pursuits that have survived elsewhere only in fairy tales. And not to interfere with the seriousness of everyday life, it is supposed to last, like Fasching, for only one summer. The storms of the next winter will sweep the beach clean again...

Now you will understand why - quite innocent - raids on the Strandburg of our teenage cousins were such a pleasure during that summer.

We traveled home by train. Tante Magda and Ernst had had to leave earlier and my mother had volunteered to deliver Brigitte and Barbara to relatives in Berlin, this made us a

"family" with six children and gave us an official right in the overcrowded train to a compartment marked "Reserviert für kinderreiche Familien," literally, reserved for child-rich families. People would stop, look at the strapping Stölzel sisters, then at mother, and finally at us smaller children, and beam in admiration. Mother clowning, her chuckles muted by a trace of pride, would pull her "Mutterkreuz" from her decollete - a kind of Iron-Cross on a blue ribbon that had been bestowed on her by the authorities together with a recommendation signed by Him personally a year earlier for having borne four children to the Vaterland - and show it around, and we children had to fight not to explode in laughter.

The two days in Berlin were my first visit to a real city. father took me to look at the Reichskanzlei, where I greatly admired the elegant, steel-helmeted SS Honor Guard standing at attention at the entries to Our Führer's Private Palace. We also visited the exemplary monkey cage in Hagenbeck's Zoo and rode the subway. To my disappointment we slept through both nights without air raid sirens or the sound of an American bomber.

Easter 1942 another change of school became necessary, if I ever wanted to go to university. Habelschwerdt's only institution of higher learning was an "Aufbauschule," a six-year high-school where the emphasis was on mathematics, the sciences, and modern languages in contrast to an eight-year "humanistisches Gymnasium" where Latin and Greek were the major subjects.

The school was run by Jesuit trained teachers and had a reputation for toughness and excellence. The entrance examination took two days of intensive testing in all subjects from German composition to sports. This time I passed without mother's tactical intervention, which I attributed to a four-leave-clover stem that I carried to the examination.

The clover became part of an experience that was to have a long-lasting effect on me. Being fully convinced that the "luck" the four-leave-clover was supposed to impart to its owner was pure superstition, I nevertheless discovered that I could endow this fetish with the power to calm my nerves during the examination, by simply telling myself over and over again that it could do that trick. I called it "cheating myself" to be calm, and it worked miraculously. Later I would find that "cheating myself" was much more effective than the "Iron-Will" approach my father always recommended so highly. There are few notable memories from my two years at the Aufbauschule. There were no human freaks among the teachers, the discipline was exemplary, and I had to work too hard to have time to wreak any havoc. In retrospect I see that this may have been the best school I ever attended.

The summer of 1943, the last peaceful summer in our charmed corner of the globe, left me with one more nostalgic memory of the old soon to disappear Prussia. The Schmidt's had bought an abandoned mill in the country east of Frankfurt on the Oder to escape the ever more frequent air raids, and I was invited to spend July and August there.

I traveled alone by train, the last fifty kilometers on a narrow gauge line that wound through the flat meadows of the lazily flowing Oder river into a land of potato fields, cows, and gremlins. We passed scattered villages with old Prussian names like Brederlow, Kunersdorf, and Reppen, meandering, willow-lined brooks, unpaved country lanes with deep tracks full of water or ankle-deep sand, and sandy hills covered by fir forests. This was the land of the Prussian Junkers, the unpretentious but proud half-Slavic, half-German owners of vast tracts of land, villages, forests, and fishing rights. Here and there one could see their manor houses hidden in an ancient park of wild oaks, and next to it invariably the smoke stack of its "Schnaps-Brennerei," the distillery of potato spirits. - The monocled Junker of Anglo-American

lore are - like Cowboys - an almost complete manufacture of the Hollywood movies.

The Schmidt's mill had belonged to one of these manor houses. It had not been used for at least twenty years, but a silted pond, the overgrown dam, and the old waterwheel missing half its wooden boxes were still there. The cavernous house, miles from the nearest village, was completely hidden under acacias and oaks. Here I found Tante Käthe ruling from a fly infested medieval kitchen, a minor army of house personnel, and my five cousins. The myriads of flies - I have never again seen so many - were produced in a stable behind the house, where an old, weathered and slightly benighted shepherd watched a flock of some thirty sheep.

I slept with Peter, Hartmut, and Jochen in a mansard room under the roof. The first thing they did, was to instruct me in the use of a deadly knuckle-duster that was lying next to my bed. Each of us had one of these four-ringed weapons to ward-off any marauding Russian POW that were said to infest the nearby forests. There cannot have been many, because on our long hikes through the woods we never saw one. I became more interested in "funny" Peter this time. He like I had become interested in physics, and I remember that we endlessly discussed the nature of the electron. On less philosophical days Peter and I went "swimming" in the shallow mill brook, where we would catch crayfish and dig for fresh-water mussels, and once I even found a pearl in one of those.

Our only connections with the war-torn outside world were the occasional swarm of high flying allied bombers on their way from or to Berlin, and the battery operated radio of a Luftwaffen major who lived with his Greek born wife in another part of the house. Every night they would hover over their shortwave receiver and listen to the lies perpetrated by Radio London, and in the morning they distributed bad rumors in the kitchen that left Tante Käthe silent and depressed for the whole day.

My parents insisted that I attend Pastor Schicha's "Konfirmanden Unterricht," in preparation for my Confirmation. Instructions in Religion had vanished from the curriculum of the schools by that time, and I did not miss them. To be known as one, who attended religious instructions, had become an embarrassment to me. My parents, however, were unmoved.

Unfortunately the Konfirmanden Unterricht consisted mainly of the uninspired memorizing of Luther's "Kleiner Kathechismus mit Erklärungen", the "Small Catechism with Explanations" and a long list of hymns. I had the greatest difficulties in remembering any of this, whether they were the swollen baroque hymns by Paul Gerhardt, or "Thou shalt not desire thy neighbor's wife".

Worse was, however, that at the center of the Confirmation Service on Palm Sunday a confession of my sins was going to be followed by my first participation in the Lord's Supper. Quite simply, I could not comprehend the concept of Sin, nor the need for such an elaborate and painful ritual of forgiving. It was not that I felt righteous, pure, or innocent, it was that I did not feel guilt. My religious dilemma was very real, because I clearly perceived that as far as the church was concerned, the essence of Christ's mission was to forgive man his sins, so, why should I become a Christian, if I did not feel guilty?

And I still cannot comprehend sin or guilt.

Father already then and until his death explained the Lord's Supper - and make me partake in it - as a spiritual act of communion with my family, my forefathers, and the Church as The Institution of Western Culture. Unfortunately I have never needed a special service to commune with forefathers, family, and the church.

There happened another, most incisive incident during the confirmation instructions. There was a girl named Elisabeth, who also attended Pastor Schicha's lectures. She had already been in the same class with me at the Mittelschule. For some reason I have forgotten, I suddenly became infatuated with her, not in my usual way of simply talking to a girl whom I liked, or walking her home, but in a round-about way from a distance, by sending her notes through a girlfriend of hers. I don't think, I ever spoke a word with Elisabeth herself.

I composed the missives to Elisabeth in bed at night. Each of us children had our own reading light, and although reading after mother had turned off the light was forbidden, we did it anyway for years. One night when copying a love poem from some song book - I never was good enough to compose my own poems - I heard mother come up the stairs. I quickly hid book, paper, and pen under my pillow and was "deep asleep" when mother entered our room. God knows why she had come in, it was unusual for her, and even more unusual was that she pulled my book, paper, and all from under my pillow. She said nothing, but she took everything with her when she left. My heart stopped.

Next morning mother had red eyes. She still said nothing. The storm only broke on the weekend when father came home. Mother had a long, excited, and apparently tearful talk with him, and next morning a deeply preoccupied father ordered me to go for a walk with him.

My knees were giving way, my heart ran much too fast. I felt faint, betrayed, and exposed and trudged next to him with hanging head for an hour listening to his monologue.

At first he described mother's tears over having discovered that I had "a relationship with a girl". I was too young for that, it was dangerous to my health and bad for my nerves and my school work. He demanded that I promise him that I would have no further relationships with girls until I was past nineteen and had finished the gymnasium.

During the remainder of that long walk, down the steep stairs into the Weisstritztal and back through the lower town, he tried to explain and justify his position: I was the youngest member of an old, honorable, intelligent, and well-bred family that could be traced back to the fourteenth century, and I had obligations towards these my forefathers. I was not the result of an accident, but of careful selection, and I could not throw myself and this inheritance away at any arbitrary girl. The girl I would marry had to come from a family at least as special as mine, and I was still much too young to fully understand that.

I told him that it had not occurred to me to marry Elisabeth - after all I was barely thirteen. "Then," he said, "you should keep your hands off her in the first place." "Playing" with girls was gemein, base. He had absolutely no understanding for that: "Das sollte Deiner unwürdig sein!" Besides the chances of my picking up a venereal disease that would ruin my "kostbares Erbgut," my precious inheritance forever, was exceedingly large. Sex should be practiced in marriage only and even then only for the purpose of producing children... And by the way, he had to warn me against producing an ejaculation by rubbing as he had heard some people do. It would make me nervous and be bad for my health...

I was completely bewildered, but, and that shows my respect for father, I did not rebel against him.

Saddened, I see now, that this walk with father in Habelschwerdt marked the end of my childhood and the wonderful years of friendship, I had enjoyed with him. I find it hard now to believe that this preposterous conversation actually took place, and I may not accurately remember father's words, but he used similar words over and over again in the years to come. These were his views. More surprising is the complete overreaction of my practically and

sensually quite normal mother.

The only explanation I have to offer is that both were truly naive in these matters. Other, later incidences seem to confirm that: Mother, a few months after this walk, told me in her motherly embarrassed voice: "father would never understand it, but if you sleep with a girl, please use precautions, mein Junge. It is over in fifteen minutes, but you may catch something for life - "Du kannst Dir was holen firs ganze Leben." - The fear of syphilis had in their youth been quite real.

Another touching incident happened in 1977, when I spent two weeks with father and mother on the Seser Alm in Italy. We were waiting to be served in the dining room of a hotel, when a tall Italian youth of maybe 25 walked in and standing in the door in full view of everybody absentmindedly scratched his crotch for several minutes, a very common occurrence in Southern Europe. Said my dear mother: "Look at this swine. He is satisfying himself in public!" - I rarely laughed more heartily, and Mother despite her seventy-eight years blushed crimson.

Needless to say, I did not desist from girls during the next five years, I simply couldn't, but henceforth could never look at a girl without considering her nubility. My Confirmation took place on Palm Sunday, in March of 1945 in fear and uncertainty.

I was excused from kneeling during Communion because of my stiffly bandaged knee and stood in a shabby dark suit with lowered head through my personal agony of committing - God's Eye watching from the triangle over the altar - what I considered a clear perjury.

My world was fast collapsing. In the cold nights of this spring the rolling thunder of the war could be heard very close. father had hitchhiked the fifty kilometers from Heinrichau, where he was stationed directly behind the front, and mother served "Mohnkuchen," poppy seed cake with Ersatzsahne at a table festively decorated with yellow narcissus...

9. Total War 1944-1945

My School closes, Refugees, Wunderwaffen, The Volkssturm, Father sent to Heinrichau, Visiting him and the Kreisleiter, A Bomb on our Town

Once again the school I went to was closed. After the summer vacation in the fall of 1944 the Aufbauschule became a military hospital for the rapidly approaching eastern front. An emergency airfield was established on the Sigritz where Fieseler-Storch, short-take-off planes landed several times a day loaded with wounded soldiers. In June 1944 the Americans had landed in Normandy and during the summer had over-run France and most of Italy. The Ostfront had for practical purposes collapsed, and the Soviets were poised in Poland for the final drive into Germany. One German city after the other was leveled by American and British bombs. Ten-thousands of civilians died in these raids.

During the Fall the first refugees arrived. German speaking farmers in groups of a few hundreds at first later by the thousands, they trekked through the bitter cold on horse-drawn wagons, from the Wolga in Russia, from Rumania, Yugoslavia, and Hungary they fled "Heim ins Deutsche Reich". They parked their wagons on the Sportplatz. We brought food and clothing and blankets. Some of them found a temporary home in the villages, others continued on their

migration seeking asylum elsewhere. Many were killed later, being machine gunned from the air by American fighter bombers or were incinerated in the air raids on Dresden. And with them came the stories of rapes and killings by the approaching Soviet armies that exceeded in their horror all the propaganda distributed daily by the radio.

The war had finally reached our quiet corner of the world.

Despite all this the determination of the population to continue the fight was unbroken, if possible it became stronger as the enemy began entering Germany proper. There were pessimists and deserters, but as I remember it, the morale was higher than ever and most were convinced that Germany would be saved by a miracle. And the "Wunder" soon began to happen: Hitler survived the attempt on his life by a "Clique von Verrätern", traitors, officers of the army on July 24, 1944. We concluded, like our Führer, that this could only have been an "Akt der göttlichen Vorsehung", a sign of "Divine Providence". And then the first, long promised, "Vergeltungswaffe," V-weapon appeared. I still hear the clattering motorcycle-sound of the V-l engine coming from the radio. And there were still more fantastic rumors: Our engineers had invented a Messerschmidt fighter with a novel jet-engine that was faster than anything known that would defend us from the continuing air raids, and a V-weapon that could reach New York.

The other "Wunderwaffe" I was allowed to hold in my own hands: the Panzerfaust, the "Panzer-fist", a two-meter long tube of about that carried a bluntly shaped, conical "bomb" in it's one end. The thing was cheaply made from sheet metal, had a primitive aiming device, and a piece of metal underneath for a trigger. The instructions were equally simple, when a Russian tank comes, hide, when the tank has come to no more than 100 meters from you, put the tube under your arm, aim at the tank's chains, and pull the trigger. Then take cover. Aim well, you have only one shot... Well, when you pulled the trigger of this ingenious device a four-meter long rocket flame issued from the end of the tube, the blunted cone separated, and spewing a short but very intense flame on its front end it burnt a clean hole through the tank's armor. After entering the tank the charge in the rocket head blew up.

The only trick was to have iron nerves and to let the tank come to within 100 meters of yourself!

This was the major weapon of the Volkssturm, the People's Army. the "last answer of the German People to our enemies": "Wir werden unsere Heimat mit unserem Leben verteidigen. Ich rufe den 'totalen Krieg' aus! Alle Männer zwischen sechzehn und sechzig werden bis zum letzten Mann kämpfen. Lang lebe der Führer!" 1 Screamed Gobbels in the radio. And grumbling they all came - the few who refused were found hanging from the trees along the road. They practiced shooting the Panzerfaust in the field behind our house and were then ordered to dig trenches to defend the city from the expected Russian attack.

I was two years too young, but since I was tall and looked older, Mother made certain that I did not leave the house without a voluminous bandage around my "stiff" knee.

I was convinced that our cause would not be defeated. If we held out long enough against the Russians, the Americans and their Western allies would come to their senses, stop the fighting, and join us against the Soviet invasion, and Adolf Hitler would become the Herzog Heinrich 2 of the twentieth century, who would save Europe from the "Mongol Hordes" that were standing on our Eastern borders.

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1 We shall defend our home-land with our lives. I call for 'Total War'! All men between sixteen

and sixty will fight to the last man. Long life the Führer!
2 Henry I, the Bearded (Henryk Brodaty), the Polish-German Duke of Silesia from the House of the Piastes, who died in the battle of Liegnitz in 1241 "defending" Europe against the Mongols. His wife was Hedwig of Andechs in Bavaria, who later became sanctified and the patroness of Silesia.

The final collapse of these last dreams came fast. By February 1945 the Soviet armies had encircled Breslau. For three months the front came to a standstill a mere 60 kilometers north-east of Habelschwerdt. In cold nights we could hear the heavy guns rumble. Großmutter and Tante Irmgard with her two children had been evacuated from Breslau shortly after Christmas 1944. We did not know where to. The mail system had ceased to function. father's work group had been dissolved, and he had been given a Panzerfaust, a Mauser, and the order to join a Volkssturm unit that had been given orders to save or destroy the large sugar supplies kept in a factory in Heinrichau.

Soon after his transfer father came to visit us in an official Volkssturm staff car. Strangely in this time of dissolution, uncertainty, and fear, I remember him laughing, happily explaining the use of his Panzerfaust to me. He agreed with mother where she should flee to with us children in case of a Russian tank break-through, and I was installed as my mother's advisor and protector. From now on we always had a rucksack for each of us packed with the most important necessities and the clothes we would wear in an emergency neatly laid out next to our beds. Mother in consultation with me was to make the final decision of when to leave.

In late February we were required to rent the children's bedroom to a seventy-year-old couple from Breslau. Their name was von Gellhorn. At first their "nobleman's" name impressed me - they even had a coat of arms - but then we discovered that they stole! In broad daylight. Mrs. von Gellhorn would wear stockings and other clothing that belonged to my mother and that she had appropriated somehow. Occasionally the old lady was somewhat "deranged", but at other times she was very much together. Her husband was harmless. He was so confused that she had to tell him constantly what to do. - Later, after the end of the war, she claimed that she was Jewish.

For two months in the winter of 1944 mother sent me to the Gymnasium in Glatz. I went there by train every morning and had to have Nachhilfestunden again, this time in Latin, which the other children in the class had already had for one year. Latin was a disaster and remained a disaster until the end of my school years. But in February all regular train connections came to a halt and brought an end to school. Thus began a time of one-and-a-half-year, when I was "vogelfrei," as free as a bird.

I had found a new friend. His name was Hermann. He was the only son of a war-widow. His father had died in Poland. He had great practical skills in all kinds of technical things, which I only knew from my father's books, like electrical machines, radios, and car engines. But what attracted me even more was that he came from a lower middle-class family. Somehow the boys I befriended during those years came - much to my mother's dismay - from "low-class" families, partly because there were few families "as good as ours" in Habelschwerdt, but more importantly because I found their lower scruples and greater knowledge of "real life" fascinating. "Bullo", who earlier had enlightened me about the facts of reproduction was a good example.

Hermann earned some money by working part-time as a meteorologist. Three times a day he read the instruments of the weather station on the roof of the Aufbauschule, estimated the cloud height and cover, and telephoned his data to the central weather bureau. For this purpose he had a key to the deserted physics room in the school. It was a paradise that we roamed many an afternoon. There were a static electricity generator, electric motors, electron tubes, rheostats, and a huge mercury-filled barometer. At first we just took some of the equipment out of the cabinets and played with it, but when it became obvious that all authority was collapsing, we became more daring and began to take a vacuum tube or a voltmeter home, - to never return it. I quickly lost all scruples.

We felt fully justified in doing this, all these wonderful things were so obviously doomed, why should we not put them to better use? The possibility of being discovered, greatly added to the excitement. Soon I extended my explorations to a recently abandoned factory building filled with all kinds of dark, mechanical machinery smelling for oil and dirt. Among them was the carcass of an old steam engine. It became my great dream to build a steam engine for my model-cruiser, and for a month I worked with another friend, whose father had a car repair shop, trying to turn out a cylinder and piston for such an engine on a lathe.

The accident happened when Hermann and I tried to take the mercury barometer from its wall. It broke and several kilograms of quicksilver spilled on the floor. Hermann got a broom and a dustpan and desperately chased the fast running droplets tacross the floor. A day later he was very sick and had to stay in bed for several weeks, a victim of acute mercury poisoning.

It must have been mother's idea to send me to Heinrichau for a while to stay with father. My free time, my association with these new friends, and my barely hidden pillaging trips greatly worried her.

There was still an occasional train running between Habelschwerdt and Glatz from where I had to hitchhike on military convoys. It took me a whole day to cover the 50 kilometers.

The day was cold and void of all color. Low clouds were hanging over the countryside that was spotted with large patches of dirty snow criss-crossed by muddy vehicle tracks. Glatz had become a chaotic army camp, with tanks, trucks, and other equipment lying around everywhere. The roads out of town were barricaded with anti-tank defenses and guns, and military police was checking the papers of all travelers. I slipped through everywhere, a drifting war-orphan.

It was along the road behind Glatz that I saw my first dead man. He was hanging with a rope around his neck off a roadside tree, a sign declaring him a deserter, caught and executed by the military police. Notwithstanding there were several men hitchhiking on the same wagon with me, who made no secret of the fact that they were on the run from the army, trying to get home before the war came to an end, and the Russians would take them prisoners.

When I reached Heinrichau, I found father living in a palace. Founded by the same Herzog Heinrich who in 1225 had saved Europe from the Mongols, Heinrichau was the ancestral seat of the Piastes. In an "English" park with magnificent trees extending for miles nestled a Baroque chateau complete with an orangery, a rococo church, and a opera-theater. The village with the service buildings lay separated, two kilometers east. Here father lived in a

comfortable room in a squat half-timbered house that had been the "Kanzlei," the office of the large farm operation. The farm boasted besides the usual Schnapsbrennerei a modern beet-sugar factory.

Everything from the chateau to the factory was in excellent preservation, but with the exception of a few old farmhands it had been deserted by its inhabitants. The present Herzog had piled his family, servants, farm personnel, and precious possessions into a special train and fled to the safety of his cousin, the King of Saxony. The place was a most beautiful ghost-town.

In the afternoon father and I explored the estate: The hundreds of Renaissance chairs in the opera and the mirrors in the vast dining room were carefully covered by dust cloths; the orangery filled with neat rows upon rows of potted orange and palm trees... I had never seen anything like this before, but strangely I do not remember it as eery. The retreat of the owners had been most orderly.

Afterward we walked through the park. Compared to his last visit at home, when his most ardent wish of defending his country with his own hands had finally been granted, and he had been so exalted, father was now in a gloomy and depressed mood. He saw the end, the end of his country, the end of his hopes and dreams, the end of his Weltanschauung. It seemed obvious to him that the Western Allies would take an even more murderous revenge on Germany than in 1918. They would reduce the country to a third-rate agricultural state, destroy our universities, prevent any further education, and demontage all industry. The Russians would not even go to such troubles, after killing as many people as possible, they would simply deport the remaining men to Siberia.

In another long monolog father advised me to try to reach American occupied territory when the war came to an end, even at the price of becoming separated from mother, himself, and my siblings. There I should try to find a place on a farm, since the farmers would always have at least something to eat for themselves, and there I could hide my family background best. Maybe in this way I could survive.

I was deeply disturbed by father's pessimism, and glowingly opposed his view. If indeed the war was to end in the total occupation and destruction of Germany, then I was convinced that in another ten years a new Germany would rise from the ashes.

In leaving a few days later father had asked me to visit the residence of the Kreisleiter, the political commissar of the county of Habelschwerdt, and request that a convoy of farmers be sent to Heinrichau to evacuate the warehouses of the sugar factory.

So it happened that at this last hour before the Fall I appeared at the door of this powerful official in Habelschwerdt. Since a few months he lived barricaded in a feudal villa surrounded by a large park, a wall, and barbed wire. A tank was parked at the entry, and there were helmeted crack troops standing guard at the gate. At first I was told that the Kreisleiter was unavailable, then that he was too busy to see me. But I was not going to give up so easily. I insisted that my mission was exceedingly important, and that I had been sent by an authority directly from the front. I absolutely had to see the official personally. So after a lengthy telephone conversation with the inner office I, the eager thirteen-year old Pimpf, was escorted into the "castle" by two SS-men, guns in hand.

In contrast to the formidable front presented to the outside world, the inside was sheer chaos, fear, and confusion. Everywhere people were running seemingly aimlessly through the halls. We passed one smoke filled room where I glimpsed a group of military and party men

huddled over a table loaded with beer bottles.

Finally we reached the inner sanctum, a large room where the Kreisleiter in full party regalia sat, stomping a cigar, behind an enormous oak desk. The room was empty except for a light machine gun on a tripod that was manned by a young SS-man who kept the gun trained on me.

I stood at attention with raised arm until the man behind the desk waved his cigar at me to be at ease. I delivered my message. He began to caught with laughter, blowing cigar smoke: "So your father has sent you. What was your name?" He got up from behind his desk. "Ah, yes, Rolf Gross. I'll recommend you for your courage and persistence." He shook his head in disbelieve: "To have made your way in here with that story!" And he started again to cough cigar smoke. He escorted me to the door, shook my hand, then raised his arm with the words: "If we had had more guys like you, we would not be in the deep shit we are in now! Heil Hitler!"

I walked home in a daze.

Two weeks later, at night, Christine and I were reading in bed, a single airplane could be heard to fly circles over the town at very low level. Then there was a sudden bang of an explosion. We turned off the light, but the engines of the plane were already receding in the distance.

Next day we found that half of a three story house across the street from the villa of the Kreisleiler had disappeared. The remains looked like a doll house, the side of which had been pulled out: beds, pictures, wallpaper, and furniture standing unharmed in the sliced rooms. Rumors that the bomb had been dropped by a German airplane and had missed its real aim, the residence of the Kreisleiter, immediately began to circulate and did not die until other, more serious events overshadowed them.

10. Armageddon 1945

Hitler's Death, The Last Memorial Service

Eine Sondermeldung des Deutschen Rundfunks. The famous fanfares that had announced our victories in Poland, France, and Russia blared: "Heute Morgen fand unser Führer Adolf Hitler in den Kämpfen um die Reichshauptstadt Berlin den Heldenlod. Mit der Waffe in der Hand opferte er sein Leben im Kampf um die Errettung Europas vor den asiatisch-bolschewistischen Horden." - "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles..." followed, then there was silence.

A news-flash from the German Radio. This morning our Führer Adolf Hitler died a hero's death in the fights around the Reichs-Capital Berlin. With the weapon in his hand, he sacrificed his life in the fight for the salvation of Europe from the Asiatic-Bolshevic Hordes.

It was the thirtieth of April nineteen-hundred-forty-five.

The room began to turn and the floor seemed to give way under my feet. Benumbed I vaguely sensed that this was the end. Leaderless, fear, sadness, my world was collapsing. What would we do without our Führer! Where were we to go?

About noon a Pimpf from my old Schar rang our bell and asked, whether I would come to a special memorial service for the Führer at the Heldengedenkstätte on the Floriansberg in the afternoon. The Bannfuhrer would lay a wreath and deliver a eulogy. I was requested to wear uniform. Because of my knee I had been excused from all functions of the Pimpfe since October, but the knee was better now, the request sounded almost like begging, and maybe the Bannfuhrer would bring some clarity into my clouded mind. I told the boy that I would be there.

I put on my uniform - for the last time in my life - and walked the familiar way across town.

It was a clear afternoon, and the hill was beautiful. After the cuttingly cold winter the last days had been unseasonably warm and had brought forth grass and buttercups in the meadows, and the birches on the Floriansberg had their first green leaves. Here and there in the shade of the firs there were still patches of soft snow. I arrived around two at the memorial site and there found a small group of Pimpfe and Jungmädchen milling around, throwing snowballs at each other, and waiting for someone to tell them what to do. Finally a Fahnleinführer appeared with two flags and lined us up in the familiar formation, the boys on the right side of the monument the girls on the left, standing at attention, holding the swastika flag.

We waited for half an hour for the Bannfuhrer. There was no sight of him. An hour later, the troops were getting restless and the order was beginning to fall apart, a Pimpf arrived with the news that the Bannfuhrer had disappeared from town. He had heard that he together with other Party officials had fled by train to an undisclosed location.

There followed an almost instant pandemonium. I saw the Fähnleinführer slip away into the bushes with one of the Jungmädchen. We were leaderless again. Someone suggested that we all go home, someone else urged us to wait and to sing a Lied to properly celebrate the Fuhrer's passing. Three or four raised their arms and facing the memorial stone began to bawl: "Es zittern die morschen Knochen...", a few laughed and began throwing snowballs at them. Soon everybody was involved in a free-for-all snowball fight. The girls were shrieking.

Just then one of the girls who had started to go home came running up the hill again crying: "The Russians are coming! The Russians are coming up the hill!" Within seconds everybody was running. I hid in a stand of trees not far from the now deserted monument. The two flags lay abandoned in the mud by the memorial stone.

Three rugged Gestalten appeared, their brown Russian uniforms half-falling off their bodies, rags wound around their feet, with long unkempt hair and beards, emaciated faces with crazy eyes, more animals than men they trotted across the empty clearing and vanished.

I concluded that they were POW from the Lager near the railroad station. Where were they going? Running free in broad daylight?

Carefully I followed them. They had slowed down, were looking for something, came back, and then took another path east. Slipping from tree to tree I kept up with their erratic movements. I knew the area well, but had never been in the valley behind the hill into which they were now descending. A high wire-fence appeared. Apparently close to their goal they began to run again to an open gate in the fence. And then I saw what it was, a sweet cloud, a dump, a huge dump, - my breath stopped, a dump of legs and arms, of bloody bandages, and hospital trash, and among the smoldering debris the three Russians on their knees scrounging for scraps of food...

For a few minutes I stood spell-bound by the horrifying vision, then I ran until I was out of breath.

The sun was now quite low, the light had changed. One could see the town across the steep cut of the Neisse valley. It must have been close to the deserted Bergbad, when I noticed something moving in the a sunlit clearing between the trees. They were brightly lit, two people. After getting closer I recognized the Fähnleinführer and the Maid who had vanished earlier.

She was lying in the sunspot, her blue skirt pushed up, her white blouse open, revealing her full breasts, and he on top of her, on his elbows, his body slowly moving up and down. His bare behind the counterpoint to her breasts. Every now and then he would stop and wildly kiss her all over, and then resume his gentle rhythmic movement again.
Amazed, I found them beautiful.

And then she began to scream, one long, sensuous scream... I lay in my hiding, tears running down my face...

11. Our Flight from the Russians May 1945

By Train and Wagon into Czechoslovakia, Tiefflieger: An Air-raid, Surreal Visions, Königsgrätz, Returing Home, Father taken POW, Habelschwerdt again

It was pitch dark when I woke. The only light came from an arc of dim night sky behind two soldiers sitting in the opening made by the awning of the wagon. Why were we stalled? The pungent odor of the horses mixed with the musty smell of the pile of old clothes that I was lying on.

Nobody spoke.

Again and again the tense silence was broken by the violent eruptions of a locomotive trying to pull an overloaded train up a track on the other side of the valley. After several powerful exhalations of the old steam engine its wheels began to slip on the rails with a high screech and like an animal the engine died in a sequence of diminishing wheezes. A few minutes later it would try again only to fail once more.

One of the soldiers lit a cigarette and the light from the match cast a hugely magnified shadow of him on the rough tarpaulin covering the wagon. For a few seconds the load of old clothes, blankets, and domestic utensils that filled the car were sharply illuminated. I was alone and cold with fear.

A sharp report of an anti-tank gun echoed from the distance, then the rattle of a machine gun. The soldier swore under his breath imploring the rear defense to give us time. For a while they discussed our situation in hushed voices. We were still in the Bohemian Mountains near the border of Germany and Czechoslovakia. We had covered a mere thirty kilometers since noon. The roads were choked with endless columns of refugees, soldiers, wagons, and equipment crawling south across the mountain passes. A chaos made worse by fear.

How close were the Russian tanks? Why were we not moving? Why was everything like in a nightmare? How did we get here?

Two nights ago father had unexpectedly appeared at home. He had been ashen-faced and had aged by ten years since I had seen him in Heinrichau. His Volkssturm unit had been dissolved and told to flee from the Russians to behind the American lines by whatever means possible.

Mother packed through the night. From seven in the morning we had sat on our belongings at the railroad station waiting for a train. Only one train passed, and it did not stop. There had been no room on it. And all the time the Russians were moving closer, hour by hour.

Finally around eight at night another train came that did stop. We all piled in. Most of that night we had to stand, there was no place to sit. The train was agonizingly slow. By six in the morning we had only reached Waldenburg, a coal mining town 60 km west of Habelschwerdt, where mother had once lived. Here the ride ended. Russians tanks had reached the railroad further west. We were cut off. The last piece of unoccupied Germany. It was the 7th of May.

Completely paralyzed father had lost his will to live, and mother had to make all decisions. She pulled us together into town. There, around noon, she was able to flag down a convoy of soldiers going south. We were distributed over several of their wagons.

Thereafter ordinary reality became fragmented into intense visions of fear, peace, and happiness...

The day was very hot. Maybe because we were wearing so many layers of clothing one on top the other.

The sun burned on the seemingly endless column of desperate people winding along the road to the south. Old men and women on foot pulling handwagons or pushing wheelbarrows full of unnecessary possessions, crying children piled on top. Military vehicles in complete disarray. An occasional officer on horseback giving orders, which nobody listened to. Soldiers, runaway from their units in horse drawn wagons requisitioned from some peasant further east. The slowest dictated the progress. There was no way to pass or to get ahead, there were too many people.

We had now reached the plain on the southern side of the mountains. The meadows and fields besides the road were strewn with abandoned military equipment and broken down wagons. Yet in the distance spring was just arriving.

Suddenly they were upon us, two planes, barely hundred meters high. I do not know whether they were Soviet planes or American. They came from the south following the road spreading machine gun fire.

Someone screamed. I jumped off the wagon. My heart beat furiously. I trembled all over. I buried myself face down in the ditch. And then the second plane came down the middle of the road. Horses reared and ran in all directions dragging their wagons through the crowd. The wagon nearest me turned over. A horse flying through the air fell, dead, into the ditch.

And at the height of all this turmoil my heart suddenly became quiet, and I lost all fear and knew that death would be beautiful.

I was ilying in a lush, deep green meadow. Spring flowers were growing in bushels everywhere. I could hear the gurgle of a brook between willows, which were already flushed with the orange and silver sheen of the new blossoms. It was at the edge of a village. There were a few white farm houses in the distance by the roadside, where the wagons were parked. Their horses were grazing. The sun was lower, shining from a clear blue sky. It was no longer hot.

I was looking into the blue sky. All the fear and commotion of the road had fallen away. The receding whine of the heavy engines of the planes cast a nostalgic spell. An anti-aircraft gun had finally woken up and shot little, useless, white puffs into the air for the sole purpose, it seemed, of making the sky appear bluer. Across the meadow a beautiful woman walked towards me. I could not say, who she was or where she came from.

This vision is still with me and reappears again and again: In the meadow above the river Main, where I first loved a woman. As a meadow on Mount Athos in Greece, where during a lonely noon hour among butterflies and summer flowers I first understood the ambivalent omniscience of woman. And in the Easter Scene of Syberberg's version of Wagner's "Parcival", in which Parcival's alter-ego is transformed into a mysteriously beautiful woman, who appears sitting at the edge of a fountain in a meadow full of flowers.

Today I know that the beautiful woman in these visions is my death, - but also that the love of woman will transcend death.

The news that the German High Command had unconditionally surrendered spread like wild fire along the road.

The end of the war had come. It was the eighth of May 1945. Our nightmare, however, was just beginning.

We were still all together. It was a miracle. The wagon on which the twins had been riding on had turned over during the air raid, both horses were dead, the pole was in splinters, but nothing had happened to Gerhard or Christine. They were now riding with me.

We had reached the area near Konigsgrätz. A rumor that Soviet tanks had cut us off from the last road to the west began to spread, but we still had not seen a single Russian.

It was then that I decided to destroy all evidence of my and the twins identities. In a bag around our necks we carried our birth certificates and our official identification cards. Without the slightest doubt I tore them into tiny shreds, wich I threw out the rear of the wagon. Nobody would ever know our names again with certainty.

More and more wagons and people now passed us going in the opposite direction, back to where they had come from. Finally we heard that the Soviet army had set up a roadblock a few kilometers further, at which they made POWs of all men of military age. Civilian refugees were allowed to go wherever they wanted. Many of them decided to return "home".

The confusion that this message produced was overwhelming. The younger soldiers were mostly resigned to become POW, but the older men began undressing in numbers and bargaining with the civilians for clothes.

In the ditch by the side of the road lay a number of men in the uniforms of the Ukrainian Vlasov Army, who had been fighting on the German side for years. They had drunk themselves unconscious.

Mother decided that we should turn around immediately and not risk father being detained. Father argued against her. Not listening to him, within minutes she had persuaded two soldiers to let us take their wagon, loaded us all on it and joined the flow of the returning refugees. father became the reluctant driver.

Towards evening we reached Köningsgrätz where we were told that we had to have a "propusk," a permission from the Soviet commander in town to continue our trip. Together with hundreds of other refugees we were herded into an emergency camp. Our wagon had had two horses, one had been limping all day. When father and I had taken the harness of its back, it lay down and refused to get up again. By the time the sun set it was wheezing and jerking

and obviously dying. Suddenly it jumped up and dragged itself to a ditch alongside the camp where it collapsed on its knees. It was then that a man appeared, who shot the horse

Then came Czech Victory Night.

As soon as it became dark the shooting began, with and without tracer munition into the sky, at anything that moved, all around us. The sky looked like New Years Eve. Fires were burning, and groups of armed drunks were running all over the place. Nobody slept. Around midnight a group of Czechs descended on to the camp waving guns, demanding watches, jewelery, and women. One of these men climbed into our wagon and pulled Dieter out. Holding him up by the leg, pointing a pistol at his head, and demanding our valuables. This was when father offered his watch to appease him. Mother was too old. Towards morning a group of Austrian soldiers, who, because they insisted they were not German set up a defense unit with poles and knives to protect the camp.

The day began hotter than ever. There was nothing to eat. The few empty barracks were so filthy inside that everybody camped on the bare earth. There were no trees, no shade, no water, and no fence. After this night a few Russian soldiers appeared, guns in hands to watch over us and protect us from the aroused population. They were our first Soviet soldiers, very young, barely twenty, and compared to the Czech population around us friendly, well disciplined, and even smiling.

Mother had decided that if we wanted to survive, we had to get out of this place as fast as possible and return home to Habelschwerdt. Father knew the area well, it was not far, and the roads were good.

Alone mother spent the whole day in town trying to obtain the required document. She returned towards six in the evening triumphantly waving a piece of paper covered with Cyrillic letters and an enormous red stamp with hammer and sickle. She never told us what she had seen in town.

We would leave the camp before nightfall and trek through the night. But there were practical problems. father could not figure out how to harness the remaining horse to our wagon, and the wagon filled with all of us was going to be too heavy to be pulled by one horse. Eventually an older man helped us and joined us with another abandoned wagon. I rode with him. It was dark, when we finally cast off.

Fireworks and shooting was still going on everywhere in town, but the country roads were quiet. Maybe people were scared to be seen in the country, maybe we were just lucky, but nothing happened to us. Our propusk worked well, we had to present it several times that night at check points manned by Soviet soldiers. Avoiding all larger towns, exceedingly careful we made our way east.

Occasionally father and the man on my wagon would confer in hushed voices on how to continue. Our tired horses were barely able to pull the wagons any longer. Towards morning we reached the mountains that we knew marked the border and our hopes rose. Behind Nachod, miles from the border the road was blocked by a long line of stalled wagons and waiting people. We were told that there was a roadblock near Kudowa at the border, where the Russians checked everybody's papers. It took two hours before it was our turn. Two Russian soldiers searched our wagon. I had to unwind the bandage I wore around my knee. The soldiers laughed, saying that they could not see any problem with my knee. How old was I? I told them, thirteen. They looked at each other, then at me, and waved me on.

My travel companion did not get off quite as easily. The soldiers would not believe his

age, which he gave as sixty. Protesting loudly, he reached into his mouth, took out his dentures, and held them up to the soldiers. They laughed, told him to go on, and we crossed the border.

Then Mother came running in tears. They had taken father away.

I ran with her looking for him, but he had disappeared in a group of men that were being marched down the road by Soviet soldiers with their guns at the ready. The last we saw of them was when one of the men suddenly tried to run for a garden full of cherry trees in full bloom. Two soldiers raised their guns and fired. The man slumped to the ground. Like snow a cloud of white cherry petals, shaken from the trees by the shots, fell and covered the blood splattered body.

I cannot remember how we made our way home. We reached Habelschwerdt in the early evening. The Gelhorns welcomed us with feigned sincerety. They had moved into my parent's bedroom. But I do remember how wonderful my bed felt and the peace of our house that night.

12. Habelschwerdt under Russian Occupation 1945

A Russian Commandant and a German Volksrat, Weeding the Sidewalk, A Message from Father, A Troop of Mongolians and other Soviet Visitors, Father in the Glatz POW Camp, Mother walks to Glatz, Father with Typoid in a German Hospital, My Visit there

Although the war had left no destruction to the town, Habelschwerdt was in chaos. The trenches the Volkssturm had dug in the fields behind our house were filled with the trash of war, Panzerfausts, guns and automatics, munition, uniforms and Slahlhelme, electronics and medical equipment. Cars, trucks, and an entire tank stood abandoned in the streets.

All of the upper Party administration had either fled, vanished, or committed suicide. The city fathers were hiding in fear. Many of the professional people, the apothecary, the doctors, lawyers, teachers had left for the "West" and were never seen again, but most of the population and all of our neighbors were still there.

A Soviet military commander now resided in the villa of the Kreisleiter, but the Russians had put the daily affairs of the city into the hands of a "Volksrat" of old Habelschwerdter communists. God knows, where they had found them. The Soviet military had declared a curfew at night. Not to stand behind the Volksrat issued the surrealist order that all sidewalks had to be cleaned of weeds within a week, and all windows had to be freed of their air defense blinds: "Zuwiderhandlungen gegen diese Bestimmungen werden mit Gefängnis beslraft," non-compliance with these orders will be punished with prison.

The Gellhorns, considering themselves already experienced citizens of the New Regime - we had disappeared, hadn't we - were exceedingly anxious to abide by the order. The removal of the black paper covering most of our windows was a simple matter. It opened up new views of the mountains, which I could not remember ever having seen. Our sidewalk was another matter. It had never been surfaced and was full of weeds. Nobody ever used it, except as a source of feed for the rabbits that were raised in the neighborhood. So the first morning

after our return we found ourselves in the street pulling out weeds. And we spent the rest of the week there. It still was very hot, and the work was hard and tiring.

On the third day we were out working very early when a refugee wagon stopped. The woman called me over and inquired for the house of Dr. Gross. When I told her that he was my father, she handed me a slip of paper with a note in father's hand and a house key, saying that father had asked her to deliver this to his wife.

My heart stopped. I ran inside to find mother. By the time that I had found her, the people and their wagon were gone.

Mother, trying to hold back her tears read the note: father was being taken to a POW camp in the former German army barracks in Glatz. He was alright, but because of the heat and the long foot marches his heart caused him trouble.

That night mother had the crazy idea for the first time to walk to Glatz and smuggle him out of the camp. But how was she to get into the camp and then find him among the thousands of men? I convinced her that such a desperate plan was sheer madness, and would only end in both of them being shot dead.

There was not much time for grievance. At the end of that week a whole troop of Soviet soldiers marched singing down our street. We locked all doors and windows and hid in the house. Fascinated we stood behind the curtains watching them. They were all slit-eyed Mongols. They marched in closed formation and the songs they sang were at the same time sad and strangely exciting. What was going to happen to us now? They disappeared out of sight, further down the street. Curious we children slipped out of the house. Mother forbade us to leave the garden.

We found that the soldiers had stopped at the end of the street and that two officers went from house to house. A child came running up the street with the news that the officers were requisitioning accommodations for their men.

Mother gave me a key, locked the door, and told us to say that our mother was not home. It took a long time before the two officers reached our end of the street, and when they finally entered our garden they turned out to speak passable German, to be quite charming and none of the monsters that we had expected. They were now looking for a place for themselves. I told them that mother was not home, and lied that we did not have a key. They asked whether I had a sister, and smiled when I reluctantly pointed out Christine to them. They shrugged their shoulders and said that they would come back later, when mother had returned.

So it came that two Russian officers slept in father's room downstairs that night. Mother invited them for dinner, and they appeared with two bottles of vodka for a present. Everybody including the Mongolian soldiers were most civilized and disciplined. They left early next morning.

During the next weeks we had repeatedly Russian soldiers as unannounced guests. One I remember especially. He had first rung the bell at the Laubes' across the street. The Laubes panicked and refused to open the door. The poor mushnik who was all by himself, his horse and wagon was standing at our side of the street, lost his patience and emptied his automatic through the glass panes of the Laubes' front door. - Later we counted ten bullet holes in the ceiling of their veranda. The front door was in splinters. After this introduction he wandered across the street towards our house. Mother had learned something from the visit of the officers, she opened the door, let him in, and tried to put the excited man at ease. He asked

for vodka. Mother said, "Vodka nyet, voda da", and offered him a glass of water from the kitchen faucet. He drank it and then drove his horse and wagon into our garden, dragged a huge sack with his belongings into the house, and simply lay down on the bed in the veranda. As with the officers before him mother invited him to our dinner table. He refused steadfastly for a while, but finally after much gesticulating on mother's part - he did not speak any German - he gave in. Before coming to the table he spent a long while in his room rummaging through his sack. When he finally reappeared - we had already become apprehensive again - he smiled broadly and presented mother with a pound of butter, something that we had not seen for months. After that successful experience, we became careless. The next visitors were three uniformed half-drunks with a truck, who walked in, ran through the whole house, and walked out with our Blaupunkt radio, which they piled on top of other loot in their truck. They did not even say thank you.

It must have been in the first week of June when rotund Frau Schlachthofdirektor Schigulla appeared out of breath at our door. Mother was quite taken aback, she had never talked to "this woman" or been introduced to her. Yet here she was with an urgent telephone message: A former neighbor of us in Glatz had called to say that father had been put into the infirmary of the POW camp. He was well enough, but his heart troubles had become worse. The friend was a nurse who worked at the infirmary and saw him frequently. If there was any message for father, mother should call her. There was no holding mother back now. Very early next morning she left for Glatz. There were no trains, so she walked. Under normal circumstances it was a good days walk, 20 kilometers, but the country was full of Soviet soldiers, and the war was barely over. It took a lot of courage for a single woman to venture out alone. Because she felt that the villages there would offer her better protection, she chose the way through the Neisse valley and not the main road across Lime Kiln Pass. She left dressed as an old farmer's woman.

"Ach Unsinn," she told me with a decisive shake of her head when she left, "was sollen die Soldaten schon mit mir alter Frau anfangen. Und wenn schon, es wird mich nicht umbringen." Ach nonsense, what could the soldiers do with an old woman like me. And if so, so what, it will not kill me. She was accosted, it seems, but shook off her pursuers every time. She reached Glatz and the house of our former neighbors just before nightfall and the beginning of the local curfew.

We had discussed a number of possible ways for her to get into the camp, but none of these proposals had seemed possible to me. She found another much better one. On the way to the barracks she passed by the nursery of another old acquaintance, who sold her a huge basket of strawberries. Now she looked like peasant woman trying to sell her berries.

The nurse had carefully described to mother the location of the infirmary at the northern most corner of the barbed wire fence surrounding the complex of barracks. Mother knew the place well. She walked up the hill and along the fence without anybody paying attention to her and surprised father standing very close to the fence outside the infirmary.

He went pale and could only stutter, "What are you doing here. Love? Please leave as fast as you can. Nobody can predict what would happen, if they saw you. Please, Käthe, for God's sake, please, go away." He moved away from the fence and into the bungalow.

Mother walked away heart broken and in tears, overcome by weeks of tension, exhaustion, fears, and love for this man.

Walking back down the hill, past the main gate of the camp she decided that now that

she had made this long pilgrimage, she was not going to give up so easily. There was only one soldier guarding the gate. She had an idea. She waited for a while, and when there was nobody around, with her best motherly smile she went up to the guard and offered him some of her strawberries. At this moment a jeep came up the hill full of officers. The guard indicated to her to disappear quickly, and she hid by squatting behind a low wall beside the road. The jeep roared through the gate. When the air was clear again , the guard called out to her: "Frau! Komm Frau!" She clambered out of hiding and fed him some more strawberries and in the end a pack of cigarettes that she had had in her pocket.

And the good natured man let her pass! She went straight into the infirmary. Later father said that mother's sudden appearance in his room, where he had been sitting on his bed with a heavy heart, had almost killed him. But his comrades cheered and went outside to watch for anybody coming and mother finally was able to hug her man and kiss him.
Half an hour later mother walked out through the main gate throwing the smiling guard a kiss in passing.

She started walking back to Habelschwerdt on the same afternoon, stayed overnight in Grafenort at the house of a farmer befriended to father, and unmolested reached home at noon on the fourth day.

Father's health was fair. The German doctor of the infirmary had greatly overblown his heart trouble in the hope that some opportunity would develop to legally get him out of the camp. But time was running short. Rumors were beginning to circulate that the Soviets were planning to ship all POW to Siberia. Father had told mother that because of the Genf Proclamation, in his opinion, they could not do that, after all, the war was over. But who could vouch for the Russians?

By the end of June the Soviets began moving trainloads of POW out of Germany into the Siberian and arctic Lager. None of their western allies protested, and who would have stopped them in the political climate of that day? Very few of these men survived the camps.

It appeared like a miracle when Frau Schigulla brought us the message of another telephone call from Glatz: father had been taken from the camp to a hospital in Glatz that was still run by German doctors. But what the message did not say and mother only found out on the following morning was, that he had been diagnosed as a serious case of typhoid fever...

Mother went to Glatz immediately. There were now a few trains every day, but they were so overcrowded that she had to hang on to the outside platform of the old railroad car.

Father was very ill. He hardly recognized mother. He owed his life to one of the German nurses in the camp's infirmary who instead of letting him die there, had smuggled him past the guard with a Propusk that had been issued to a man who had been bitten by a horse. The seal of the Soviet Army Commander on the paper had been sufficient to free him ...

The few tired and overworked doctors in the hospital told mother that it would be difficult to care for father under the conditions in the hospital: too many sick, no food, no medicine, all instruments plundered by the Russians, and now the heat, the dirt, and the rats. But they promised to try their best to save him, and she was only too willing to believe them.

The great heat continued for two months and the country became submerged in a peculiar smog with the sweet stench of burnt flesh. Every evening the sun went down in spectacular sunsets.

It was on such a day in mid June that I went to see father. I carried a bag with food for father and another one with his microscope that he wanted to give to the hospital to help pay

for their care. The train to Glatz was so crowded that it required all my strength and cunning to weasel my way into one of a compartment. People were sitting on the buffers between the cars, hanging of the "Perrons", the platforms and stairs, and some had climbed onto the roofs of the wagons.

I never liked sick people, but I found father in an even more pitiful state than I had imagined from mother's description. He had lost so much weight that he had become a mere skeleton. Nearly all his hair was gone. He was on an intravenous drip, to keep him from dehydration, but there was nothing to eat at the hospital. Because of the heat all windows were open, and the sick were covered with hundreds of flies. There were no drugs and no nurses, the sheets and the sanitary facilities had not been cleaned for days. The stench and dirt was indescribable.

He was too weak to speak much, but he was conscious and did recognize me. With the help of a male nurse I changed his sheet and then sat for two hours at his bedside and chased the flies from his face.

The sun was already setting blood-red into the stinking gloom, when I waited for the train home at the desolate railroad yard. It was then that from an open window of a switch tower floated the immensely sad voice of a man singing very slowly:

Ich hatt' einen Kameraden, einen besser'n find's du nicht.
Er ging an meiner Seite im gleichen Schritt und Trill.
Eine Kugel kam geflogen, gilt sie mir oder gilt sie dir?
Sie hat ihn weggerissen. er liegt zu meine Füssen,
als wär's ein Stück von mir, als wär's ein Stück von mir.

I had a comrade, a better one you couldn’t find. He walked on my side in the same step. A bullet came flying, was it for me or for you? It tore him away, he lies at my feet, as if it were a piece of me, as if it were a piece of me. (German soldier's song from the 1870s)

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13. New Perspectives 1945

The old Tageblatt rises from the Ashes, Photos of Concentration Camps, My last Deutscher Gruss, I learn to"Organise", Hamstern with Mother in Spätenwalde

Our little town had a new newspaper. Actually it was the old newspaper, the "Tageblatt fur Kreis und Stadt Habelschwerdt," the Daily for Town and County had risen like the phoenix from the ashes. It looked the same as before, only the byline had changed, instead of "The Official Organ of the NSDAP" it now read "Published by the Soviet Military High Command for Germany". It was produced by our new Volksrat, and because there was not enough paper to print a large edition, single sheets were pinned up in glassed in boxes in a number of conspicuous places in town for the citizen to read. The box at the printing office even boasted photographs.

It was there that one day I saw my first pictures of concentration camps. I simply did not believe them. With only a little doubt lingering in my mind, I was certain that these were pictures of a Russian Lager in Poland which the Soviets we're now trying to blame on the Germans.

After all, everybody knew and had seen the photographs of the rows and rows of dead Polish officers lying in a pit that our army had dug up in Katyn in Belorussia in 1941. They had clearly been shot by the Russians, a fact that had been verified by an international commission of Swedes and Swiss that had inspected the mass graves. Maybe there had been German camps too, "Konzentrationslager" as the paper called them, where to Jews had been taken and Gypsies - and indeed some of the emaciated people on the photos looked Jewish - but it could not be true. No German would be capable of killing women and children using poison gas and burning them in furnaces, and tossing them into heaps like the ones on the pictures. And the numbers the paper quoted were fully inconceivable. It was not true. The photos had to be lies. It could not have happened.

How easy it was to make up horror stories! About the same time appeared the story that Adolf Hitler had killed himself together with his "wife" by taking gas in the bunker of the Reichskanzlei rather than having died "with the weapon in his hands" as we had been told. A photo showed a charred clump of a vaguely human shape, which the Russians claimed to have found in Berlin and identified as Hitler. It was hard to believe. Nobody had ever heard of Hitler's wife.

Somewhat later the Tageblatt showed pictures of our former leaders. They had been imprisoned and were being tried by the Allies in Nünberg. The articles describing the trial were so vindictive, the pictures full of hate, that they produced a new wave of indignation in me. What kind of justice was this that granted the victors the right to stage a public "trial" of the defeated? After what had happened in Dresden and Hamburg? Where from did they - and especially the Russians - gather the moral courage to hang the leaders and officers of the defeated country like common street robbers? Why did they not simply shoot them without trial? Everybody would have understood that. It would have been the victor's right.

Yet these photos pursued me, and it became increasingly difficult to defend myself against their power. I tried desperately to hold on to my beliefs: I must not let the propaganda of the enemy destroy all I knew was true. It would be traitorous and disloyal to my country, to my ideals, to my heroes.

Hitler had done great things for Germany: he had saved us from the depression, had built Autobahnen. Volkswagen. a new army, a splendid air force, had returned the Rhineland, given Germany a social security the like no other country had, and restored our national pride after the humiliation of Versailles. Yes, there had been many corrupt officials in the Party, and it was possible that some of them had been ordinary criminals. Yes, Jews had disappeared. But it was not true that we had started the war, that we had attacked our neighbors without provocation. I had seen the maltreated refugees from the Sudetenland and Poland in 1938 with my own eyes. I knew what had happened to Germans living in Russia, Hungary, and Rumania.

I clearly remember the gloomy afternoon in August on which the rumor spread like wildfire that the same Americans that sat in judgment in Nürnberg had dropped an atomic bomb on Japan. I knew enough physics to understand the meaning of this event, to guess at the extent of the destruction, the thousands of burnt and dead people. And the photographs

the Tageblatt showed were, if possible, even more gruesome than those of the concentration camps.

At the height of my confusion I had a traumatic experience. On one of my walks through town, on the narrow street behind the Catholic church I unexpectedly met my former music teacher, and without a thought I had raised my right arm and said "Heil Hitler!" - as I had done so many times in the past. Except now it was dangerous. I was just a young boy, but he might have been taken away and been beaten or worse, as they had beaten Herrn Müller to death, the owner of the grocery store. The teacher looked the other way and quickly hastened off into a side street, and I pulled my hand down as if burned.

But it was not fear that continued to pursue me after this incident - luckily nobody had seen us - it was the perplexing discovery that Hitler's name had become a disturbing embarrassment to me. I had lost my faith...

Most other nightmares that have their origins in that year have ceased to haunt me, but to this day I still occasionally dream of greeting someone with "Heil Hitler!" And every time this nightmare occurs I have to go through all the painful emotions of that entire year again.

For months I fought the slow disintegration of my ideals, the decomposition of my heroes, and the loss of the part of my German identity that they stood for. Concepts like national pride and honor, patriotism, community, and fatherland, the singing of national anthems and folk songs, the display of flags and uniforms, the national pronouns We, Us, and Our not only lost all their meaning for me, but to this day drive the blood of indignation and anger to my head regardless of the nation that claims them. An immense sadness took hold of me. At first vaguely, later ever more clearly I understood that I would never again be able to hold any ideals, to follow any immortal or mortal heroes, or to know the distinction between good and evil.

On the other hand, I was barely 14 years old. I had not yet become dependent on the "crutches" that the strong authoritarian structure had provided to my father's generation, which did not need to make "own" decisions, as long as they were willing to submit to and believe in "State", God, and the Church.

Quite suddenly I found myself free of all authoritarian restrictions, I could do what was within my own abilities and judgment, and I made reckless use of that freedom.

Hermann once again became my close friend. He had recovered from his mercury poisoning, and in the basement of his house was building a boat that was going to be powered by a small gasoline engine that he had "found" somewhere. We felt like Robin Hood: We stole, or as this was then referred to "organized", anything confiscated by the Russian occupiers.

Anything the Russians controlled was fair game, the abandoned Fieseler-Storch airplanes, three of which were lying on the emergency airstrip at the Siegritz, made the beginning. With hammer and chisel I took out the magnetos and some of the instruments in the cockpit. Christine had to act as look-out against any surprise intruders. Then followed a dump of German military electronics on the grounds of an abandoned factory. This was much more dangerous, because the equipment was guarded by armed Russian soldiers. I was making off with a portable transmitter, when I stumbled over a pile of radio tubes. The noise of the splintering glass woke the dozing Russians, who came running with their guns at the ready. It was only due to my "superior knowledge of the terrain" that I got away this time. The transmitter had to be abandoned in flight. I was sufficiently shaken by the experience to tell mother of it when I came home. Poor mother, she must have had a bad fright and forbade any

further exploits of this kind.

But there was enough abandoned equipment lying around in less dangerous places, in the trenches that had been dug by the Volkssturm behind our house, and on various dumps around the city. By the end of July I had collected a small electronics laboratory and began experimenting following father's old university lab-books. It was a very exciting time.

Strangely enough despite our short food supply during the year in Habelschwerdt I never "organized" food for the family household as I did with impudence later in Oldenburg. The threshold for stealing from Germans had yet to be overcome. However, I was often as hungry then as I would be in 1946. Perhaps this will excuse that with racing heart I regularly stole cottage cheese or slivers of butter from mother's storage in the basement. She must have known of these raids, but never said a word. Perhaps she had pity on her growing boy.

By the middle of June our provisions of food had been eaten up. For over six weeks we had not seen any sugar, milk, cheese, or butter, and meat only once when Frau Schigulla had sent a message from the Schlachthof that a horse had been brought in for slaughtering. Her husband had inspected the meat, it was perfectly good, and would we want a couple of pounds? So we ate horse meat on two successive Sundays. Finally mother came to the dreaded conclusion that in order to survive, we had to go "hamstern", to trade some of our remaining possessions against food in the villages. Together we decided that we would try the farmers in Spätenwalde, father's favorite village across the mountains, who had always been good to us.

We went together, each with a rucksack filled with a variety of things that were no longer absolutely necessary, father's camera, a pair of binoculars, father's only dark suit, his best Sunday hat, some silver spoons. The path went through mountain forest for more than two hours. Mother had been very apprehensive, the woods had for weeks been unsafe because of Russian military camping there or searching for German soldiers, but we met nobody.

The houses of the village with their steep shingle roofs climbing the sides of a dead-end valley with a brook running below. The fields had been claimed from the forests centuries ago and were very steep. They had to be plowed with oxen, horses were too nervous to work on such hillsides.

Because it was too poor for farming, much land was used as meadows, which were carefully irrigated by the many small brooks running down the slopes. These irrigation systems had always been my special delight, since the farmers had put up all kinds of waterwheels and toys along the runnels for their own children - of which there were many.

To support their large families many of the farmers had to seek additional work, mostly lumbering in the state forest during winter. For a while everybody had been engaged in making cheese boxes from wood-shavings for a dairy in Habelschwerdt. Only the two farmers on top of the saddle at the end of the valley were better off. They owned a small herd of dairy cows, pigs, and sheep.

We reached the village high above the house of a widow who only owned a a goat, a few geese, and some chicken. At another time I had chased her geese on the meadow above the house, and one of the geese had taken fright and flown highly excited from the meadow over the roof of the house. When it arrived in the front yard it had a heart attack and was dead. Father had been very concerned and offered to pay for the goose, but the widow had not wanted to hear of that. The bird had been slaughtered at once and canned for the winter.

It was just before noon. The houses were all still there as if nothing had happened.

When she recognized us the good widow broke into a broad smile. We had to come in and eat lunch with her. "Und wie geht's Ihrem Herrn Gemahl? Und den Kindern? Man hört solche entsetzlichen Geschichten dieser Tage." How is your Spouse"? and how are the children? One hears such horrible stories these days. Very reluctantly mother broached the subject of trading for some food. Well, she said, she did not have much herself, but she had prepared some Ziegenquark, coarse goat cheese that she was going to feed to the chicken, would we want some of it? And she could probably find a few eggs, if she searched the chicken's nests. But she would absolutely not take any of our valuables. "What should I lonely woman do with these things?"

Well-fed and much encouraged we walked up to the "rich" farmers on the saddle. The last time I had been there had been for an all night "Schweineschlachtfest," a feast of slaughtering a pig in December a year earlier. The steaming, dripping blood-sausages, the fat "Wellfleisch," the white meat that would not keep in cans, and the hard drinking in the overheated "Gute Stube," their best room had impressed but also disgusted me. This was how I pictured "Schlaraffenland," the fabled Land of Plenty.

The farmer turned out to be less friendly than the poor widow, but "we don't abandon our old friends when in need" he told mother. He would not accept any of our offerings either and filled our rucksacks with a pound of butter, two cans of pork, and five more eggs. Asking us to "remember him to Herrn Doktor Gross" he sent us on our way home. This was my first "Hamster-lour". We had done very well, I thought, but mother continued to feel humiliated. The farmers had refused to take the only kind of payment we could offer and had reduced us to accepting their generosity.

Later, when the Poles came upon us like locust, she easily found people willing to pay hard cash for father's old clothes.

The last action of the German Volksrat before it was dissolved and replaced by a Polish mayor was to issue an ordinance requiring every male person over fourteen to be able to show evidence of a place of work or risk arrest. It was, of course, a regulation that was as difficult to enforce as the side-walk weeding order had been, but it would later serve the Polish militia as a pretext for many a cruel beating.

Mother, who foresaw that none of the schools were going to reopen in the near future, seized upon this order to get me off the streets and into a job. In July, not quite 14, I became the bread-winner of my family.

14. At Fourteen the Bread Winner of my Family 1945

Apprentice at a Car Repair Shop, Radio Electrician, Shoeing Horses at a Blacksmith's, The Russians are going Home

Actually it was a glorious time my apprenticeship as an automobile mechanic, and full of memorable stories. The shop was rather large and had been owned by the father of the classmate with whom I had tried to make a steam engine in the spring. The shop had since

been taken over by the Russians. They had simply put an army captain in charge of the office and had left the daily operation to the German work force. Vladimir, the Russian captain was a short, red-haired, tough but gregarious fellow in his early thirties. He was rarely completely sober and spent most of his time lusting after the two girls in the office. When for the first time I, the prospective apprentice, was taken before him by the shop's foreman, he signed my employment papers with the words: "Lass's gut sein. Geht schon alles in Ordnung," Let it be. Everything will be taken care of, without looking up or taking his left hand off Anke, the older of the two secretaries. Anke was blond with the a fashionable "hick-up" hairdo and looked worn out. The brunette Gitta, the other girl had been more successfull in keeping the "boss" in his place and in exchange had to do all the paper work.

In good German tradition my apprenticeship began with an assignment to the cleaning crew, a motley half-dozen of unskilled good-for-nothings between twenty and sixty years old. We had to do the odd jobs.

We were to fill and start the "Holzvergaser" every morning. It was mounted on an Opel truck. Like many other trucks it had been refitted in the early forties with a six-feet high reactor drum in which hardwood cuttings were burned to "wood gas", mainly carbon monoxide and methane. The gas then powered the engine in place of scarce gasoline. Once the reactor was burning the engine worked well enough, but on cold mornings starting the Holzvergaser took an hour.

Another relic worth of a museum was a tractor with a "Glühkopfmotor." This "glow head" engine had an enormous single, horizontal, two-cycle cylinder with an un-cooled bulbous extension into which the fuel was mechanically injected. In the beginning the glow head had to be heated with a roaring gasoline heater. When the head was glowing dark red, two men cranked the engine, while a third man had his hand on the fuel valve. He had to open the valve just before top dead center or the engine would run backwards. The infernal noise it made was the gratifying culmination of every morning, and the daily ritual was always attended by the entire cleaning crew. Folklore had it that the engine was indestructible and could run on anything from crude oil to vodka.

The highlights of my first few weeks were the trips with the Holzvergaser to the "cow farm" and to an abandoned factory. At the factory we officially "organized" tools, bits, nuts, and bolts to restock our supplies. Supervision on these trips was lax, and I was regularly able to vanish into the background and pursue my own interests. From one of these trips I brought back a technical handbook, which became one of my most precious possessions. From this book I learned nearly everything I know about drafting and mechanical engineering.

The expeditions to the "cow farm" had a different flavor. The Russians had requisitioned a large number of cows from the farms in the area. These cows were kept in a former German Lorain radio station on the Siegritz right next to the three airplane wrecks. During the day the cows were taken to pasture in the surrounding fields by two soldiers with automatics tucked under their arm. Every week the cowherds shot one of the cows, and we would be called to come with the truck and take the carcass to town to be cut up.

At first I could not understand why the excursions to the cow farm enjoyed such a popularity among the men of the cleaning crew, until on one of the trips, snooping around, I stumbled into a room where, I surprised a colleague with his pants down in full action on a girl in bed. Later it became obvious that he was not the only one who had been to the girls' quarters. The practical Russians had figured that the cows needed to be milked, and so had

collected a flock of girls at the farm: The place was a regular "Puff." I was never able to fully investigate all the details of this interesting arrangement, in which the Russian victors quite democratically and without apparent jealousy shared the girls with their German workers. Because, despite the really dirty jokes that they taught me daily, the men considered me "too young for the cow farm", and after I had discovered its hidden secret, I was never allowed to go there again.

However, the milk that flowed from the farm and the meat were our saving. Every day I took a liter of milk home to my starving family and a couple of pounds of meat on Fridays! This was my real pay, the few Marks or later, after the Poles arrived, Zloty were barely enough for mother to buy sugar, cooking oil, and a few other necessities. I was also fed every noon at a "Kantine" the Russians had set up in the former Hotel Grüner Baum. A few wooden tables had been put into its courtyard where everyday we ate "Krautsuppe mit Rindfleisch," cabbage soup with the leftover meat from the cows or borshch as the Russians liked to call it.

Life in the cleaning crew was often boring, there simply was not enough work. For hours we would lie in a huge pile of cleaning rags that filled an entire room and listen to someone telling stories, mostly dirty ones, of course. It was there that I read my first "dirty book". I don't remember where the worn paperback had come from but it was a romantic, soft-porn love story about a young Herr von 0. who was alternating lying in bed with his sulking wife and a beautiful, young governess of bourgeois background. The hot details were vague, but hiding in the cleaning rags or in the backseat of a wheel-less Mercedes wreck I devoured every word with glowing cheeks. After a month or two my apprenticeship advanced. First I was introduced to the secrets of overhauling a truck engine - for a week I had to grind valve seats with a hand crank - then I worked with the shop's specialist in dirty jokes, and a bachelor in addition, on repairing motorcycles, and finally I had to help the tin man - a hunchbacked gnome from Czechoslovakia, who re-cored radiators.

During the time I worked with the motorcycle specialist I was one day entrusted with the job of repairing the flat tire of the motorcycle of a Russian major, who, I had been told, lived in the Hotel Grüner Baum.

After some searching I found his room on the second floor. I had to knock several times before a man with enormous hands opened. He was plainly drunk and could barely stand. Looking for support on the bannister of the stairs he had left the door wide open. In the room behind him, in dense smoke back-lit by the gray light coming from a mullioned window, I made out a long table buried under a chaotic load of food and bottles. Overwhelmed by this mountain of food I haltingly explained my orders. Suddenly I became aware of the stare of a woman, who in a short skirted uniform was sitting, her legs brutally spread, at an odd angle on a chair facing me. A cold shudder ran through me when I met her eyes. Never had I seen a face so merciless or so cruel. I had the distinct feeling that she was capable of killing me with her bare hands. Who was this woman? At this moment she kicked the door shut with her foot...

Thirty five years later I met that woman again in Tbilisi at a public festival. Her severely knotted hair had grown gray. Comfortably retired to the southern lands of the Georgians she had grown fat. She wore her old brown uniform to show off on patriotic occasions like this one,- the same short skirt. Her immense bosom was covered with rows of medals, from the Stalin Order to the Order of the Twentieth Anniversary of the German Democratic Republic. I ran with my telelens to take a photograph of her. When she recognized me she charged like a

primeval animal. Running at me gesticulating she kept shouting in Russian: "Where do you come from? I shall kill you, you Bulgar!" I retreated backwards, still trying to focus my camera on her face, wasted by vice and passions. When I met her crazed eyes, one lid ticking nervously and uncontrollably, I suddenly knew who she was.
My friend Merab who rescued me from her fury thought she had been a nurse during the war. When I told him that I knew better, that this woman had killed men, he laughed - uneasily...

The major finding himself abruptly shut out, sobered up, stumbled downstairs with me, and left me there with the flat tire of his motorcycle.

An hour later my job was done, but I was afraid to go upstairs and face that woman again. Finally one of the hotel boys brought the major to the basement. He inspected my work and then dragged me by the arm into aother room where he got a large water glass and filled it with vodka to the brim.

"Trink!" he said pushing the glass across the table towards me. I measured the amount of alcohol, then the distance to the door. I knew that I would fall down unconscious, if I drank only half of that glass, but between me and the door stood the half-drunk officer. There was no way for me to run.

I shook my head.
Annoyance in his voice, his eyes growing cold, he bellowed "Trink! Schnell!" The glass still stood on the table between us. No matter what the consequences I could not drink the stuff. Growing scared I tried to appease him by saying: "Nyet, spasivo!" Suddenly his face changed into a broad smile. "Du! Mutter? Schwester?" he asked. Fearful of what had now in mind I nodded. He began rummaging in a large carton. Finally, happy as a child he thrust a pound of butter into my hands...

I lost my job in early November. The Russians were going home, abandoning Silesia and with it Habelschwerdt to the Poles. For lack of cars they closed the shop. On the same day father was told to leave the farm where he had been living and working. It was a great misfortune. Over night the few Zloty I brought home from work and the rent paid by the tenants in our house had become our only income. Beyond that mother fed us by selling our possessions, which were not many and dwindling fast.

The five of us had to live squeezed into a single room upstairs. The rest of the house had been confiscated by the Polish housing commission, furniture and all. The kitchen, dining room, veranda, and father's room downstairs had been given to a young Polish couple from Czenstochawa and their baby, and in the former children bedroom upstairs lived a Polish major with his varying girl friends. The rent they paid, fixed by the commission, was very little, and the major forced mother to do his laundry free of charge, including on several occasions his blood-stained bed sheets.

And now there was also father, home, still very weak and depressed, one more person to the crowded room and one more to be fed. Both of us had to find work and not only for economic reasons.

It had become dangerous for a German to be found on the streets without a work permit. The Polish militia combed the streets day and night enforcing the ordinance originally issued by the defunct German Volksrat. In addition, since August every German had to wear a white armband. Germans found without an armband or an officially stamped work permit disappeared in the basement of the headquarters of the militia where they were usually beaten up badly for a few days - some never came back alive.

I remember the cold fear that gripped me, when in the beginning of the white armband regulation I had a close scrape with the militia. I was on my way to lunch at the Hotel Grüner Baum. I had forgotten to put on my armband. When I noticed it on my way my colleagues from the garage told me not to worry, it was not very far and everything would be fine, but right at the door of the hotel a militia man stopped me. It was only when the men threatened to call the Soviet military police that the militia man let go of me.

It was my friend Hermann who found me a new job. He was working at a small radio repair shop, and he persuaded its German proprietor to take me in as an apprentice. I was immensely happy and very excited to work on electronics and in the same place as Hermann. I still see the small room in the Hinterhaus and smell its odors given off by hot bakelite, solder, and a "Plumsklosett," a non-water closet that had a window into our workroom with cute red curtains.

There were five of us, an old man who was an expert in repairing burned out electric hotplates and irons, an engineer of about twenty-seven who had worked at a German military research laboratory and was hiding from being deported as a specialist by the Russians, and finally Hermann, myself, and another young spud who lived on our street, and whose mother was ostracized by everybody for dating Russian officers to scrape up a living. The only one who knew anything about electronics was the runaway engineer, and I hung on every of his words.

My first job was to repair a burned out transformer in a large radio, and I did not even know how to solder properly. With patience and sarcasm the engineer taught me to label the twenty different output tabs of the transformer before taking it apart and how to avoid "cold" solder junctions. I soon learned to read the designations and applications of the many radio tubes and how to test them, if they did not function. Most of the time, however, we had to do the regular electrician's house calls, like fixing switches, installing lights, or rigging antennas.

One morning a few weeks after I had started work at the shop we found a militia man, the well-known and hated directrice of the Polish housing commission, and a nattily dressed Pole in the store talking to the ashen faced German owner. They had just informed him that as of this morning he should consider himself the employe of the Polish gentleman, who was going to be the manager of the store. Nobody had to leave, everybody was to stay for the time being, after all there was work to do, but all moneys were to go to the Pole, who would every week pay us our salaries.

We spent the morning consoling the owner's crying wife. All their life's work, hope, and savings had just been taken away from them. Not much changed for us at first. The Polish manager was as slovenly as he was "elegant". He spoke only a minimal amount of German, content to lazily play the lord of the cash register, he never came to our workshop or talked to us. He paid us the same weekly wages as before the takeover. But without the owner's interest in us, our enthusiasm slowly ebbed and the working morale sank. To this decline contributed that more and more of our work was for Polish costumers who treated us like serfs or animals.

This job lasted only two months. In January the Pole, without any show of emotion, told me that I was dismissed and did not have to come back. I had been sent to repair the faulty radio in the house of a Polish officer. When I got there, I found that he lived in the Wilhelminian villa of Gymnasial Professor K. a highly regarded local historian and former teacher at the Aufbauschule.

When I rang the bell the professor's widow dressed in a white servant's uniform opened the door. With a hushed voice she told me that the Herr Oberst was sleeping. She timidly

knocked on the door of one of the rooms while I waited in the hall. Finally, in his underwear a choleric looking man in his late forties appeared, who with a gruff voice told the professor's wife to show me in.

The radio turned out to be in the stately bedroom of the historian, where I found the Oberst in bed fondling a young woman in complete disregard of my presence. Today I have to admit that he had style. I was just a serviceman and the old eastern European nobility had been brought up to simply consider such people, as if they did not exist. It was my fault that I felt stung. Here was this arrogant Polish oaf lying in the usurped bed of one of the most educated men in Habelschwerdt, fondling in full view of me the breasts of a whore.

When red-faced, I had finished my job, I went with equal disregard of their presence to one of the book shelves on the wall, picked out a precious German history book, read a few pages, put it back, picked out another, slimmer volume on the Battle of Verdun and quite deliberately pocketed it and walked out. A last look at the bed assured me that he had certainly noticed my presence now. I was never asked to return the book, in fact the officer apparently made comparatively little scandal about the whole affair, but the shop's manager simply had to dismiss me. The gentleman had been the head of the city's militia.
I carried that book, one of three, in my rucksack when in May 1946 we were deported.

Here I was, the self-styled hero looking again sheepishly for a job. By that time it had become very difficult to find work. Most businesses had been appropriated by Poles and those were naturally unhelpful.

It was mother who found me the job at the blacksmith's, one of the last German-owned establishments in town. Apparently the Polish commission had not yet found a dandy who would have been interested in "managing" this unglamorous business. It was a classical smithy in one of the old houses in town. One entered the underworld of this dark, vaulted dungeon through a large Romanesque gate with carved doors. On the left was the hearth with two manual bellows to fan the hearth. At the center of the place stood the huge anvil. Everywhere in the smoke-black recesses of this cavern stood iron, lay wagon wheels, nails, horseshoes, plow shares, and other products of Hephaistos' profession. Behind the house was a courtyard where the horses were shod. Two wooden strong-boxes served to tie down unruly horses during shoeing. The Meister lived with his family above the vault in an apartment that one reached on a spiraling stone staircase. Beside the Meister there was an older, rather unpleasant journeyman, who also lived with the Meister's family.

And so it happened that I learned how to shoe horses, put rims on wooden wagon wheels, fire-weld steel, and forge and harden axes just before all of these arts became extinct.

Of course, I was not allowed to shoe horses myself, that and the careful preparation of the horse's hoofs were the Meister's job, but occasionally, if the horse was benign and not a heavy Belgian I was allowed to hold its leg while the Meister fitted the iron. I shall never forget the stinging smell of the smoke that is produced when the hot iron is pressed into the horse's hoof. All my clothes smelled for it.

If the horse became spooky during shoeing it was tied up in one of the boxes, and an iron clamp was applied to the animal's lower lip, which I had to tighten until the poor beast's eyes bulged out.

When the journeyman and the Meisler put a rim on a large wooden wagon wheel, I was truly needed. First the steel rim had to be formed into a hoop and welded, which was still done by fire welding rather than with an acetylene torch.

The two ends of the open hoop were put into the fire which I had to fan to a bright white glow by working the bellows like mad. The Meister meanwhile was watching the steel carefully. On a word from him I had to let the bellows go and run, grab a hammer, and wait my hammer at the ready by the anvil. A few seconds later the master with a sweeping movement ripped the white glowing, sparks spitting hoop out of the fire and onto the anvil crying, "Los, jetzt, schnell!". He hit the anvil first to set the pace, and then, the master counting "Eins, zwei, drei!", the three of us hammered in rapid succession the overlaid weld ends shut.

This was always a very exciting operation, everything had to happen fast so the weld would not cool, and three people trying to hit the same small spot four or five times in a few minutes required a good deal of coordination. The first few times I goofed and the journeyman nearly hit my hammer with his. They got very angry with me, and I had to watch a few weeks, before I was allowed to have another try. Finally the steel rim was set onto the wheel by heating it to a red glow first to allow the undersized rim to expand. The glowing rim was then pressed over the wooden wheel with a hammer, copious amounts of smoke pouring from the burning wood. As soon as the rim was on the entire wheel was dumped into a vat full of water. Again speed was most important or too much of the wheel would have burnt off making the rim too loose.

Somewhere in the jumble of old iron I had found a raw blank of carbon steel for a hatchet the size of a small hand. I fell in love with it, and the Meister allowed me to finish it for myself. First the edge had to be forged sharp, not too blunt or it would not bite well and not too thin so it would not break later, and then it had to be hardened. Only the front edge would be hardened, the back of the hatchet was to remain soft in order to be pliant and tough. On a piece of blank steel the master showed me how to do that by carefully heating the edge in the fire to a uniform dull dark red. Then he took the piece out of the fire and with a rough file filed the edge to prevent it from oxidizing. As the edge cooled the bright surface of the metal assumed all the colors of the rainbow, blue, straw yellow, brown yellow, and magenta. A good edge for wood working had to be a middle yellow when it was quickly dumped into a bucket of water to freeze the steel. Finally the hatchet was filed sharp, not ground on a motorized wheel which would have overheated the edge and softened it again.

Even putting in the handle into a hatchet is not a simple matter. Apart from the handle having to have the right balance, making the small steel wedges that hold the handle in the head, and placing them at the correct angle with respect to the wood grain has its secrets.

Despite his rough manners I became fond of the master. Deep down I sensed that he liked me, and he was kind and considerate, while the sly journeyman always tried to make my life difficult: the son of an educated family what business did he have to meddle in his trade?

It was my last job before the Poles forced us into cattle cars and sent us off into an uncertain future.

15. Life under Polish Terror 1945-1946

House Searches, Thieves, and Thugs, Father returns from the Hospital, We hide him in Spätenwalde, Mother sells our Belongings, Father is sent Home, Six people in one Room, My Hideaway. "Volk Ohne Raum"

Mother's voice, tense with fear, tore me out of my sleep: "Rolf wake up the Poles are trying to break into the house." She whispered, "Please wake up. Schnell!" "Was ist's, Mutti?" It was completely dark in the room. I tried to turn on my reading light, but she put her hand on mine: "Don't turn on the light. They will see us. Since half an hour they are trying to break in. First into the basement, now at the main door. I am afraid. The door is not strong."

It had been quiet for a while. Now the noise at the main door started again. Loud shouting in Polish. They were trying to break the door down with their boots and some heavy object, perhaps the butt of a gun. The blows shook the whole house. I sat up shivering. Mother held on to me. The other children were sound asleep. Then there was silence again. Voices. Our Polish tenant downstairs had gone to the door and was talking with the people outside.

It all happened very fast. I heard the tenant remove the chain, turn the key, and open the door. Heavy boots came running up the stairs. A few seconds later two men in the uniform of the Polish militia, guns in their hands, stormed into our room shouting "Hands up! Don't move!" One put Mother in her pajamas with her hands to the wall holding his gun to her back, the other ordered me to lie on the floor on the upper landing of the stairs. Christine, Gerhard, and Dieter were jerked out of their beds and put next to me.

By now two more men with guns had come upstairs. The man who held mother kept on shouting "Wo ist Silber? Wo ist Geld? Sag' Frau, schnell!" stabbing her into the back with his gun between shouts. The other three started to throw the contents of drawers and closets onto the floor. I was trembling uncontrollably. Christine and Dieter where whimpering and whining on the floor. One of the men kicked Christine with his boot shouting at her to shut up.

They were beginning to search the mattresses of the beds, and one was slitting open a cushion emptying the feathers into the room, when there was a shout from downstairs. They let go of mother, and in extraordinary haste left whatever they were doing and scrambled downstairs. Within less than a minute they were gone.

Mother, crying quietly, collected her children and put them back into their beds. I went downstairs, where I found our tenants ashen faced, the crying baby in his mother's arms. They apologized. The men had told them from outside the door that they were from the Polish militia with a warrant to search the house for hidden weapons. He let them in.

Apparently they were militia men on a private rampage. They ran when their back stall saw a group of legitimate militia coming up the street. When mother came downstairs, the Polish woman fell around her neck crying, and both promised never to open the door again.

At least once every week marauding groups of Poles continued to try to break into one or the other of the houses on the street. They would appear in the early morning hours, and every time mother would start out of her sleep whispering tensely for me to wake up, the Poles were there again. Together we would sit in the dark and listen to the kicks and bangs praying that the door frame would hold up.

Towards the end of that year my sleep had become so shallow that mother had only to whisper "Rolf" and I would be instantly awake, and she, even twenty years later would still occasionally scream in the middle of the night "Rolf, Rolf the Poles are breaking our door down." I would then go to her bed and stroke her hair and say: "Mother, there are no Poles here, we are no longer in Habelschwerdt. You had only a bad nightmare." And she would wake up confused and cuddle up to me and with a short, dry laugh say: "Ach, Rölfchen, hab Dank, dass Du mich aufgeweckt hast. Du hast Recht, das ist alles schon so lange her. - Mein Golt, es war ein schwerer Traum." Ach Rolf, thank you that you woke me. You are right all of this was

so long ago. My Lord what a bad nightmare it was.

There never was a concerted effort among the German population against the Polish marauders. All complaints to the commander of the militia were met with indifferent shrugs. Eventually everyone on the street devised his own means to scare off the marauders. The inventive Frau Otto across the street would climb on to the roof of their house and blow a horn! I got a couple of two-by-fours and a few boards and constructed a brace to support the main door against the opposing wall. Every night during that winter we would put up this barricade. At least now the frame could not be broken down.

It was luck, that father was not home during those days, they would probably have taken him away again. One late July day 1945, a few weeks after the first Poles had appeared in Habelschwerdt, father had come home from the hospital in Glatz on mother's arm, a broken man with no hair. He was very weak, and mother put him to bed at once.

The week before mother had been in Spätenwalde and had begged the "rich" farmer who lived on the saddle to take father in as a working hand and feed him back to life. He had agreed. At least there father would get milk everyday, and home-baked bread, and occasionally some meat, all things we could not find in the city. And he would be safe there.

On the Saturday after his return, mother and I took father to the village, on foot through the-woods. We had to support him from both sides. It took us twice as long as usually.

Every two weeks one of us would walk to Spätenwalde to visit him there and to hamster a few provisions in the village. Slowly father came back to life although his hair grew back almost completely white.

By September father was strong enough to help in the fields. After the harvest a Polish commission appeared in the village and placed a Polish "caretaker" into the two larger farms. They did not bother with the smaller ones. The "caretakers" did nothing, they sat in the "Gute Stube" and demanded to be fed. The first action of the caretaker at the Geissler's farm was to throw father out.

The second time father came home was on the very day that I had lost my job at the car repair shop. It was my lowest day of that year.

Until we had to leave father stayed home. Keeping a very low profile, he left all external actions to mother. In December he found work as lumberjack in a sawmill in the lower part of town. Now that he had a work permit, he was no longer in such acute danger on the street, but work at the sawmill, especially in the middle of winter was physically and emotionally very hard on him. I still remember him coming home at night his hands all chafed, and icicles hanging in his hair and mustache.

During the winter food became scarcer every month. We largely lived of selling our bourgeois possessions on the black market. Once in a while mother was able to strike a really good bargain and could go on a "shopping spree". She would come home flushed and excited and present us with a whole bag of brown sugar, or a pound of lard, or two loaves of fresh bread.

On the black market the Poles, who had now increased to where they had become a large percentage of the population, were our saving. Without them we might have starved. Initially most of them came from the western provinces of Poland right across the old German border. They were civil servants, like the couple who lived in our house, or militia. Later large numbers came from the remote mountain villages of southern Poland and these people were not only poorer than we, they were also very backwards. But they were paid money and were

willing to pay handsome sums for father's dark suit, parts of the family tableware, or a pair of used shoes.

I cannot remember the Christmas of that year, but in January mother invented "Pferdebohnenmus," or Mousse of Horse Beans. This ingenious preparation concocted from tiny hard beans, onions, and a few spices all put through a meat grinder became our staple food for several months. Pferdebohnenmus for breakfast, for lunch as a main course, and again for supper on our bread in place of butter with Wurst. Mother even tried to sell the mousse to our neighbors.

Pferdebohnenmus started with a hamster trip with father to Grafenort, almost halfway to Glatz, sometime in late December. By that time food on the farms in Spätenwalde had become so scarce that we often came back from there with only a half pound of "Hühnerquark," white-cheese curds for the chicken. We had never been to Grafenort before. To get there we had to ski across the open fields of the Siegritz. Not to be seen we left very early in the morning in complete darkness. We had to rely entirely on our general sense of directions in the snowed in landscape. It became a great test of my explorer instincts.

Father knew a man in Grafenort who managed a really large "Gut", farm, but when we got there all he had to offer was a large bag of Pferdebohnen, small, hard beans he fed to the horses.

Rather depressed we set out for home in the late afternoon. It was almost dark again and a sharp warm southern wind had sprung up that softened the snow and made it treacherous and slow. All my explorer spirit was gone, the rucksack full of beans was heavy, and fighting against the wind made the way home long and tiring. Mother anxiously awaited us at the door, when we arrived exhausted around nine in the evening. For several evenings, while all of us picked over the beans to remove stones and weeds, we discussed on how to convert this horse-feed into something edible. Finally mother came up with that unsightly brown bean paste...

The winter was, thank God, not cold, but the room we lived in was to the north and and was the coldest of the house. It had a big, white "Kachelofen" but we had no coals to heat it. Finally I had the idea of putting a small, wood-burning "Kanonenofen," or Franklin stove in series with the Kachelofen by simply feeding its "Ofenrohr" into the first of the many ducts of the Kachelofen. This would allow us to burn wood, save all its heat, and in addition cook on the Franklin stove. With money she had made by selling a pair of old shoes, mother bought the Franklin stove. A mason connected it for a few Zloty, and pulling a sled we all went into the mountains to "organize" some wood. The stove filled the room with a ferocious heat especially at the second level of the bunk bed I slept in, but we always had a kettle of hot water at the ready. It was a great success, and father began to make up fantasy stories of how we would remodel the Kachelofen so that we could all sleep on it, like the Russians, he said.

During the late winter my escape from our overcrowded living-bed-dining room became reading in the "secret room". The house had a sizable attic under the unfinished roof, part of which my parents had converted during the war into a room for the Kindermädchen. The stairs to the attic were steep, and there was so much old furniture and boxes stored there that the door to the maid's room was hidden so effectively that neither the lady from the Polish housing commission nor the various burglars ever found it. Here we stored many of our valuables and eventually all books from father's library that could have caused suspicion or trouble.

It was cold up there, but it was so heavenly quiet. I put gloves on and a wool cap and

slipped into the bed the maids had slept in, and such protected I read half a dozen of "forbidden" books tending my still deeply wounded "collective subconscious". I remember Gustav Freitag's historical novels and Felix Dahn's "Kampf um Rom". But the novel that held me enthralled for the longest time - I read its two 200-page volumes twice that spring - was "Volk ohne Raum" by Hanns Grimm. All of these books have strong nationalistic overtones, and they are remembered today only by historians. "Volk ohne Raum", "People without Space", and his author are a curious case in German literature. Grimm was a self-styled national guru full of muddled romantic ideas. For fifteen years he had lived in South Africa where - like Gandhi and for much the same reasons - he discovered his German identity. He returned to Germany in 1920 and became a novelist and political "Wanderprediger" preaching his own obscure ideas. Nobody listened to him. Eventually the National Socialists put an end to his "teaching", but his ideas were close enough to theirs that they continued wooing Grimm - unsuccessfully - to the very end of their time. Grimm, a tough ideologue, survived the war intact - and started preaching again at once. In the national calamity of the postwar years of 1945-55 he became the Ersatz-hero of many of my parent's Wandervogel friends.

The voluminous "Volk ohne Raum", published before Hitler in 1927, is highly autobiographical. It is a heavy, hard to read "German" novel, but its language, its characters, their political ideas and hopes were so close to those of father and his friends that even today this book has not lost a certain fascination for me. Few other contemporary books reflect my parents world as accurately as this one.

16. Silesia Becomes Polish 1946

Ethnic Cleansing Grand Style, Endzeit Madness. The Polish Housing Commission, Father's Ahnentafeln

One morning in mid April on my way to work I discovered a yellow poster on a tree. It was in German.

Bekanntmachung! Seit vorgeschichtlichen Zeiten ist Slask polnisches Land gewesen. Die Mächtigen des preussisch-deutschen Staates beraubten Polen seines rechtmässigen Besitztes. Nach jahrhundertelanger deutscher Versklavung wird Slask endlich wieder ins polnische Mutterland heimkehren. Im Einverständnis mil unseren westlichen und östlichen Verbündeten wird allen deutschen Staatsangehorigen, die nicht für Polen zu optieren wünschen, die Gelegenheil einer Rückführung nach Deutschland gegeben. Die Unkosten für die Rückführung werden von der polnischen Regierung getragen. Rückwanderer dürfen bis zu 300 Reichsmark pro Person aus Polen ausführen. Wegen der beschränkten Transportmittel können Rückwanderer nur das Gepäck mit sich führen, das sie über eine Strecke von einem Kilometer eigenhändig tragen können. Rückführungsantrage können an die städtische Wohnungskomission gestellt werden. gez. Die Provinzialverwaltung von Slask (Schlesien) gezeichnet:. Die Stadtverwaltung von Bystrzyca Klodzka (Habelschwerdt)

Notice! Since prehistoric times Slansk (Silesia) has been Polish Land. The powerful of the

Prussian-German State robbed Poland of her rightful property. After centuries of enslavement Slansk shall finally return to its Polish motherland. In agreement with our western and eastern allies all German citizens, who do not wish to opt for Poland, are being offered the opportunity of a repatriation to Germany. The expenses of the repatriation will be paid for by the Polish government. Persons who return may export out of Poland no more than 300 Reichsmark per person. Because of the limited means of transportation repatriating persons may take only as much luggage as they can carry personally over a distance of one kilometer. Application forms for repatriation can be obtained from the municipal housing commission. Signed: The Provincial Administration of Slansk (Silesia). Signed: The Municipal Administration of Bystrzyca Klodzka (Habelschwerdt).

I read the notice twice and still did not understand. Incredulous, I walked on. Then I found a second one, and in a back street a third. Since there was nobody around to see me, I ripped the poster off the wall. But it was no use they were all over town.

This was my homeland. What an audacity to call it a Polish province. My ancestors had lived here for at least six generations, and some parts of the family were known to have lived in Silesia since the 15th century.

It was a bad joke that this land was Polish. To opt for Poland, who would do that? It would be treason and worse it would be emotional suicide?
We wanted to stay here but as Germans.

Rückwanderung, repatriation? Return to where, to what? Into the bombed out cities of overcrowded West Germany? This was not where any of us came from. Within a few days the local authorities made it abundantly clear that we did not have to worry about having to make decisions, there were no "Options for Poland", and no "Requests for Repatriation" were necessary. The notices had just been polite, political paraphrase: Every and all German speaking persons except those working in positions of importance to the welfare of the Polish population were to be deported, and all their property was going to be confiscated by the Polish government without any re-compensation or recourse.

In addition, the expulsion had been fully sanctioned by the American, Soviet and British governments. It had, in fact, been suggested by Churchil at Yalta as a compensation for the Polish loss of Eastern Poland to Stalin. No provision for a plebiscite had even remotely been considered.

Soon the hated lady from the Polish housing commission wandered the streets with lists of those who were to go first: all retired persons over 65, unemployed single women with children, widows, and orphans. The first transport was to leave in two weeks.

Strange, there was no spontaneous uprising, there were no protests, and nobody formed any underground movement in the hills. Everybody only thought of himself and cooperated more or less willingly with the Polish authorities. A total of eight million people let themselves be complacently "ethnically cleansed" from the land that their ancestors had lived in for 700 years. The courage and will of the German people were burned out. There was no one to speak for them.

At home mother was crying. For two days we discussed what should be done. I do not remember what father proposed, but mother was determined to leave as soon as possible. There was almost nothing left for her to sell. What should we live of, of father's and my meager wages and the few Zloty paid by the renters?

In the evening of the third day, I shall never forget her, tears streaming down her face. Mother knelt in the dirt of the street before the lady of the Polish housing commission and begged her to deport us with the next possible transport. But father had a job and she rejected mother's request. Fther in tears walked to the sawmill with Christine and got his dismission.

A few days later the housing commission assigned us a date: We were to leave with the second transport, three weeks hence, on April 27. The news were a relief. Everyone went to work feverishly on some preparation for the trip. Mother started sewing rucksacks from floor-mats one for each child. I baked nut cookies as emergency ration for the trip, because I had read somewhere that nuts contained everything one needed to survive. Father got the big wicker basket from the attic, which had carried our belongings on our trips to the Baltic. We decided that over the critical kilometer father and I were going to carry this basket suspended between two wood poles.

A kind of Endzeit madness overcame us. Father spent the evenings bent over his genealogical files, hundreds of cards with the vital data of his forefathers that he had collected over two decades. They were his most precious possession. Meticulously he scribbled all of his findings into three notebooks that we carried along. While writing he read the more dramatic stories to me - and I to his continuing annoyance made my own legends from his stories.

There were the earliest two Grosses that he had found, a father and son who in the 1750s had come from "Halle in Schwaben" to join the soldiers of Friedrich Wilhelm I of Prussia.

Ludewig, the father was eventually retired as royal lock-master on the Finow canal north of Frankfurt-on-the-Oder. No church records of father or son have ever been found in Schwaben. I conjectures that the son was an illegitimate child. In the regimental records he appears, not surprisingly, as Friedrich Wilhelm Gross. He was a talented musician and became "königlich priviligierter Stabstrompeler," royally privileged trompeter of the Kürassier Regiment Markgraf Friedrich which was stationed in Cammin in Pomerania. Father showed me handcolored drawings of the soldiers of this regiment, from which I got the impression of a handsome, strapping young man. Perhaps this was how he, despite his relatively low position, won the hand of the daughter of the Superintendent of the Pomeranian churches. I favor the version that he seduced her forcing his father in law to give him his daughter as wife before the baby was born. But the dates disproved that later.Anyway, through this marriage with Christiane Schäffer we gained a whole line of very honorable ancestors. The Shäffers came from an old patrician family in Mainz. Among her forefathers are Peter Schäffer and his brother-in-law Johann Faust who in the 1490s funded Johann Gutenberg's bible printings. When Gutenberg could not pay his debts, his sponsors had him thrown into the "Schuldturm," the debtor's prison and then used his presses to print political propaganda and "pornographic" broadsides with great financial success.

Peter Schäffer's father was a far traveled man who around 1470 took for his wife the daughter of one Andreas Andreae a close friend of Melanchton and Luther. Further back

in time he is preceded by merchants, burghers, and mayors of Pisa and in 1300 by a famous law professor at the university of Bologna.

Another branch of the family was Prussian to the core. Around 1740 someone married Luise Lukretia von Winning, and through her we inherited all the old Prussian nobility. But the overwhelming majority of father's forefathers were soldiers, merchants, pastors, teachers, and professors.

Mother had no time for such frivolities, all over town she was trying to find the 300 German Reichsmark for every family member. Since August all German money had vanished from circulation and been replaced by Zloty, and now we were allowed only to take Reichsmark out of Poland. The Polish bank was selling Marks, but at an exorbitant exchange rate and in very limited quantities. Luckily some of our acquaintances had hidden Reichsmark in their mattresses and were happy to sell them now for a good price. I still see the daughter of Frau Futter from next door counting piles of German bills onto the table top covering the bathtub.

Eventually we suddenly had more German money than we were allowed to take along. Where to hide the bills? First mother proposed to stuff them into her brassiere and underwear. But someone warned that these places would most certainly be searched first. Then I had the idea of hollowing out the carrying poles for the basket, which I did expertly and seamlessly. Mother also began sewing hundred Mark bills into the linings of coats and shoes of everyone. She decided that especially the smaller children should not even know, what she had sewn into their clothing and where. Two years later it would still occasionally happen that an almost illegible hundred Mark bill surfaced from a worn out shoe or garment.

The end was sad. I had to abandon all my precious possessions, my soldering iron, my scroll saw, my books. They followed me and reappeared in my dreams for years. Earlier I wrote that I had destroyed my fleet of wooden model ships. This was a lie. I could not bring it over my heart to burn them. I left them behind with a note cursing the Polish nation. Today I hope that some boy found them.

17.Our Deportation May 1946

The last Breakfast, March to Mittelwalde, Cattle Cars, Across bombed out Germany, My first Volkswagen, Lohne, Bernd Heseding,

Mother was already up. I watched her in her pajamas - mother always wore pajamas while father went to bed in an ankle long night shirt - make fire in the Kanonenofen and cook "Mehlsuppe," a thick, white flour soup for breakfast, which we hated, but it substituted for scarce bread and even scarcer butter and gave one a warm feeling in the stomach.

The light from the flames in the oven danced around the room, over our bunk beds on the wall next to the oven and father and mother's bed along the other wall. A large, frightening print of the head of the crucified Christ from Dürer's "Great Passion" hung above their bed. There was just enough space between the beds to squeeze the family table in. We had to sit on the beds, there was no room for chairs. Framed by the two narrow windows stood a low chest of drawers on which mother used to diaper Dieter, and on the far wall an old wardrobe painted white. Next to it was the closet in which I kept my treasures. Under the left window had been my worktable, now mother's sewing machine stood there, on which she had sewn until late the night before. Two days ago she had found a Polish woman who had bought the machine, and who was going to pick it up just before we were to leave.

The walls where simply painted white. Mother had never liked wallpaper in the house. There were two rectangular spots on one wall, where the handcolored prints of flowers from an

old botanical atlas had hung that father loved so much. He had taken them out of their frames and packed them in the travel basket.

Everybody had been allowed to take along a few treasures. Father's were the two flower prints, several pages from Great-grandfather Kiepert's atlas, the Dürer print, and his genealogical notes. I carried Kaestner's "Griechenlandbuch", an engineering drafting manual, and the book on Verdun rescued from under the hands of the Polish Oberst. Next to our beds stood the rucksacks mother had sewn, packed and ready. They had turned out to be strange looking gray, rectangular contraptions with two arm loops and a flap that closed with buttons.

To give us a "good foundation" mother was frying our last potatoes. At six she woke Dieter and the twins and we all sat down for breakfast. Breakfast had always been a "sacred" meal, for which we met at the big table every morning, but everybody being so hungry, it had lost much of its former grace. Half asleep we silently wolfed down the food.

Then the dressing started. We once again wore several layers of clothes on top of each other. Mother helped Dieter and Christine put on their "Leibchen," waistbands that held up their long, woolen stockings with knobbed ears on short rubber bands. I could just barely detect the paper money with which the Leibchen were lined. Being older I had for some time been excused from having to wear these degrading pieces of underwear. My money was hidden in my coat.

By seven-thirty, excited and overheated we were ready to leave, when the woman came to pick up the sewing machine. There was one more, last minute haggle over the price, she did not want to pay what mother had asked. Eventually two men took this last possession down the stairs.

Father and I carried the heavy basket down, around the bend in the steep stairs and were putting it into our small hand cart when the lady from the housing commission arrived. This time she was accompanied by two militia men. They secured a string with sealing wax stamped with the Polish eagle over the door, pocketed the house key, and gave father a paper slip as receipt.

The twins pulled the cart with the basket and father and I pushed. Mother held Dieter by the hand. There was nobody to see us off when we walked down the street for the last time.

Were my parents crying? Did I turn back for a last look at our house, which we had lived in for so many beautiful and fateful years? I do not remember. This sad moment of farewell is mercifully blurred in my memory.

The old "Stäupe," the flogging post on the Salzmarkt was surrounded by chaos, crying people, baggage, horses, and farm wagons that had been sequestered from the villages for the transport of the "returnees" to the train station in Mittelwalde, twenty kilometers south. There, we were told, we would board the train to Germany. It took several hours before everything was loaded on the wagons. They were so full that only mothers with babies and the oldest people were allowed to ride on the wagons on top of all the baggage. We had to walk.

For most of the day our caravan slowly wound through the villages along the road to the south. We arrived in Mittelwalde when it was already dark and were put into a compound of wooden one-story barracks close to the station that had previously housed "Ostarbeiter," people that had been deported from eastern Europe to work in Germany...

Each bungalow consisted of a single room. I remember the crowded place with graphic clarity. Most of the space was taken up by rows and rows of bunk beds. Because of the low

ceiling and there being four levels to each bed, they resembled the storage shelves in our basement. There were no mattresses, just bare boards and about six people were pressed together on each shelf.

We were lucky to be assigned a shelf in the middle that offered some shade from the electric lights overhead that burned all night. The entire compound was fenced in with barbed wire, but besides a guard at the gate we were left to ourselves. Many people never went to sleep and sat up talking or walked around looking for friends all night. One old woman spent an hour in front of the only mirror in the room making herself up, until a group of shrews chased her off. With all the noise and my hunger, we had only had a piece of bread to eat that mother had distributed, I lay awake for a long time imagining the Ostarbeiter who had lived in this place for four years. Pictures I had seen in the Tageblatt haunted my sleep.

We spent two nights there waiting for the train to be assembled, on which we were to continue our journey. On the third day we had to line up in long rows outside with all our luggage to begin the feared walk to the station. Each family had to carry their luggage from the gate of the compound across the Bahnhofsplatz to the entrance of the brick-Gothic Bahnhof passing under the eyes of militia men and civilian officials. Anything that could not be carried on the first trip or fell to the ground along the way was confiscated at once. There was also a nasty surprise in form of a scattering of young German thugs from Habelschwerdt, some of whom I knew from sight, who were standing around among the Poles jeering at the passing people.

Inside the station we had to squeeze the luggage through the narrow passage formed by the wooden bars of the former ticket control gate. Polish women and militia men were standing on both sides observing our struggle and pulling people and luggage from the line at will. The victims had to open their bags or suitcases, and a militia woman would search through its contents scavenging for what appeared to be jewelery, money, and other valuables.

Every now and then one of the thugs would whisper to the militia woman pointing at one of the passing people, and then the person would be taken away and disappear.

We had been very lucky, we made the trip with the heavy basket across the Bahnhofsplatz without an incident. Father and I, my heart in my mouth, had even squeezed the thing through the control gate. The "valuable" twins marched through behind me. We had reached the other side without raising any suspicion, but when mother, pulling Dieter by the hand walked through the gate one of the thugs raised his finger. She was taken aside at once. I shouted at Christine to take the hand of the orphaned Dieter, the guards would not let me return for him.

I had seen mother disappear into a door at the end of a long, dark hall followed by a woman in uniform. What was she going to do to mother? Why had that thug singled mother out? What did he know about us, was he perhaps from the FlurstraBe? But I had never seen him before. We had not heard any screams, so they seemed not to be beating people in that room.

We waited in anxious despair for what seemed an eternity. The intensity with which one remembers peripheral details at such a moment, the worn varnish of the wooden bannisters of the gate, the shape of a large chipped area on the once light green painted walls, the hairdo of the woman in the wooden box in which the conductor had stood who had punched the tickets...

When mother reappeared she wore the flushed expression, half embarrassed, half

victorious, her short nose up in the air, that I knew so well from her visits to my teachers. I knew instantly that she was alright.

The woman had stripped her and had then searched all possible and impossible orifices of her body for jewelery and money. But that had all been carefully sewn into the Leibchen of the twins, or stuffed into the hollow rods by which we carried the basket! The woman had found nothing at all on her. Feigning indifference we made our way outside, where we put the basket down and hugged her.

The search of the about 900 people took all day. There was no train. For a while we sat around on the station grounds this time guarded by heavily armed militia. When no train had appeared by nightfall, we were herded into a large, unlit warehouse. The guards locked the gates and left us to our own devices. The confusion and shoving was unimaginable. Everywhere people were lying or squatting on the bare concrete floor or stumbling around in the dark searching and calling for their lost, crying children.

Outside trains were switched back and forth with much noise all through the night, and around midnight wild screams were heard from a group of young women in the opposite corner of the shed. Mother tried to hush our anxious questions. Next day it was claimed that two women had been raped during the night, but whether the molesters had been from among our own people, the thugs, or the militia nobody could say.

In the morning we found a train of twenty nine cattle cars waiting for us. We were again lined up and had to load our possessions into the train, thirty people to a car. There were old people and children in our car. We knew nobody, and everyone was eying the others with suspicion. No solidarity ever developed on that trip, except that another boy and I ran out just before the train left and "organized" a small Kanonenofen from an empty car on another track. We also "found" some coals, and an old man who lay near the stove offered to feed the fire during the cold nights. The doors remained open. Somewhere in the front there was a car with militia, but otherwise we were not being watched. At first we thought that thirty people would be a large crowd in the confined space, but in the end with a little patience nearly everyone found a place to lie down.

Suddenly in the late evening, with a blast of its whistle the old steam engine came alive sending a shock wave down the chain of cars that nearly toppled our stove. It was already dark when we passed through Habelschwerdt. At the Hauptbahnhof in Glatz, where I had waited for the train after I had visited father in the hospital, we stopped, and I ran out to steal more coals. Unexpectedly the engine started up again and took the tracks east, towards Breslau. Everyone was wide awake immediately and the rumor spread that we were taken to Siberia instead of west to Germany... But behind Breslau we were routed north again; the bridges on the more direct route through Waldenburg had all been blown up by the retreating German army and not been repaired as yet. Exhausted, I slept through much of this excitement.

The journey was slow. Often we waited for hours in the middle of nowhere on a sidetrack. Everyone would then run into the bushes all the time afraid that the whimsical engine would all of a sudden start. The ruins of Liegnitz passed and Bunzlau the capital of cucumbers and salt-glazed blue stoneware.

Somewhere north-west of Bunzlau we waited two whole days. When we found that the engine had disappeared, we ventured out and discovered that a woman in one of the cars had started labor. A big bed sheet had been hung across the door of the car, and the engineer had

uncoupled the locomotive and driven to Bunzlau to get a doctor! Around noon on the sixth day we reached the tiny station of Kohlfurt on the new border of Poland and the Soviet Zone of Germany. Early that morning at another stop in the fields an official had walked along the train ordering everyone to remove the white arm band that had for a year marked us as Germans. It was a strange feeling to be without it, almost like losing another part of one's identity.

In Kohlfurt everyone was ordered out of the train, but the luggage had to remain. The fear of losing these material possessions was still much larger than the concern of coming to any bodily harm: we were willingly lined up in two sheer endless single file queues. With many a joke everyone was ordered to loosen his or her garments, women had to unbutton their blouses, men open their belts, and then we were marched into the station. There we found four uniformed British soldiers with long tubes on flexible hoses that were attached to small air pumps. The soldiers without much ado stuck the tubes one after the other behind the collar down the back, into the bosom, the open pants, under the skirts, or into the trouser legs of everyone and each time pressed a foot pedal releasing a blast of fine white powder from the hose. This was our first encounter with DDT! It added a nice itch to the already existing dirt of six days without a bath. Another group of British soldiers distributed a bowl of watery soup from a field kitchen and one loaf of bread for each family.

But the sensation of Kohlfurt was not the DDT, nor the British, but their Volkswagen, the first real Volkswagen of my life. We discovered it parked behind the station with a license plate carrying the letters CCG, Control Commission of Germany. In 1938 I had missed the only demonstration of the VW in Glatz, and now here it was brand new, the harbinger of German recovery.

Two days and a night we rolled through the ruined cities of East Germany. Clearly I only remember the switch yards of Dessau where in the middle of a rainy night, the rails glistening under glaring lights, I stole coals from a neighboring train, fearing discovery and the sudden departure of ours, and the silhouette of Magdeburg in the gray morning hours where we crossed the river Elbe.

In the afternoon we crossed the border between the Soviet and the British occupied zones at Helmstedt. In the middle of the Helmstedt bitumen coal fields, huge brown holes in the ground, an "Auffanglager für Flüchtlinge" a camp for refugees had been established.

Flüchtlinge, "refugees" was going to be the general term for people like us in the west, as if we had fled our homes. Sometimes the millions from Silesia, Pomerania and East Prussia were also called "Verlriebene," expellees but as in English this name was too cumbersome for general use and also reminded our new western allies of their political mistakes.

In Helmstedt we were counted, inspected for syphilis, given an identification card, two hundred Marks, a bowl of soup, a loaf of bread, a salami, and a paper with our destination. This paper caused great confusion, it listed our new home town as "Lochne", a name, which by the rules of German spelling could only have been - in Poland!

In the evening we left Helmstedt in a regular, third-class passenger train. The hard, wooden benches and the insufficient space made us wish we were back in the cattle cars we had lived in so long. We went west most of the night.

Standing with father outside on the platform at the end of our car trying to guess where we were being taken, we watched the devastated cities of the western Ruhr district roll by, until in the early morning hours the train made a sharp turn north. When the sun came up we where going through moors, stands of fir, and meadows separated by long lines of elm trees.

Strewn throughout this landscape were single farms and villages with thatched houses. Around seven o'clock the train stopped in a small town by the name of Lohne, the answer to the puzzle of our destination.

On the eighth of May, ten days after leaving Habelschwerdt we had arrived in our new "hometown".

We were unloaded right away and spent the first night on straw that had been distributed over the bare floor of a cork factory, - the manufacture of corks being the only major industry in this area.

Early next day the farmers from the surrounding villages appeared to receive the Flüchtlinge they had been obliged to take in. It soon turned into something like an "auction of slaves", as the farmers vied with each other for the strongest workers among the lot. We were a large family, but the sight of father, mother, and me must have given our Bauer the vision of us all working on his fields in exchange for feeding us. He remained the "highest bidder" and cheerfully carted us into the setting evening home to Brockdorf.

His name was Bernd Heseding. The farm was an immense, classical Niedersachsenhaus, a three hundred years old, one-story framework house in which under a single, mighty thatched roof coexisted ten pieces of cattle, two horses, two farmhands, and three middle-aged, unmarried sisters. Bernd was of undefinable age, to judge from his wrinkles, he must have been in his late forties. He turned out to be a bachelor - with the fistular voice of a castrate...

We were taken into the Wohnkammer the communal living room and under the inquisitive eyes of all the members of the house, his sisters fed us huge pieces of the darkest Westfalian Pumpernickel broken into bowls of warm milk.

18. Life at the Hesedings 1946

Six on one Palliasse, The Dying Woman, School in Dinklage, Father finds a Job, His Denazification

All through that early summer she died. Her two sisters, who kept her hidden in a room next to ours, said she was suffering from "galloping consumption", but she was in no hurry. When working in the garden in front of her room I tried to snatch a look at the mysterious patient, but her window was always hung with heavy curtains. Her name was never mentioned.

Every night we could hear her dreadful moaning and her seemingly endless coughing fits. Lying awake in the darkness I made myself sick by imagining her, pale, propped up on a pillow in the bed on the other side of the wall, a dirty nightgown covering her withered body, her fat, unctuous sisters at her bedside mumbling magical conjurations by the light of a candle to stop her coughing, to stop the blood she was spitting.

I reached out for Christine next to me in bed. She stirred in her sleep, but did not wake. I was lucky to have an outside edge to myself in the great double bed in which we slept,

all six of us. Next to Christine lay Gerhard and Dieter, with mother and father on their other side. I heard my parents whisper. Mother was exhorting father to do something to get us out of this place. Gerhard had had an infection of the dreaded disease when he was small, and she feared that he would get it again. Father sighed but said nothing.

Then there was silence for a while until her retching from another spasm could be heard from the other side of the wall. father groaned. "Käthe, it is not only this dying woman. Bernd told me today that he expected me to help him with the field work tomorrow in exchange for feeding us all. He has to prepare the soil and sow wheat, and Rolf will have to clean the chicken coop." He heaved a deep sigh in the darkness.

So, after breakfast I was given a shovel and a pail and ordered to climb the steep, fretted board slippery with half-dried droppings into the chicken coop. The sour stench inside the shack nearly overpowered me. For several hours bent over under the waist high roof, I hacked and shoveled at layers upon layers of shit. In the distance I saw father trotting with Bernd behind a horse dragging a harrow across the field.

Bernd's room was a windowless cubicle that opened into one corner of the kitchen. It was a chaotic mess of old clothes lying in piles on the floor surmounted by a huge oak box on legs filled with a palliasse that was covered with a dirty bed sheet. He shared this bed with Barro, a black and white Dalmatian the size of a small calf. The dog was his only real friend. He would not allow his sisters into his den, and nobody had cleaned it for years.

In the morning, when we sat at the long, rough refectory table in the kitchen to eat our breakfast, Bernd would emerge from his bedroom exclaiming "Moin", "G'morn'g" in his falsetto voice and make his way to the kitchen sink to wash himself. Bernd was already fully dressed in a soiled shirt and baggy pants that hung loosely from his large frame. At the faucet he spent all his effort on the only exposed part of his body, his huge, round head, which was covered with hair cropped so short that one could see the scabs on his scalp. The dog had followed him and was lapping his water. The similarity between the animal and his owner struck me. Both had the same powerful build, and both had the same short hair. Even Bernd's face could be compared to his dog, good-natured and unformed like that of baby yet its skin creased and wrinkled like that of a sixty-year-old man.

After he had washed, the water still dripping from his head, he never missed to exclaim in a voice full of hard "s's", "You East German pigs do you ever wash your hair?" Having forced myself to look at him so closely, this remark would continue to run through my mind all day.

One day I succeeded to revenge myself - on Barro. Barro had a frightening bark, fierce teeth, and if he jumped he could knock over even a strong man by his sheer weight. But he was a dumb beast. Once I found him trying to mount a sheep tied to a stake in the meadow where Bernd usually kept his prized breeding bull. This gave me the diabolic idea. With a birch twig I tickled the dog's organ to its full size encouraging him all the time to mount the bleating sheep. Again and again he jumped until, his juices dripping, he tottered off on trembling legs.

Bernd too was basically a good-natured fellow, but occasionally he would loose his senses and run wild. This usually happen on Sundays after the Mittagessen. Then, bored and languid from eating too much, Lisbeth, the oldest sister, would wile away the time by perversely teasing slow minded Bernd. They spoke "Plattdeutsch," Low-German, of which I understood only little, but of and on Lisbeth would weave in a few High German words for the benefit of her "foreign" audience. Slowly their voices rose until Bernd, his veins swollen in blind rage, kicked his chair over and made ready to attack his sister from across the table. At this

point Lisbeth, keeping a maddening cool, fired a last abusive volley at her brother and disappeared into their room, slamming the door behind her and noisily turning the key in the lock. Suddenly at the height of his excitement impotent Bernd was left to uselessly bang his fists at the heavy oak door.

Lisbeth played this game with consummate skill until one weekend, shortly before their sister died, she lost control of her brother. Instead of resigning himself to banging at the door, Bernd suddenly produced an ax and smashed his way into his sisters' rooms, who had barricaded themselves in the inner sanctum. We all ran after him. Their voluptuous screams were punctuated by Bernd's chopping through the next door. He was subdued by the two farmhands, just when he was about to lay hands on Lisbeth huddling at the dying woman's bedside.

This was the only time I caught a glimpse of her.

Easter was approaching. On Gründonnerstag, the day before Good Friday we were all ordered by Lisbeth to clean the house. The farmhands had to dig the dung from the animal pens, deep pits that "needed" cleaning only twice a year, and we had to wash windows and rake curved patterns into the sand of the garden paths. The women scrubbed the kitchen and covered the floor with a thin layer of white sand. Lisbeth, like a master sargent, with her hands on her hips, elbows at an angle, herself not moving a finger, commandeered the work. Nothing was ever good enough for her. Late in the afternoon she finally ripped the rake out of my hands shouting, "You dumb oaf, you are too stupid to even rake a simple wave pattern down the path. What will the neighbors think of us."

The major attraction on Easter Morning was an egg eating competition. The sisters had piled dozens of hard-boiled eggs into large bowls on the breakfast table. They stood on the side watching, cheering us famined refugee children to attack the egg piles. We ate like animals until, I remember, I got sick.

It must have been this disgusting spectacle that made mother decide to do something to restore order in our lives. Boldly she told Lisbeth that henceforth she was going to cook our own meals, that she was going to pay for any food she got from the farm, that her children were going to go back to school, and that this was the end of our working for them. Thereafter mother had to endure Lisbeth's vicious revenge: endless fights over the kitchen stove she had to share, and personal abuse for the pettiest reasons. Worse was, however, that our rich food supply dried up over night. Lisbeth swore that we had eaten the last meat from her house. So we sat every day at the kitchen table, our eyes on the meat supply hanging in the chimney, eating boiled potatoes and whatever vegetables mother had been able to buy at the village store. Mother went begging again at the neighboring farms, but she had not realized how precious a commodity meat had become, and we had no friends in the village. We had become hated, homeless refugees, suspected of stealing, intruders that were regarded like marauding gypsies.

At night in bed, after she thought her children were asleep, mother was crying "Ulrich, you must find a job! We can barely eat from the refugee money we get from the Social Services Department. It is not enough to pay the rent for another place to live. We are stuck in this hole as long as you don't have a job." Father said nothing. Every day he seemed to shrivel a little more before our very eyes. One day, we were walking through Lohne, an old, starved and enfeebled man went past us. Pain clouding his face, his eyes averted, I heard father say to himself, "Oh God, give that I don't end a human wreck like this poor creature." He left in

search of work, by train, sleeping in the shelters for homeless people set up by the churches at the railway stations of the big cities and eating in soup kitchens.

Mother's search for a school for us was more successful. On Pentecost Sunday she took us to church in Dinklage, a small marketplace about five kilometers from Brockdorf. I remember the day well. Because there had been no protestants in town before the refugees arrived, a large beer hall had been converted into a church. For this festive occasion it had even been decorated with birch branches and makeshift colorful banners.

After the service mother approached the pastor, a young man with oily black locks and an effusive, subservient friendliness. Mother was crying, begging him to help us. Blushing he took mother's hands between his in a praying gesture and promised that he would do all that was in his power. Knowing her only too well I watched mother shrink from his touch. On our walk home, still cringing. mother called the pastor a "Mauschel," and made the ominous remark that he was Jewish... - His name turned out to be Johann Süssmann, and he came from Litzmannstadt, alias Lodz. - However, true to his word. Pastor Süssmann found a place for the twins and me at the Bürgerschule in Dinklage, and for the next year became - always closely watched by me with fascinated curiosity - a special benefactor to us children.

After almost two years it was a strange feeling to have to go to school again. I was not looking forward to it. A new group of children, new teachers, the old, deeply ingrained obligation to do well, and my own need to stick out of the crowd, made me apprehensive. Was I going to be able to deal with this new challenge? And in addition there was the miserable situation at home.

Every day we got up at five to be at school at seven, walking an hour to Dinklage - barefoot. Mother had decided that the only pair of shoes we had were not going to be run down on this long march every day, we would need them badly for the winter. It was cold in the morning, and my feet were numb when I arrived at school. But the worst was the embarrassment of seeing my bare feet sticking out in front of my desk for everybody to see. The only one barefoot in class. It reminded me of my first school year and my problem with the Turnhosen, except that I was older now and the embarrassment deeper.

Just before summer vacation appeared another barefoot student, a cheerful girl in a blue-white dress, whom I fell head over heel in love with. On the school's Wandertag, which we spent hiking through the moors and meadows surrounding Dinklage, I followed her around all day and dreamed of her all through the summer vacation. Before I had the courage to talk to her, we moved, and I had to change school again. I do not even remember her name.

By July father was still without a job. He had been knocking on the doors of all the agricultural departments in the area, but there were so many other jobless civil servants. There was also the looming question of "Denazification" that monstrous program that the American occupiers of Germany had instituted, and which was now slowly grinding its way across the country with great thoroughness. The political past of every person above the age of 18 had to be investigated as a precondition for a public job.

I remember father pouring over the ten pages of the infamous Fragebogen: Where did you live, for whom did you work, and what did you earn each year since your 18th birthday? What political organisations did you belong to, which religions and what churches? What and whom did you vote for in 1933, what in 1936? It required the signature by a public notary and ended in the stern warning that any willfully wrong information would be punished according to military law. Nobody had ever seen an American questionnaire before and nobody was sure in

what way its authors would try to "twill them a rope", linen einen Strick drehen from the supplied information. father worked on this thing for three weeks. Eventually, after months of suspense a German court under heavy British supervision "denazified" father declaring him "harmless": Stufe 2, Mitterrand der Partei, ohne polilische Ämter. Not everybody was so fortunate. A job for father appeared completely unexpectedly one day in form of a letter from Professor Obst, father's former boss in Breslau. This resourceful inventor of regional planning had reestablished himself seemingly effortless at the University of Hanover and had just landed a project with the new powers of the land, the British Control Commission for Germany. This venture turned out to be as bizarre as it was beautiful: Obst and a select group of cartographic specialists were hired to prepare a "White Book" on the lost German territories east of the Oder-Neisse to be presented by the British Government at the future European peace conference. And Obst offered father a position in his team.

He was unbelievably happy and left us in the middle of that summer for Bad Nenndorf a lesser spa near Hanover which had been taken over by the British and where an old villa had been made available for Obst. And there these experts resided, while starving people were wandering homeless across a country in chaos and ruins, and produced the most beautiful printed volumes of maps and statistical data accounting for the displacement or disappearance of some 10 million people and their possessions. Mother had to deal once again with the daily family life by herself, but the space vacated by father in our communal bed eased our nights.

Soon after father left, the mysterious third Heseding sister finally "passed away". For months the doctor had come to the house every second day to give her injections. Once a week he left after his visit with his honorarium, a ham or an armful of smoked link sausages carefully tucked away in his bag. He looked exceedingly well-fed to us, and we were convinced that he was trying to prolong his patient's days to keep his source of pork for as long as he could.

In the early morning hours of a hot summer night, it was still dark, I was awoken by the ominous hooting of a small owl in the oak tree outside our window. He called again and again. My heart pounding I lay awake knowing that he was calling for her soul, that she was dying next door.

Strangely my memory does not yield any pictures of the wake or the funeral that must have followed.

19. Moors and People 1945-1946

Bauern and Heuerleute, Mother again without her Husband, Digging for Peat, Move to Nordlohne, School in Vechta, The terrible Winter of '46, The stolen Christmas Tree

Six weeks of vacation, no school! My final report card had not shown only A's - Gerhard's was decidedly better - but even my parents thought that I had done as well as I could, and I forgot school quickly. For the first time I was able to explore the neighborhood, the village, and its people who were so different from those I had known at home.

All during my early school years this part of Germany had been held up to us as the

homeland of the true Germanic Man, the Saxon Nation: tall, blue eyed, and blond. What a disappointment they were seen at close range. They were tall alright, even big people, but neither blond nor blue eyed. Everywhere in the village the ravages of generations of inbreeding were visible; children with congenital heart disease, a disproportionate number of spastics, epileptics, and just plain village idiots. The Hesedings were only one "case" among many. It was a sad sight.

The main cause for this degeneration was a social system, the origins of which lay hundreds of years back: The land was owned by a small number of families, the Bauern, farmers, who "hired" it out to a much larger number of Heuerleute, tenant farmers, who did inherit their houses and land-use rights, but had to pay rent to the Bauer in form of labor and produce.

The Hesedings were typical Bauern who owned about five families of Heuerleute. It was obvious that inter-marriages between Bauern and Heuerleuten had happened only rarely in the past, not only because their family names were different, but also because the two types of people were clearly distinct, the Heuerleute being much smaller and darker, but also noticeably more agile, mobile, and less degenerate. Almost all "morons" were Bauern.

I guess since our time much has changed in the Münsterland, this most remote, once purely catholic corner of Oldenburg. The large number of refugees that were dumped unto the area after the war must have refreshed their "Nordic" blood, and the Bodenreform, the land reform enacted by the socialist government of Lower Saxony in the late fifties did the rest.

The countryside was also new, flat and low and full of water, with only a few sand hills that held back vast moors. The many hundred years-old farmsteads of the Bauern, immense low, half-timbered houses under thick, thatched roofs nested, widely separated, like some species of waterfowl inside clumps of old oaks. The much smaller brick houses of the Heuerleute lined the roads single-file forming long, un-pretty villages. One would think that one's eyes could have swept across this panorama seemingly so familiar from the paintings of the old Dutch masters, but everywhere the distance was barred by small woods and cut by rows of trees that had been planted to break the fierce winds blowing from the North Sea during winter. I felt hemmed in by this horizon-less land and often wondered, if the narrow mindedness of the people was not caused by the particular landscape they lived in. Großvater

The most beautiful place was the moor behind the hills. I had never before seen a moor, only listened to Großvater Grohs' tales of "meat-eating" plants that he said grew there, and the grizzly sagas of people being lost or condemned to die in their vast wastes - only to be dug up in modern times as Moorleichen. With this maudlin image in mind the beauty of the bogs came as a true surprise to me, when Gerhard and I were sent to dig peat in the Great Moor in early July.

Coming over the top of the hill the land suddenly stretched as far as one could see: of a bluer green than the farmland, covered with low shrubs, only a few bushes and bright-green birch trees growing here and there. A dark brown spur full of puddles wound into the distance. The moors were very still. Their silence was only broken by the occasional, mysteriously haunting calls of water fowl. But it was the intoxicating smell of wet soil, standing water, and rotting wood, which remained the most pervasive sensual memory of the moors.

We have come with a man, a professional peat digger to cut fuel for the coming winter on an elongated plot assigned to us by the village's burgomaster. The digger has brought his ancient tools, a peculiar double-edged knife with a hook-shaped handle and an overlong,

narrow, razor-sharp spade. He begins by making two long, parallel cuts through the surface with this knife, and then after removing the vegetation on top, bares the dark, almost black peat underneath with his spade.

Alternately cutting vertically and horizontally with the knife and the spade, he continues for a whole morning to produce heavy, sogging wet bricks of peat, which we have to stack edge-over-edge into knee-high piles for drying. It is back-breaking work. Towards noon, the sun beating down on the shadeless land, it gets so hot that we take off our shirts. Looking at our naked bodies, I notice how emaciated we have become, almost like the men on those photographs from the concentration camps. But our hired hand, used to this kind of work, knows no mercy and only stops late in the afternoon leaving a ten-meter long trench behind that is slowly filling with darkly bubbling water. By the end of the summer we will come back to re-stack the bricks, now half-dry and much lighter, into a lattice-work of airy, man-high, conical towers. In November a farmer lent us his horse and wagon to truck the load to our new house. Without this peat we would have frozen to death that winter.

Mother is determined to get us out of the Heseding's house. Every other week she pressures the central refugee office in Lohne with the request to find us another abode. She drags Gerhard and all her other children to a doctor, who smears a spot on our chests with a strange smelling tuberculin test. For two weeks we inspect each other for the small blisters that might form at the spot. Gerhard's test is positive again, although an x-ray reveals no new, open spots in his lungs. But mother obtains the piece of paper that finally extracts the definite promise of a new place from the office. It is already October and raining, when we arrive with our few possessions on a farm cart at the new house in Nordlohne. The move has been kept a secret from the landlord, the owner of the local country store, who is said to have built the four-room, two-story house for his retirement from black-market profits. It is unfinished. Two rooms have doors and windows but the hall and the upper story are open to the roof. We are quickly pushed through the door by the county official, who leaves us with a key and disappears in a hurry.

The rooms are bare, unpainted with only a cement floor, there is no furniture, no running water, no electricity, no stove, no heat, and no bathroom. Outside we find an open well and a short distance away an outhouse left behind by the construction crew. To go there in the coming winter months, we put on mittens and a woolen hat and while sitting there, the only warmth comes from your own turd.

With the help of the county and the landlord's wife a shaky truce is established between mother and Herrn Brinkmann, but he refuses obstinately to pull his hat and greet mother when they meet on the road. I tell her that she is silly to expect politeness from a man, whose old-age insurance we have just snatched away, but mother remains adamant, unable to overcome her own hostility towards the short and stubborn man.

Mrs. Brinkmann allows mother to do her laundry in her "wash-kitchen" whenever her husband is absent. There is even a "washing machine", an ingenious wooden contraption with four paddles turned by a hand wheel, which I now have to operate twice a month.

The county "organizes" beds for us, unfinished ones, two double-deckers and a single one for mother. Each comes with a straw-filled palliasse, on which we shall sleep for the next four years. A week later arrives a primitive coal-burning kitchen stove and a Franklin stove for the other room. But there is no coal, and we have not yet been able to cart our peat home, because of the rain. And then it gets cold, really cold. The first snow falls in early November

and it stays until March. The coldest winter in memory... I begin to steal. First wood from the nearby forest. I remember standing in driving snow, mitten-less with blue hands madly chopping away at a bunch of green branches, which I had earlier cut off the pines in the forest of the local Bauer, fearing all the time to be caught red-handed with all the noise I had to make. But we need the wood, the ceiling above my bed - like at home I sleep on the upper level - is frozen solid, covered with a thick layer of ice crystals, which even the roaring fire that makes the Franklin stove glow cannot melt.

Then shortly before Christmas I stole a Christmas tree for us from another part of the same man's forest. Cutting down the tree in the middle of a snowbound winter night was not "redistributing social wealth", I knew I was stealing. We could not afford a tree from the black market, and we had no negotiable possessions to barter for one. It was a beautiful tree, and to this day. every year when we go to the Los Angeles railroad yards to buy a Christmas tree, my children get very impatient with their father. They don't know that I am still looking for a tree that would at least come close to the stolen one of 1946. It stood next to mother's bed in the kitchen. We hung it with a few apples and straw-and-wool stars that Christine had made. And how could there be Christmas without real candles on it? I made them by dipping cotton yarn in bees wax, which mother had unexpectedly found at the Brinkmann's store. father had come from Bad Nenndorf for the first time, and like at home mother cooked a carp for dinner on Christmas Eve, which had been very cheap, because nobody ate carp in Oldenburg. And it was warm and the tree smelled, and we all sat near the burning candles on mother's bed for dinner, because we had only two chairs. There were few presents, but miraculously we were all together and happy.

Perhaps this Christmas remains so strong in my memory, because thereafter family harmony seems to have vanished never to return.

As the dark months of this cold winter continued and food became so scarce that we often had to live of mother's begging and my stealing, patience with each other, and love and understanding became emotional luxuries, which we could ill afford. mother's seemingly inexhaustible strength had become so depleted that after she had provided for our basic needs, there was not enough energy left to go around among her children. The lowest point in our life, however, came in early Spring 47 after the snow had melted. Not only was all our food supply gone but the farmers had nothing left either. With horror I remember the sunny day, when one of our cousins arrived for an unexpected visit. He just stood in the door happy to have found us, and there was absolutely nothing to eat in .the house. Mother took me to the side and whispered that I had to quickly run to the nearest farm and beg for some potatoes for dinner. With hanging head I walked from farm to farm for two hours and came back with five whole potatoes. It was then that mother began to have those terrible nightmares again, from which she woke screaming. Sometimes she dreamed that the Poles were knocking down our door, at other times she dreamed that she was hungry and begging for food for us at a farmer's door, who not only gave her nothing, but chased a dog after her that looked like Barro.

Worse of all, I was aware that I was slowly losing the special confidence, which I had enjoyed with mother for two long years. Puberty approaching, I felt full of pain over mother's inability to understand my most pressing questions. For the first time I also discovered that the responsibility, which was the other half of the intimacy I shared with her, was becoming a burden. Right or wrong, I accused her of having deprived me of my childhood and retreated

from our communal family life more and more into a separate world of my own. This separation took many years but its beginning was in that winter.

Already before we moved we had been sent to school in Vechta, the largest town in the area. Christine was consigned to the "Nuns", who operated an excellent, albeit catholic, high-school for girls, while Gerhard and I went to the Gymnasium for boys, which was only slightly less religiously biased. For a while we walked every morning to Lohne and took the train to Vechta. Later, from Nordlohne there was also the choice of a bus, which however was more expensive, and we could only use it when mother's purse allowed it. So we joined the Fahrschüler, commuting students, who as a group had the reputation of low responsibility, perennial tardiness, and quite generally "of doing immoral things" during the long hours of their unsupervised journeys.

The enormous masses of snow that fell in January put an end to both the bus and the train and would have been an end to our going to school, if it had not been for mother. She decided that, if we could not ride to Vechta, we certainly could still walk there. It was a distance of 10 kilometers through lonely, uninhabited woods and moors, but walk we did.

The three of us left shortly after five in the morning, in complete darkness. In several places the snow drifts were three meters high. We walked for two hours. At first I was very angry with mother and sulked all the way, but after a few days I began to enjoy the long walk, especially the way home. After school I had once again to take Nachhilfestunden, make-up lessons in Latin from an unemployed Gymnasialprofessor, a German speaking refugee from Hermannsstadt, Rumania - Bela Lengyel always reminds me of him - and so I could walk home unencumbered by the presence of the twins. For as long as I pleased, I could dawdled and nobody nagged me with any domestic duties or crossed my musings. I had discovered two unusual places along the way. One was a half-destroyed munitions factory hidden in the woods, where one could find mounds of discarded brass shells, and the other a former Freilichtanlage, an open-air meeting place of the Nazis, where I imagined them to have staged torchlit solstice celebrations and the like. It reminded me of the Floriansberg in Habelschwerdt. The already faded nostalgia of the place matched my present mood well, that, later when Spring came again, I would occasionally escape there to lie under the trees and read or just dream.

School was rough. Not only were the academic demands much higher than in Dinklage, but we also had a devoutly catholic bully of a principal, who felt that discipline in his school was lacking and soon discovered me as an especially troublesome student. After that I had little peace from his vigilance, he would constantly watch me and catch me at the smallest transgression. Mother was ordered to appear twice at his office during the year. The first time because I had in the morning darkness smeared the chair of our boring Latin teacher with chalk, and the senile, old man had made the mistake to sit on it. The second time Dr. Kimmel, who was the best mathematics teacher I ever had and whom I adored, discovered that I was reading a book on advanced calculus under my desk, whilst he was still trying to introduce my dumb co-students to the fundamentals of geometry. He confiscated the book and added hurt to injury by telling mother that I should rather play soccer than read math books at this stage in my life.

To escape from the difficulties at home and my lack of success at school, I began reading Goethe and - calculus. The mystery of how very real problems could be solved by a formal mathematics using infinitesimal quantities occupied me for months. I quickly learned

how to use this formalism to solve physics problems, but never really understood the concept of the limit to the infinitely small, and the physics teacher, whom I pestered with my questions, could not explain it to me either. Still it bolstered my damaged self-respect. I had taught myself a subject that belonged into the curriculum of the last school year.

Goethe lasted longer. I borrowed one volume after the other from the school's library and carried them around with me wherever I went. I devoured everything, all his plays, even the obscure ones. "Wilhelm Meister", "Die Wahlverwandtschaften". the poems, and "Faust", the second part of which I must have read two or three times. When I first came to Greece six years later, I could still recite parts of Faust II at the appropriate places. Later I read the "West-Östliche Divan", which became my favorite poetry, and I still read in it sometimes today. Mother, who in her practical mind considered poetry an esoteric pursuit, good only for intellectual ninnies, made fun of me by calling it an adolescent infatuation. - Which did not help to improve our faltering relationship.

20. Gelnhausen June 1947

A Letter from Grossmutter Hammer, Mother and I travel to Gelnhausen, Brigitte

One early morning, it was still in Brockdorf, mother was coming across the fields from the post office, tears running down her face, and she was laughing at the same time. It was a beautiful, sunny day. She held a bundle of pages and a hastily opened envelope. When she saw me she shouted, "Rolf, Rolf, there is a letter from Großmutter. She is in Gelnhausen with Tante Magda." She hugged me, and then we read the letter together.

The last time we had heard from Großmutter Hammer and Tante Grete had been almost two years ago, in 1944 just before the Russians encircled Breslau. We did not know whether they had survived, or where they had fled to. Onkel Gerhard had loaded the two old people into one of the last trains out of the Festung Breslau, they had escaped the terrible bombing of Dresden and the Tiefflieger on their way across wintery Germany, and here they were well and safe, living at Tante Magda's house.

The letter also brought the good news that all of mother's relatives were alive and together, Onkel Fritz with his family in Köln, Tante Magda and her three children, and Tante Irmgard who also escaped from Breslau at the last moment and was living with the children in Schleitz in the Ostzone, in East Germany.

Ever since Großmutter's letter had arrived mother was living for the day that she could take her in her arms in Gelnhausen, - and that was where we were going now. It had been a difficult undertaking. Gelnhausen, not far from Frankfurt-on-the- Main, was in the American Zone and to travel there required a special permit from the authorities, which took weeks to obtain - unless you had some "pork" to offer. With the help of the refugee office and because of grandmother's advanced age mother had finally secured the papers, a week earlier - in June of 1947.

It was night and we had been on the train since early morning. Behind us lay the ruins

of Osnabrück and Hannover, frightening mounds of rubble, above which chimneys and blackened house fronts reached into the sky. In Hannover we had to wait for a connection and had wandered out of the station looking for something to eat. It was my first look at a burned out city. The center of Hannover had been a jumble of narrow lanes with old, half-timbered houses, which had burned quickly. Only the basements were left with the entrances into the underground air-raid shelters gaping like black holes. Here and there on the walls were messages written for a friend or some husband or son returning from the front: "Fritz, we are alive! Come to Aunt Sophie's. Christa and the children." How many must have come back, for whom there was no message.

We finally had found a soup kitchen in a primitive wooden shack amidst the ruins. The large, run-down place with a few benches and stand-up tables along the walls smelled of potato soup and unwashed clothes. One wall was covered entirely with photos and messages of people looking for each other: soldiers, friends, wives, grandparents, and many, many children. The young woman who ladled the soup from a huge cauldron into the aluminum dishes we had been given, had a sign stuck to her coat saying: "Who knows Christian W.? 5th Panzerregiment. Reported Prisoner of War. Area of Stalingrad." Still full of hope, her beautiful brown eyes peered anxiously into the gray faces of the stream of gray people passing before her, whom hunger and deprivation had long made indifferent to any such plight.

There were people, too many people, in gray-green uniforms from which the lapels and insignia had been cut off, in discarded American army coats, or just in rags. They wound along the wall in a long queue towards the soup kettle, hunger written all over their sagging, unshaven faces. Marked people, like Kain had been a marked man after he had killed his brother. Still walking they fell over the thin soup like animals. The din of their spoons hitting the aluminum bowls filled the room.

All through the night the train rattled on. Only one of us could sit at any time on our suitcase and try to nap for a while, the other had to stand. Shortly after midnight we arrived at the border station to the American Zone. We were all chased from the train and had to carry our suitcases through a heavily guarded inspection station, where some of our papers were taken away and others were stamped. An hour later we fought our way into another train for another six-hour ride south into the early morning.

We arrived in Gelnhausen two hours late. Tante Magda was waiting for us at the station. Following the two unequal sisters, slightly dazed from the long night, I carried our suitcase up the steep cobblestone lane to the Obermarkt, past the Marienkirche, and along the Alte Leipziger StraBe. And there, under the big chestnut tree near where the stairs to the "Halbmond" climb the hill, suddenly stood Brigitte carrying her school books under her arm. She was about as tall as I and wore a blue cotton dress, with a white collar, a belt, and a wide skirt. She had thick, dark-blond hair cut above her shoulders and sandals on her bare feet. When shaking mother's hand she made a curtsy like a coy school girl, so that it was a surprise when her voice turned out to be a quiet alto. A smile was in her brown eyes when she gave me her hand. Much too fast she ran off down the street.

I had been given a room under the roof for myself, something I had never had before, and was then left to myself. Absentmindedly I wandered through the large house. It had been built by Brigitte's grandfather at the beginning of the century, a regal, wood-paneled staircase at its center with a two-story stained-glass window to match. Among the bric-a-brac and the heavy period furniture of that time I discovered in the lower hall faded family photographs that

Onkel Otto, Brigitte's father had taken. One showed a group of crinolined ladies surrounding an important looking gentleman with hat and cane, obviously "Reichsgerichtsrat" Stölzel himself. A later one pictured a blooming Tante Magda arm in arm with a young mustachioed man in the uniform of the Wandervögel: Knickerbockers, hiking-boots, and a Loden-jacket. He must have been Onkel Otto, whom Magda had met in the youth-movement of the late twenties, and who had died of tuberculosis soon after Brigitte was born. But nothing could chase away the strange state of tired happiness and anxious expectation, which left me restless all morning. Finally I found myself a book, but fell asleep, the picture of the Brigitte in the blue cotton dress floating before my eyes.

It was already evening, when I found her in her grandfather's library doing her homework. Sitting on the edge of her desk, wanting to be near her, but remaining at a distance, I talked to her for hours. All the questions that had been going through my mind for months overflowed: the mathematics I was doing and my discovery of Goethe, death, God, and religion and my problems with mother. And she listened, and I was filled with an unknown happiness.

Brigitte was eighteen then, two years older than I, and in the fall was about to enter the final year of Gymnasium. It was not that she was pretty - since her childhood she had had to wear glasses, because one of her eyes had a weak muscle and would look cross, when she got tired - but she was warm and strong and beautiful in a very special way, and all things she touched became beautiful and numenous to me. Together we discovered Gelnhausen.

From a wizened woman sexton, who lived in a narrow witch-house below the church and who knew her by name, Brigitte got the huge iron-key, with which she admits me into the half-light of the Marienkirche. The church had been built in the early thirteenth century as part of a convent. High, Romanesque arches still support the nave, but the nuns' choir, behind its sandstone screen, is already pure Gothic.

Brigitte pushes open the heavy iron door in the choir-screen, its clangs and creaks echo through the church, and we stand, flooded by the light streaming from the stained glass windows, before the main altar: Mary, wearing a crown, the child on her arm under an explosion of delicate, Gothic Masswerk. They are lovely figures, carved from wood still with their original paint. Faint frescoes adorn the walls.

When we return to the nave, I see that the choir-screen is surmounted by an over life-sized, disturbingly surrealist crucifix, a reminder that the Gothic was a time as much of ecstasy as death. During the century to follow half the population of the town died from the plague. On the columns below Brigitte shows me the sculptures of the resurrection where the damned - popes, kings, and the powerful - are dragged to hell by devils, and the simple people, smiling blissfully, ascend to heaven.

Later, led by Brigitte, who has a special liking for climbing church towers, scaring up dozens of bats and pigeons, we climb the central tower over the quadrature of the nave. There we sit in the company of four great stone angels blowing trumpets into the four directions and talk, overlooking the jumble of medieval roofs below us and the sun flooded fields and hills of the Spessart across the Kinzig valley to the south.

On another hot afternoon we lie in the shade of the chestnut trees in the "Burg" the imperial palace that Emperor Friedrich Barbarossa built on an island in the Kinzig. Only a row of exquisite columns and a few crumbling walls attest to the palace's former splendor, but from there, looking up, the panorama of the town ascending a steep mountainside has the two-

dimensional quality of an old, handcolored Merian print. The churches, towers, and houses climb one on top the other below a line-up of red quarries and the lush green woods of the mountain.

Here among the ruins of the old palace, a few evenings later, I have my first bout with real jealousy. Brigitte had invited me to a play put on by her class, and I have to watch, how she is surrounded by a whole gang of admirers, not only on stage, but worse, afterwards on our way home through the sleeping town.

Brigitte is still in school, and I wile away whole mornings without her, restless and dreaming, hungry for love and beauty, my mind is entirely absorbed with the new world of colors and forms that she has opened to my eyes. There is little room left for other people beside her. Even Großmutter's magic is powerless to reclaim me. With an ironic smile she muses, "Ja, die Brigitte, die Manner gehen ihr auf den Leim wie Singvöge!" - yes Brigitte, she catches men like songbirds on a lime-twig, which I remember, because curiously it pleased me. Tante Magda sees it differently and calls me "ein fauler, selbstgefälliger Egoist," - a lazy, self-centered egotist. Her verdict, un-rescinded for years, was to remain a thorn in my pride for a long time. She finally suggests that I do something useful for the community and clean the old vineyard of dead wood.

The "vineyard" - it had not seen any vines since the great philoxera disaster in the 1890's and was now covered with overgrown fruit trees - climbed terrace upon terrace up the Berg behind the house. At is upper border I found a hedge of grown-wild blackberry bushes covered over and over with fruit. Not much work got done. Most of the morning I lay up there, out of sight, in the warm sun, listening to the bees, eating blackberries by the handful, and trying to commit to memory every line and color of the Spessart on the opposite side of the valley, - until Brigitte found me, and we escaped by a hidden gate on a long walk through the woods of the mountain.

Pacific Palisades June 15, 2011