OMA'S MEMOIRS

By Hannchen Erna Gantenbein

With Ruth Wood

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DEDICATION

To my grandchildren—Justin, Tim, AnnaChristie, Gretchen, Holly, Rachel, Markus, Heidi, and Katie.

This book is dedicated to you, and of course I hope that it will be passed down to your children and their children. Isaiah 33:6 says, "He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure."

May the Lord who remains faithful protect and keep you,

Oma

FORWARD

Dear Readers,

Since the first draft of my mother's memoirs was given to the family in 2008, we found that the book has also resonated with others. So, with a final edit, I set this story, like a little paper boat, gently in the stream of publishing.

May you always be blessed with unshakeable hope,

Ruth Wood

INTRODUCTION

How oft in grief, hath not He brought thee relief, spreading His wings for to shade thee! (From the German hymn "Praise Ye the Lord, the Almighty")

My life changed forever when the Russian hordes invaded eastern Germany at the end of World War II. Eventually I lost everything—my family, my home, and all worldly possessions. Only one thing remained—my God.

You, my dear grandchildren, face an increasingly complex and challenging world. In sharing my past, I hope to somehow speak to the future. Perhaps you'll see something about family and community that inspires. Or better understand the value of routine and order and the structure these provide. And that we can endure much, if we must, with God. But I am getting ahead of the story.

With the Russian occupation, an entire culture and way of life slipped into oblivion forever. I want to tell you about this lost world. Perhaps by recording my memories, it will not be entirely forgotten.

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I was born on a 300-year-old farm in the village of Habendorf in the province of Silesia, Germany.[1] Earliest records mentioning our village date to the 1200s. Slavic and Germanic tribes settled here. Over the centuries, a mixed Polish and German population saw Polish, Bohemian, Austrian, and Prussian rule before Silesia, in 1871, became part of a unified Germany. The volatile history of this region played a significant role in what happened to us after the war.

On the following map, look for Breslau, capitol of Silesia, and notice our proximity to the borders of Czechoslovakia and Poland. Habendorf stood 42 miles west of Breslau. In 1943 the population of my village was officially listed at 927; today it stands at 580. World War II brought great upheaval, changed the borders, and displaced millions of eastern Germans. To find my birthplace on a current map today, you must look for Owiesno, Poland.

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[1] Interesting facts about Silesia:

- The forefathers of Copernicus hailed from the Silesian village, "Koeprich."
- Another Silesian town, Reichenstein, provided the gold used to make wedding rings for German kings and emperors.
- Silesia has produced nine noble prize winners.
- In 1943 the county we belonged to, Reichenbach, had three cities, fifty-seven villages and a population of 82,816. There were many castles in this region of Germany including the one in our village.

Those of us living in rural eastern Germany experienced World War II differently than people in western Germany or those living in cities. I want to help you understand our way of life before the war and its aftermath changed everything.

1

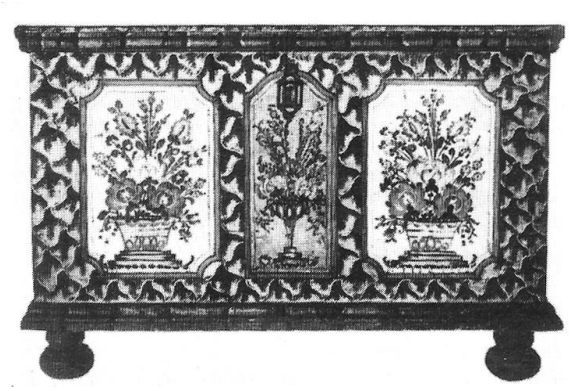
THE FARMHOUSE

Your great, great grandfather, Wilhelm Becke, acquired the farm around 1875. This house and the surrounding buildings were very old. The three-foot-thick walls provided ample window shelf space, wonderful for displaying plants and flowers. The earliest buildings had been built with field stones and loam; bricks and mortar were used for later additions.

Our cow barn, the oldest building on the farm, featured an interior with arched roof trusses. This architectural style hailed back to the Romans, and I've never seen any barns like this here. Since houses are so different in America, it might help if I describe our farmhouse to you.

From the front door we entered a foyer tiled with rough, reddish stone. To the right stood our indoor water pump (the courtyard also had one) and to the left, a staircase led to a large landing from which we accessed four bedrooms. The small bedroom led to our provisions chamber, a very large room the width of the whole house which kept cool because it faced north. Remember, we had no refrigeration.

In this room we stored smoked sausages, bacon and ham, canned goods, and dried apples. Dried peppermint and chamomile hung from the ceiling. Antiques filled one corner—a spinning wheel, colorful petroleum lamps in various sizes, my grandfather's war medals pillow, old photos, and old-fashioned greeting cards, some even written on birch.



From the second story landing, a stairway led to a huge attic where we stored wheat kernels. An old cabinet stored Father's guns, a saber, a saddle and other miscellaneous items.[2] From the attic you could lean a ladder against the wall to reach the pigeon loft where I later hid from the Russians.

The parlor was on the first floor to the right of the entrance. We only used it on weekends, holidays, or for special occasions. Next to it you would find a pantry where we stored the bread in a special cabinet with air holes to prevent molding. A sturdy table about 100 years old stood against the wall. It was covered with a light blue tablecloth edged by the Lord's Prayer woven in white letters into the fabric. This table held our meal leftovers, crocks of butter, cakes and other baked goods.

A door under the foyer staircase led to the kitchen. To the right stood a large, brown tiled, old world stove where we cooked on large iron platters fueled by a coal fire underneath. These platters glowed red when fully heated.

We had no running water in the house but filled our containers at the water pump in the foyer. Fortunately, the stove contained a large water tank. We also kept a heated pot of hot water on the stove at all times. Attached to the stove was a coal-fed baking oven where we dried apples.

The kitchen also served as our bathing room, and every Saturday we children got a bath. Mother first heated hot water in a large basin on the stove. Then she brought in the tin bathtub and filled it with warm water. She'd only shampoo our hair every two weeks and I hated it. The shampoo was an awful concoction that made your hair clump together and created a mass of tangles. You could barely comb your hair after a shampoo. Mother bathed each of us one at a time. I remember how good it felt to put on a clean night gown and go to bed afterwards.

In the summers we went barefoot and took a foot bath daily. As a little girl I liked the foot baths so much, I put the rest of myself in the water too—fully clothed! Did that ever upset the adults. Now they had even more work to do.

[2] Cabinet similar to ours in style.

Along the wall, next to the stove, stood a low bench where we set large iron pots and pans. Cooking utensils hung above the bench. To the left of the bench in the corner, stood a wash table with a porcelain bowl where we washed our face and hands. The house did not have a bathroom—we used an outhouse.

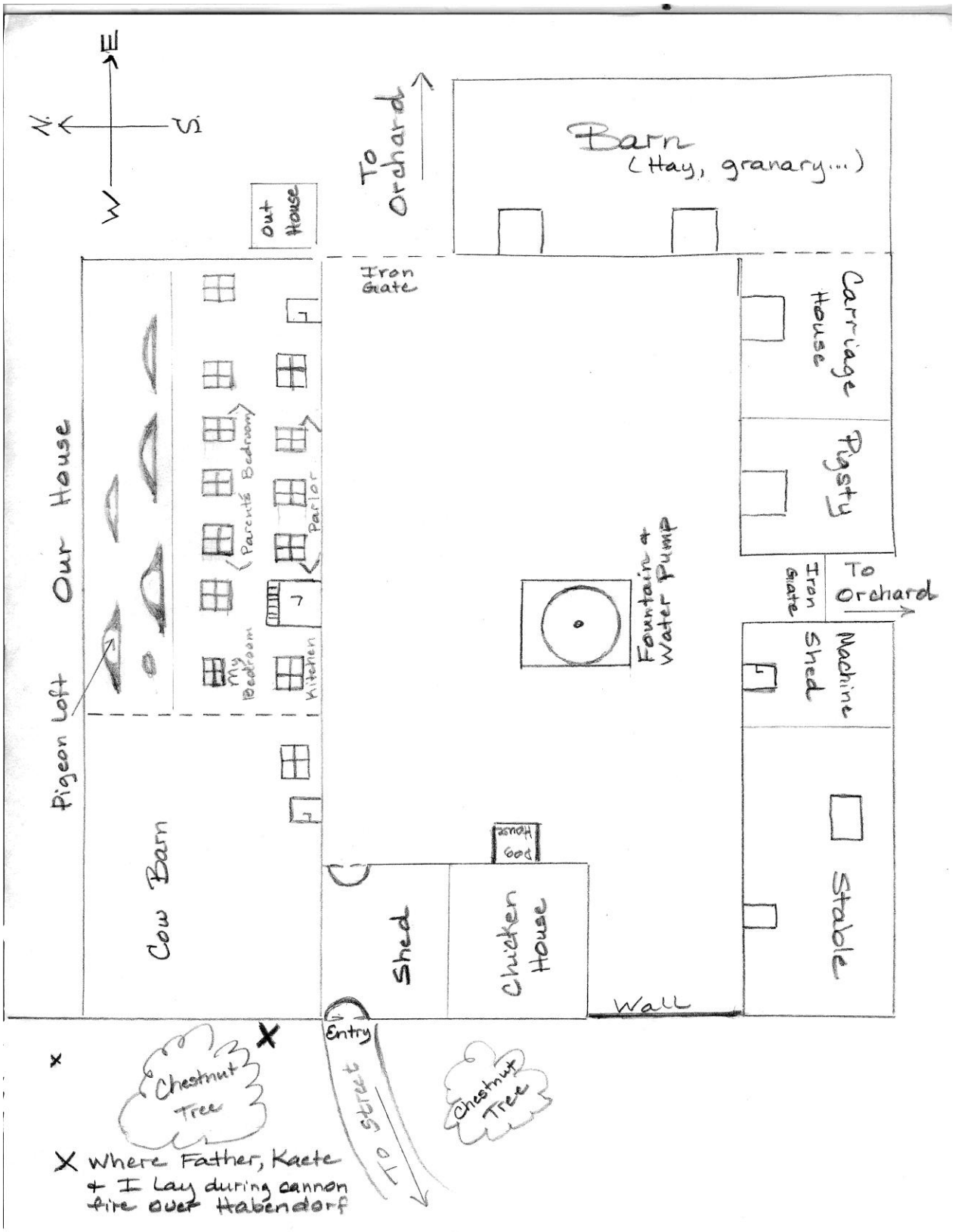
Next to the wash station, against the back wall, stood a work table where we washed dishes in a wooden bin. Using no dish detergent or soap, we rinsed the dishes first, and then washed them in hot water. This was customary in those days.

In the corner next to the work table stood a cabinet that stored our dishes, silverware, and staples such as flour and sugar. Our radio sat on top of this cabinet.

An L-shaped bench hugged the left wall flanking the kitchen table, and chairs provided more seating on the other side. A lamp hung from the ceiling over the table, and this cozy corner of the kitchen is where I did my homework. In fact, most of our family life took place in this room. The kitchen contains so many memories. It is also the room where I was nearly killed by a Pole with a bayonet.

The electric cream separator machine was attached to the wall in the corner to the left of the table and the butter-making machine stood here as well.

Exiting from the kitchen to the left, a trap door in the floor led to a staircase descending to the small dirt-floor basement where we stored winter vegetables such as carrots, onions, leeks, parsnips and turnips. From the foyer, a long hall led straight to the old barn, a nice convenience—we didn't have to go out in the rain to milk the cows! A drawing of the courtyard shows how the farm was laid out.


E
N
W
S
To Orchard
Barn
(Hay, granary...)
out House
Iron Gate
Carriage House
Pigsty
Iron Gate
To Orchard
Our House
Parents Bedroom
Parlor
My Bedroom
Kitchen
Pigeon Loft
Fountain + Water Pump
Machine Shed
Cow Barn
Pig House
Shed
Chicken House
Stable
Wall
Entry
To street
Chestnut Tree
Chestnut Tree
X Where Father, Kaete + I Lay during cannon fire over Habendorf

ERNST WILHELM ARTHUR HAASE

Born November 11, 1891. Died May 29, 1945.

Your great grandfather, Arthur Haase, the oldest of seven children, came from an old farm family in Reichenbach, Silesia. Since his mother's name, Auguste, began with "A" she gave the boys "A" names, such as Arthur and Alfred. The girls' names, Ella and Elfriede, started with "E," after their father, Ernst. In one year, three of their seven children died of diphtheria. Father also came down with it, but he was strong enough to survive.

Father can best be described as a go-getter. At seventeen, he voluntarily enlisted in the army looking quite the dapper Hussar in his green uniform sporting gold braids and buttons.[3] After serving four years, World War I broke out. Using lances, swords, and pistols, his cavalry took part in battles across Poland, Russia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria.

I loved listening to Father tell his war stories. Sometimes the blacksmith, the butcher, or other veterans of World War I would visit and the men smoked cigars and talked. Once Father received a deep sable wound above his left arm. Another time he was almost gored with a lance from behind, but because he quickly bent forward on his horse, the wound only penetrated a few centimeters deep. In another battle, his favorite horse was so severely wounded that he had to make the heartbreaking decision to shoot it.

Father told how he took part in the campaign when the Germans chased the Russians into the Rokitno swamps where they perished. "War is terrible," he would say. At the end of his military career, Father became a sergeant and earned the Iron Cross Second Class and the Close Combat Honorary Pin.

After eight years of military duty, Father returned home only to learn that his parents had sold the farm and their house which should have been handed down to him. His parents apparently made this decision because they did not believe that he would survive the war and because his younger brother studied business and had no plans to farm. Now Father was at a loss what to do.

What is a farmer without land? Father decided to go bride hunting.[4] He visited various farms under

[3] Hussar – (1) originally one of a body of light Hungarian cavalry formed during the 15th century. (2) One of a class of similar troops, usually with striking or flamboyant uniforms, in European armies.)

[4] These are your great grandparents, Arthur and Ottilie Haase, on their wedding day. My mother was only about 5'3", so you can see that Father was not a tall man.

the guise of looking to buy a horse, and that was how he spied his Ottilie. With the marriage, Ottilie's father transferred the family farm to the couple. Father spent many years paying off his wife's six sisters, a heavy financial burden.

Hitler later enacted a law stating that a farm was to be inherited by the oldest son, and he would not need to buy out the siblings. In this way the government was trying to alleviate the debt hanging over farms. However, if something happened to the heir, the farm passed to the youngest child. Legally, I would have been the rightful heir to our farm since my brother died in the war.

Not long after Father and Mother married, a man offered to renovate the entire property. Father had inherited enough money from his parents to do it; however, he refused the offer. Unfortunately, only two to three years later, during the hyper-Inflation of 1922-23, currency lost its value. Money was so inflated that a loaf of bread cost 250 marks. Father and his parents lost their savings, all the money they had made from the sale of their farm. And so it went with them as it did with many others. Rich people became poor. If only he had made the renovations when he had the chance! This mistake continued to gall Father for a long time.

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Father was a wild character. In the military he lifted a full bucket of milk with his teeth just to show off. He had very strong teeth and died at age fifty-two with only one filling. Surprisingly, he never brushed them and didn't even own a toothbrush. Even more surprisingly, he didn't have bad breath.

We children learned good dental hygiene in school where daily brushing was emphasized. I owned my own toothbrush and brushed regularly.

In the early years of marriage Father drank too much whenever he went to town. Once he came home, unhitched the horse, and then hung onto the horse's tail while bringing it to a gallop with his whip. He was just crazy.

Sometimes he'd come home singing at the top of his lungs. Apparently in those days Mother worried a lot and shed many tears. At home he never drank, but out with his pals, he was susceptible to temptation. Later when he developed ulcers, he stopped drinking.

However, smoking remained his vice. He loved cigars. He smoked a cheap cigar on workdays and an expensive brand on Sundays and holidays. With a good cigar you could bribe him. He was completely given over to this addiction. If he didn't have a cigar, he was in a bad mood.

Military order and discipline ruled our lives. At 5:00 a.m. sharp, Father leaped out of bed, flying with both legs into his long underwear. Then he was off, banging on all doors shouting, "Time to get up!" His first business was to feed the horses then brush and curry them. Several times a day the stalls were cleaned and new hay was strewn inside. Everything was always swept and clean. On weekends the horses' hooves were smeared with black shoe fat, their manes and tails were combed and they got their rest. Only light work was allowed occasionally such as pulling the carriage to go to church or take a Sunday drive.

We had a horse named Hans who knew when it was Sunday. On that day, he'd always manage to get out of his halter and bang on the stall gate until it would spring open. Then he'd stroll about the yard and graze contentedly.

Horses were father's passion. He ran a horse breeding business with a couple of studs, and they produced excellent foals which we then sold, often with heavy hearts because we had grown so attached to them.

Father often helped other farmers break in young horses which were first hooked to old plowing horses for training. Some lashed out and tried to rear up. Taming them took a strong will—but they met their match in Father.

I respected my father and was proud of his leadership in the community, yet not once do I remember that he hugged me or that I hugged him. I would have never asked to sit on his lap. I wanted it that way as I was too afraid of him, but I knew that he loved me and would lay down his life for me.

I always felt secure with him, especially during a thunderstorm or when he was driving the horses and they were wild and unruly. I always felt he could handle anything. Love is not just hugs and kisses—it's feeling wanted, being able to trust, feeling secure.

Father would go to town and would often bring me something. I still have the scissors he brought me from Hanover when I was ten. This little gift meant so much.

OTTILIE AGNES HAASE

Born November 13, 1887. Married May 15, 1920.
Died April 11, 1945.

Your great, great grandparents, Wilhelm and Johanna Christiane Becke, were blessed with eight children—seven girls and one boy. The girls were all very pretty, with thick, dark hair. Though her sisters had green or gray eyes, my mother's were brown. The girls' names, in birth order, were Selma, Emma, Hulda, Klara, Ida,

Ottilie and Auguste. The only brother, Oskar, was a middle child and died in his twenties of pneumonia.

All the sisters had good voices and sang everywhere—out in the fields, in the house or in the barn. With so many of them, they had their own choir. However, when they began to whistle their mother would say, "Girls that whistle and hens that crow ought to be strangled." She found it "bourgeoisie," and unfeminine.

On Sundays the sisters wore pretty dresses to church, high top shoes made of fine leather, and crocheted fingerless gloves. If they wore short sleeves, the gloves reached their elbows. A hat with all kinds of things on it completed the outfit. I still remember these hats and the well-sewn silk dresses with bodices and corsets. We used these dresses for costumes when we played theater.

Christmas in my mother's day meant perhaps receiving a new pair of knitting needles. It simply was not customary to give many gifts, only something small. Parents did not have the means, and they held strong beliefs around not spoiling children. The focus of Christmas centered on the birth of Christ. In my day, it became more customary to give gifts.

Sweets were reserved for special occasions as society frowned on the habit of snacking. If we received a small bag of candy or a bar of chocolate on a special occasion, we were thrilled. Even an orange would make your heart soar.

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When Ottilie and Arthur married, they took over her parents' farm. Grandmother was no longer alive but Grandfather continued to live there. This dear man suffered greatly under my father who sometimes berated him at dinner for spilling his soup because of a tremor. I was told my Mother cried many times in secret over this. She felt so sorry for her father. It would have been improper for her to reprimand her husband in front of the hired help that usually joined them for meals. Her only option was to express her distress privately.

All children were born at home with the help of a midwife. Kurt, their firstborn, slept and ate on schedule and caused no problems. When sister Kaete joined the family 13 months later, she proved his opposite, crying day and night.

About 2-1/2 years later, Christa Ruth arrived on January 31, 1926, but it was a difficult birth. All the effort went into saving Mother, and the child was neglected. Three days later the baby died. Such events were not uncommon but heartbreaking nevertheless.

I made my entrance into the world on January 14, 1929, during the hardest winter of the century. Mother was forty-two years old by then. Father traveled with the sled through a great snow storm to get the midwife. Everyone worried that he would become stuck in a snow bank and breathed a collective sigh of relief when he arrived with help in time.

They told me that I took after Kurt, though I was livelier. Whenever Mother laid me on the diapering table, she'd quickly tap on the overhanging lamp, so that I'd be astonished at the swinging object, would forget to kick, and let her change me. Since it was winter and very cold, mother spent three months attending her new baby in the upstairs, cozy bedroom while Tante Ida and our maids cooked, milked the cows, and made butter. She often said this was one of the best times of her life. As the youngest in the family, I have always received so much love from everyone.

Mother often sang in her beautiful, clear soprano voice while she worked, especially while making butter or cooking. I learned a lot of folk songs and hymns that way. I still remember lying in bed in my upstairs room over the kitchen listening to her as she churned butter. Her favorite song was:

"Wait my soul, wait on the Lord;
For when your world is broken, God will not forsake you.
For certainly your need is not greater than your Helper.
In all storms, in all distress, our Great God will protect you."

How often I've often thought of this song throughout my life. Yes, the Lord has truly been my Helper in all storms.

When Mother sang songs about dying and heaven, I didn't like it and would clap my hands over my ears. She said she looked forward to heaven, but I didn't want to give her up. I could not have known then how little time was left.

I deeply loved and admired my Mama, so modest in her expectations of life, never asking much for herself. My favorite thing was to sit on her lap and press my cheek against hers, and I did this until I was almost as tall as she. Then she started saying, "Mousekin, you've become too big a lump to sit here anymore." I loved to be near her—I felt secure, safe and protected. Mother's contagious, free laugh always made me so happy. She was a cheerful woman despite bearing heavy sorrows, especially troubles with Father.

Though Father was very dominating and strict, he loved her very much. Mother often cried secretly, but her red eyes betrayed her. Sometimes she cried because Father was too strict with us, especially with Kurt. If I noticed that she had cried, it would make me sad, and I would make every effort to make her happy.

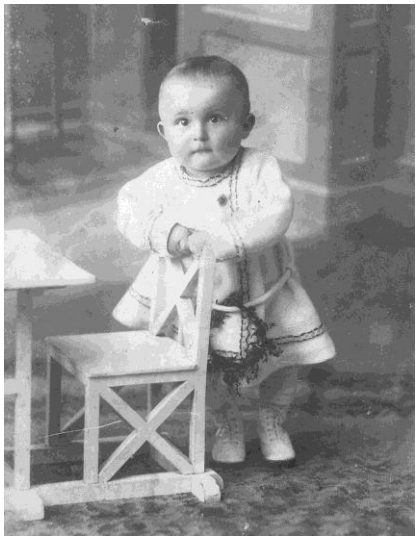
I had the best mother, one who prayed with me and for me. She also didn't hesitate to drive nonsense out of my head with a few firm whacks now and then. I would always be so ashamed that I had irritated her so much. Usually I acted up because I was bored or irritable from not feeling well. I didn't want to cause my dear Mama distress and never left without saying farewell. I constantly lived in fear that one day she would die, and I would not have said goodbye.

2

KURT GUENTER HAASE

Born May 8, 1922. Died December 29, 1943, Odessa Field Hospital.

Kurt was born at home on May 8, 1922. I was told he was a contented baby, ate, slept and grew; however, his main fault caused Mother a lot of extra work. When he woke from his nap, he very quietly did his business, took off his diaper and artfully smeared himself, and this on a daily basis. Mother usually caught him too late to avoid the tedious job of bathing him and having to wash the bedding.



He slept in a white wicker crib under a blue canopy. His baby carriage had tall wheels and a white porcelain handle. Green velvet curtains shielded him from the sun. When I went home for the first time in 1984, it was emotional to see that baby carriage again.

In our day little boys wore dresses until they were potty trained. Mothers swaddled their babies in cloth diapers since safety pins were not yet invented.[5]

When Kurt was six years old and ready to start school, he never wanted to go alone. He'd sit under the chestnut tree and wait until children from the other end of the village came by. If not, he didn't want to go. Mother fretted and kept going outside to check on him, and here he'd still be sitting under the tree. The three kilometer walk was quite long for such small boys. Finally he got to know children at school, and they came by to get him each morning.

What he didn't want to do, he didn't do. Once at a village festival all the children joined in the sack hopping relay. Whoever came in first would get a prize. Kurt also had a sack but didn't budge. Mother called, "Hop to it! Why aren't you going?" Kurt said, "That's too dumb for me." And he didn't hop. Mother was so ashamed—all the children except her son were having fun.

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[5] Photo of Kurt at his one-year birthday party.

Kurt was already seven when I arrived, and when he saw his new little sister, he kissed me very gently I was told. He called Kaete "The Screamer" and me the "Cry Baby." Evenings when Father was not at home we held pillow fights until one of us cried—usually me, being the youngest. They knocked the pillows around my ears, and I couldn't defend myself enough. But I'd get revenge! In fury I'd hang on Kaete's long braids making her howl. Mother would have to set things in order with a few whacks, but pillow fights were fun, and we had many despite how they usually ended up.

The three of us shared a bedroom with our parents when we were little. When I lay in the crib next to Mother, I always wanted her to hold my hand and held on tight until I fell asleep. I always wanted security. A year after I was born, Kurt moved into his own room. Later Kaete and I shared one. My parents put us to bed early. Mother prayed with us before tucking us in. They retired much later themselves.

One winter day my parents decided to drive to town. They gave strict instructions to Kurt and Kaete and also the maids that no one was to go skating on the pond because the ice was not solid enough yet.

But after they left, my brother and sister slipped out of the house and went to the pond where they met two other girls. They decided to test the ice without skates first. Crash, the first girl broke in. The second wanted to help; she also went in; same with the third, Kaete. Then Kurt tried to help and also broke through the ice, but he was able to make it out and ran to get help.

Frau Becke, who owned the pond, came running with a long pole and a rope. Only three red hats were visible as the girls bobbed on the surface of the water. She laid the pole over the ice, pulled out the first girl and soundly gave her a few lashes with her rope. Then she pulled out the next and gave her the same treatment. Lastly she rescued her own daughter and thrashed her, too. Then she turned on Kurt and beat him. He protested that he'd only gone on the ice because of the girls and didn't deserve the punishment.

When Kurt and Kaete arrived home soaked, the frightened maids immediately put them both to bed with hot water bottles. Later, my parents didn't see the incident Kurt's way either and both children got their behinds warmed once again. Thankfully, neither of them caught cold from their little escapade.

Kurt was neat and orderly and took good care of his possessions. His room and closet were always immaculate. The day he got real skis he was so proud and waxed them carefully. He cleaned and oiled his bicycle often. As a young man, he even ironed his own pants because he wanted a perfect crease.

Kurt loved books and in this he and I were alike. For birthdays and Christmas he often gave me books if he could find some during the war. He enjoyed reading the Bible, biographies and history. Foreign countries and World War I were also subjects that interested him.

He drew very well. Drawing was never my strength, but watching him fascinated me. He drew a wonderful still life of fruit on a plate which still hung in the kitchen forty years later when I visited for the first time.

Kurt liked to make sail plane replicas which we flew down a hill nearby. If he heard an airplane overhead, he'd leave everything to run outside and watch until it disappeared from sight. Seeing a plane was such a rare event. Once we heard that the Graf Zeppelin blimp was coming, and so we sat for a whole day on our hill and waited, but the blimp did not show up. What a disappointment.

Planes were Kurt's passion. Many years later I flew coast to coast across America. I had never flown before—it was my first time. I thought of Kurt. How he would have loved the experience.

My brother was an excellent marksman. When he was fourteen Father gave him his old hunting gun which responded with a hefty kick when fired. Father figured this would cure his son's interest in firearms and shooting. But he was wrong.

Kurt picked up the rifle, aimed at a pigeon on the roof and bang. Bull's eye, first shot. His face was white from the gun's kick and flushed with the excitement of his success. He'd shot his first bird!

Father was speechless. So he bought his son a special gun for target practice which Kurt quickly mastered. Later Father also bought him a pellet gun. Once Kurt used it to shoot rats we found in a nest. He knocked them off one by one as they emerged from their hole in the pigs' stall. He could hit anything, even with a pistol.

Later when Kurt was in the military and they had target practice, he'd shoot a perfect round and then got time off while the others practiced. He had a steady hand and excellent eyesight and was not easily ruffled. We sisters admired him greatly.

My brother was at the top of his class. At fourteen years of age he graduated from school and chose farming for his career. Father had taught him early how to plow straight furrows. Kurt attended agricultural school for two years where he studied horses and livestock, farm machinery, soil cultivation, and crop management. The agricultural bureau wanted to employ him, but he was not drawn to indoor work. Working in the fields was his favorite activity when he came home on leave during the war.

In the summers out in the fields, Kurt walked around shirtless with a healthy tan, looking fit and handsome. (Father would never have been seen bare-chested.) Kurt was expected to work as much as the hired help because Father demanded more from his children than others. He'd say, "You have to set a good example."

Father expected a lot from his firstborn. Kurt always stayed in control and never let anything perturb him. He was not high strung, but Father was nervous and easily upset. And if he didn't have something to smoke, he was impossible.

My brother's cool sometimes irritated Father beyond patience. Once Father stormed at him, "You are an ape!"

Kurt replied, "Well, YOU should know where I came from." His terrific sense of humor helped him cope, otherwise he would have despaired under Father's tyranny.

Kurt was a good athlete who excelled in swimming, diving and the long jump. Once he swam the whole circumference of our large pond. The green-uniformed Scharnhorst, an organization like boy scouts, remained loyal to the Kaiser. Kurt was a member, but this organization was disbanded when Hitler came to power and then only the Hitler Youth existed.

The Hitler Youth met on Sunday mornings, but Kurt attended church instead. Once as he walked through the village carrying his hymnbook, several ruffians surrounded him and threatened to beat him up. He looked at them disdainfully and said, "You are cowards—there's only one of me and so many of you! But just go ahead and try it!" He was strong and knew it. They decided to let him go and warned that if he continued to go to

church, they'd come after him again.

This incident upset Mother terribly, but Kurt said, "I could care less. I'm not going to let them bully me. Now I am even more determined to not attend those meetings."

And he didn't. The boys who threatened him came from Communist parents who turned Nazi, but they left him alone after this. Later, they were drafted into the military and few survived.

Kurt didn't smoke even though Father was a terrible role model for him, or perhaps he abstained precisely because of Father's bad example. Why have your moods be so dependent on this little "glow stick"? In the army he traded his cigarette rations for bread or chocolate. Mother feared that once Kurt joined the military he would be enticed to smoke. But he had a strong character, and what he didn't want to do, he didn't do. Smoke? Never!

When Hitler invaded Poland in 1939, Kurt was seventeen.[6] We weren't too worried because this blitz was over quickly, and besides, Kurt was too young to be drafted. Unfortunately, more and more countries were drawn into the war and it dragged on, and one day Kurt was also called up. We had so hoped that because he was involved in farming, he could avoid the draft.

Kurt shipped out to boot camp in Strassburg in the Saarland, a long way from Silesia. Then, without leave, he was sent to the Russian front. There he came down with "body louse typhus." Many died from the high fever which left red flecks all over the body and often caused long-lasting damage to the heart and other problems.

Kurt survived the illness without any lasting damage but was weakened and sent to Cottubus for recovery. Afterwards, he was transferred to the Regiment Grossdeutschland. These were our Special Forces—men with high integrity, without physical flaws, tall and handsome. This was not the S.S. but a highly modernized weaponry division sent in when the front bogged down. Many royals served in this regiment. I was very proud of my big brother.

Kurt's confirmation verse was Psalm 37:5: "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will work it out (German translation)."

The following verse says, "He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun." Fitting verses for a young man who chose to stand for righteousness in evil times.

[6] After World War I the League of Nations granted Upper Silesia to Poland in 1921. Hitler invaded Poland to reclaim this land. We lived in Lower Silesia.

KAETE ANNELIESE (HAASE) STEPIEN

Born June 27, 1923. Died December 27, 1999.

Kaete was Kurt's opposite in temperament. She was very lively and a go getter. As a result, she often got in trouble and received many spankings.

When she was confirmed at age fourteen, her class was invited to the pastor's house where each child received 40 German Mark, donated by an American relative visiting the Von Seidlitz family. What a surprise! Yes, that was quite something. My sister added a little extra money to the 40 Marks and bought herself a bicycle.

Kaete was very frugal with her clothing. She owned new slippers but continued to walk around in trashy ones. One day Father could stand it no longer and said, "I'm going to burn your old slippers!" Reluctantly, she began wearing the new ones. The same thing happened with a new vest, despite the fact that in the pre-war years new clothes were available. Sundays, however, she always dressed nicely for church, donning hat, coat, and gloves.

On Christmas we usually received several bars of chocolate. Kurt and I would consume ours fairly quickly over the holidays. Kaete, however, hid hers and saved it until Easter. Then she would pull it out, and we would beg a few pieces from her. Always to our disappointment, the chocolate proved stale. Mother and Father held up our sister as the model of self-restraint. However, Kurt and I never repented of our "fresh chocolate" indulgence.

Kaete worked on the farm after she finished school. Father wanted us all to be familiar with the family business and expected us to produce more and work harder than the hired help. Kaete was a good worker and very industrious; nothing tended to be too much for her, but Father's demands could become absolutely unreasonable.

One day during haying season, Kaete raked behind the hay wagons but began having trouble keeping up because of the heat. Father became irritable and started yelling. She could not work any faster, and the situation became impossible. Finally Tante Ida working beside her quietly suggested, "Just fall down—pretend to faint." Kaete took her advice and sank to the ground.

Greatly alarmed, Father leaped down from the wagon, “Oh no, the work’s been too hard on her!” He ran for water and cooled her off until she “came to.” From that time on, he did not require such overly-strenuous work from his fourteen year old.

Kaete wasn’t too interested in books. Intending to read later, she’d hide a new book to prevent me from reading it first. I would always search until I found it and then read it secretly because reading was my passion. Of course when I foolishly told her what was in her book, she’d become furious with me.

Father worried that we would become lazy if we read too much. Well, that fear was unfounded, and I certainly didn’t become lazy. Of course, you can’t let your thirst for knowledge make you forget your responsibilities. Reading is a recreational activity. First do your work and then have your fun.

I remember my birthday one year. It was January, very cold, and we were in the middle of a snow storm. Kaete braved the nasty weather to get a primrose for me from the castle plant nursery because she had heard me complain, “I never get flowers because my birthday is in winter.” She had to protect the delicate plant with thick paper and her hands nearly froze during her errand. Her gift made me so happy—I was deeply touched by her sacrificial act of kindness. Every birthday I think of it. How I appreciated her thoughtfulness and all the dear cards she sent me over the years.

I loved warm summer evenings when our family would sit outside on the bench in the garden. The nightingale would sing, and every so often the cuckoo called. The air was fragrant with the scent of roses, lilacs and linden trees. In the distance you could hear the evening church bells toll and the neighbor’s accordion playing. These warm summer evenings were so beautiful, I wished I could stay up all night.

Sitting in the garden together, we’d sing. Mother liked hymns or folk songs, and Father, when slightly inebriated, belted out old soldier’s songs. Kurt, Kaete and I sang folk songs in three-part harmony and crooned: “The stars that shone at home, they shine for me in foreign lands, too.” I never dreamed how true these words would be someday for Kaete and me, nor could I have ever foreseen living in America.

Kaete’s confirmation Bible verse was Revelation 2:10b: “Be faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of eternal life.” And that she was, faithful in all her labors to the end.

3

FIRST MEMORIES

"Why do we need a rooster?" I asked our farmhand. "He doesn't lay eggs. Why waste food on such a useless animal?" At age three I already showed my practical bent.

With a twinkle in his eye Heinrich said, "The rooster is also important. He lays crooked eggs."

Determined to see such a thing, I chased our one and only cock around the yard until he was completely worn out and easy to catch. Then I plopped him on a nest I'd made and pressed him firmly to task. He flapped frantically to get away. "Stop," I commanded, "First an egg."

Keeping a firm grip, I lifted his tail every so often to check for results. Nothing. I clucked encouragement, "Bock, bock, bock." The distressed rooster began to wheeze and roll his eyes.

Suddenly Mother appeared and asked, "What in the world are you doing?" I explained about the crooked egg.

"For heaven's sake, you let that poor bird go! Look at him—he is practically choking to death!"

Reluctantly, I obeyed. The cock stumbled away, indignantly shaking his head and fluffing feathers to regain former respectability.

Naturally, I've never seen a crooked egg, but I suspect this abrupt end to my research meant incalculable loss to the world of science and mankind.

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As a little girl I loved my pink underwear. When visitors came, I'd proudly lift my dress so that all could admire my beautiful panties. In my mind, something so lovely should not be covered up! Amid much laughter, guests obliged with lavish compliments, and I was pleased.

As the baby in the family, I badly wanted a little brother or sister. Heinrich advised me to lay white bread with cream cheese slices on the window sill for the stork. So I did. I even strewed some sugar on the bread—but no stork and no babies. After three failed attempts I gave up and resigned myself to being the youngest.

A small grocery store stood around the corner from our farm house.

Already at age three, I was sent on small errands for things like baking powder, vanilla extract, and other items.[7] I would give the store clerk my list and the money. I didn't have to speak, which was good because I was very shy. After she gathered everything into a bag, the nice lady always gave me a couple of bonbons. I felt rich and wished Mother would send me to the store more often!

OUR DOG TREU

My first chore at age three was feeding the dog. In the morning I fed him pieces of bread soaked in milk, and for lunch and dinner he got leftovers from our meals. His name was Treu (pronounced Troy) which meant faithful and true, an apt name for him. Most of the time, he was tethered to a rope guarding the courtyard. He knew every animal that belonged to the farm—if a stray rooster or the neighbor's geese ventured into his territory, he immediately launched into agitated jumping and barking.

Whenever Father arrived home with the horses, Treu would greet him with joyous barking, leaping high into the air with all four legs off the ground, an amusing sight. If we had forgotten to tie him up, he ran circles around the wagon, repeatedly leaping at the horses' heads, but they good-naturedly put up with his behavior.

Occasionally, I was allowed to ride with father to the water mill where we ground our grain. Then Treu would sit proudly next to Father on the wagon seat, but if some cat appeared, in one bound he'd be off on the chase.

Treu and our young goats would sometimes roughhouse together. Treu would lurk in the grass, waiting until the frolicking goats came close. Then he'd pounce and bite them playfully in the legs. The three would roll over and over in a tumbled ball of dog and goats. I loved watching them play.

Once the house door stood open, and the kid goats, with the dog close behind, raced inside. The goats jumped over the sofa, over the table, knocked over everything in sight and the dog nipped at them every time they touched ground. We laughed ourselves hysterical it was so comical. That was a wild chase, and it took quite a while before order was restored. These kinds of scenes were our TV in those days!

Treu's dog house was securely cemented to the chicken barn, a sack hung at the entrance to keep out inclement weather, and straw kept him warm inside. One thing Treu couldn't stand was a hen near his feeding bowl, even if it was empty. Treu would immediately dart out of the house to defend his domain. Once he succeeded in nabbing a young hen, bit it in the head, and that was its sad demise. No, in matters of food, Treu did not fool around. In his doggy mind, order and respect must be maintained at all times.

Treu politely shook paws with me on command. Sometimes I'd get on my sled, and he'd take the rope in his jaws and would pull and strain, shaking his head violently. When the sled would not

[7] Habendorf enjoyed four small grocery stores—mom and pop stores—and one included a smithery.

budge, he'd get furious and start a low growl, but I was not afraid. I knew the growl was not meant for me but for the rope.

In the winter Treu sometimes wandered away, and once a hunter shot him. Treu licked his wounds faithfully and healed after a while. In his old age he became arthritic, and we kept him mostly in the house then. One morning he lay motionless under the kitchen table. I mourned for my playmate, but I was also glad that he no longer suffered.

SOME OF MY FAVORITE THINGS

I was a child who liked to make others laugh and often practiced my talent on our maid, Clara, who was my favorite. She was soft and cuddly and kind. We loved each other very much, and later she named her first child after me. At mealtimes I snuggled between maids Clara and Hilda, content in their protective warmth. Without them, my seat placed me next to Father, not a position I cared for because he frightened me.

We did not have many things, and so we treasured our possessions and took good care of them. I prized my colorful picture books and memorized all the rhymes. My uncle brought us a box of stained glass pictures you could view through an electric projector, a sophisticated toy for its time.

My porcelain dolls did not interest me much. Sometimes I brought them out to play when my best friend, Edith, came over, but I preferred interacting with live "toys" such as our dogs, Rolf and Treu. Once I dressed our cat in doll clothes and forced her into my doll carriage but quickly saw my mistake. In her panic to escape, she shredded her lovely outfit.

We owned no radio or gramophone until I began school, so there was no music in the house. However, the steady hum of the electric butter churn sounded melodic to me, and I twirled round and round to its rhythm. Mother sometimes shook her head in amazement saying, "Aren't you dizzy yet?"

We sang a lot in our home. Already at five years of age I learned a three-part round with my brother and sister. In 1940, my brother insisted that our family buy a radio so that we could stay abreast of world events. Mother didn't like the idea. She maintained that a radio was too noisy—it would be an intrusion into privacy. She preferred to sing and make her own music she said. However, once we got the radio, she approved—after all, you could still turn it off!

I memorized music easily, and to this day still know hundreds of songs. I would have loved to play a musical instrument, but I had no time to practice, no money for lessons, and no instrument. I'm so glad that you've had such privileges.

FAMILY LIFE IN HABENDORF

My family was well-respected and considered well-to-do. Father was a leader in the community. Sometimes he drove us in the carriage across the fields to show Mother the wheat and discuss harvest time. These drives were a treat for us all and especially for Mother as she did not get outside much.

On summer evenings we children often tumbled outside trying cartwheels and somersaults. In the middle of the courtyard a small grassy elevation extended from the barn. This is where we played with the dog and the goats, romping around with all the animals on the grass.

In the winter we played games like "Aggravation" and "Black Peter," a card game similar to Old Maid. Sometimes the adults gathered in the kitchen for a work party, removing quills from goose feathers. Later the collected feathers were made into pillows and down comforters for Kaete's and my dowries. As a three-year old I loved to walk by and blow on the feathers to make them fly all around. All the adults scolded me, but I laughed and ran even faster to create more wind. I was a naughty girl.[8]

The neighbor children always congregated at our place. Our farm was a great playground—we played in the barn, in the garden, in the courtyard, and in the wagon shed. In the spring, when the barn was empty, Father tied a long rope to a rafter and made a swing that allowed us to fly from one end of the barn to the other. We played hide and seek in the barn, took turns on the swing or played tag. Our shouts could be heard through the whole neighborhood.

Balancing on a wagon shaft, the boom used to span two horses, was absolutely *verboten*,[9] but we did it anyway because it provided such great spring for bouncing. However, with abuse, the boom could easily crack. When we were caught, all the neighbor kids were sent home, and I got a big lecture from my father.

When a mound of fresh sand was delivered to the farm for mortar to repair the house walls, we we built a long-jump pit and measured our leaps. Playing on the mound was actually against the rules also, but here the rules could be fudged. "Only don't lug any of the sand away," we were admonished!

[8] Brother Kurt, sister Kaete, and me.

[9] Forbidden

Once we set up a theater in the bushes and invited other kids to our performance. An opening in the bushes served as our "stage" and boards supplied the seating. We were especially proud of our water pantomime (inspired by an act seen in the circus) where we created a "waterfall" by hanging up a horses' leather blanket and pouring a bucket of water down it. We even had a clown. Everyone clapped, pleased with the show, and we were so proud. Imagine a world without TV or video games. We had to entertain ourselves, and these were the kinds of things we did.

Father always had a heart for children. When my brother, Kurt, got his first snow shoes, and we got sleds, the neighborhood boys visited and had nothing to play with. Father came up with a great idea. He took apart the rings of an old wooden sauerkraut barrel, nailed leather bands to the bent boards and voila—skis for all the boys. They used broom sticks or cut willow branches for ski poles. I was too small to enjoy this sport yet, but for my brother and the neighbor children who didn't own much, this was something special.

Sometimes Father allowed the children to accompany him out to the fields, riding the empty wagon and sitting on top of the wheat on the return home. These rides were a coveted experience, but Father expected us to behave if we wanted to enjoy this privilege.

Mother also loved children. Frequently she included the neighborhood troop at the second breakfast, feeding them sandwiches. She herself came from a family of eight, and all the other neighbors also had large families. She had grown up on our farm, and it had been the neighborhood playground in her day, too.

About 114 fruit trees grew in our orchard. Sadly, most of them were later chopped down by the Polish settlers after the war. We grew many varieties of apples, from early to late winter fruit, and picked from July through September. The children who came to play on our farm were allowed to eat as much as they wanted from the orchard. For children from poor families it was a real treat to eat to their heart's content and fill their pockets with fruit to take home.

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Father always cleaned and polished all our shoes every morning. He would do this early, right after he fed the horses, so the shoes would be ready for school. In the evenings, shoes were wet and had to dry overnight before one could apply polishing cream. Leather must be continually treated, otherwise it hardens and cracks. Shoes were scarce during the war, so we took good care of what we had.

In our day, shoe polishing was considered men's work; men thought it beneath their dignity to let their wives take on this task. Mother did not have time anyway because she worked in the barn and made breakfast in the mornings.

***

Mother worked very hard. In the evenings, she darned socks and mended clothes or knitted new socks. Mother's spinster sisters, Emma and Ida who lived in Reichenbach, helped with this task.

On wash day all the women labored at the washboard. The evening prior, the wash was sorted and soaked in large wooden tubs. The next day it was cooked in a large kettle, rubbed with soap on the washboard, and then rinsed twice before being hung on the clothesline.

Bed and table linens were starched and then pressed by running the items through a mangling board (a rolling press). This was a machine usually used to press linens. You folded the table cloth, for example, to the right size, and then fed it through the mangling board rollers. Before I left we had an electric, wooden washing machine and also a wringer which lightened the work load considerably. This was all women's work. The men were responsible for livestock and fields.

For transportation, Mother relied on the horse and wagon. She never learned to ride a bicycle, but we were within good walking distance of everything in our village. Once in a while Father drove her to Reichenbach, five miles away, to shop for larger purchases.

***

Life on a farm meant hard work because people and animals had to be tended year round. As a military man, Father expected everything to be done in an orderly and timely manner. Not a single piece of straw lay in the whole courtyard. We cleaned up thoroughly after every job.

We lived by the clock. Our meal schedule was maintained to the minute. When we brought the second breakfast out to the field, the workers took a break for exactly 15 minutes and then went back to plowing until it was time to go home.

Meal schedule:

Breakfast – 6:30 for hired help and father/family
Second breakfast – 9:00
Lunch – 12:30
Afternoon snack – 3:30
Dinner – 6:00
Sundays – afternoon coffee hour with company

Saturdays were especially busy as we prepared for a day of rest. Extra feed for the animals was prepared ahead, for example, so that only a minimum amount of work was required on Sundays. Father used to say, "Work gained on Sundays, will come to ruin on Mondays." My parents highly valued Sabbath rest and order.

We took turns going to church. Those who stayed home fed the cattle and cooked so that the church goers could immediately eat upon their return and enjoy their Sunday rest. We had to walk one hour each way to the church in the neighboring village of Rosenbach. There was no Protestant church in Habendorf. Services ran from 9-10 o'clock. That meant we left at 8:00 a.m. did not return until 11:00 a.m. Sometimes Father would drive us with the carriage if he felt the horses could forego their Sunday rest after a hard week of work.

Sunday school was held after the main service in the church. Children walked to Sunday school and walked home. According to custom, I attended Sunday school as a child and during those years rarely sat in on a church service. Only after beginning confirmation classes at age 12 did I begin attending church with the adults regularly.

Father was very strict and couldn't stand it if we were idle. If he saw someone resting for a moment, he'd ask, "Don't you have anything to do?" and immediately assign a task. If I wanted to read, I often hid to avoid him.

Once when I was five, I wanted to go look for the geese with Mother, and I made a great scene because she didn't want me to come along. Suddenly Father appeared around the corner and thundered, "What's going on here?"

Mother said, "She just won't obey."

He said, "What? You don't want to obey your mother?" Then he set me over his knee and gave me a severe thrashing. That was my first and last spanking from him. I thought to myself, *I will NEVER do that again. I will always look around and make sure Father is nowhere in sight next time I misbehave.* After that I was extremely cautious, and I never felt his hand on me again.

Mother's personality was softer. The two balanced each other out. Had she been as strict and yelled as much, it would have been very difficult to cope. With Mother we could sometimes go out of bounds. She let us be who we really were. Whenever Father drove out of town, she allowed us to have a little fun. Sometimes that included pillow fights!

My brother and sister, only a year apart, got in a lot of mischief which resulted in spankings. They were six and seven years old when I was born, so I had no partner in crime. Once, when the two of them caught the measles, they had to stay upstairs in bed. They got bored, started jumping up and down on their beds, and used a walking stick to punch holes in the ceiling. Despite being sick, they both received a good whipping.

Mother punished me every so often when I got out of line. She'd warn me first that if I continued misbehaving, "the garlic would soon bloom." I would sometimes get bored, and then I constantly asked Mother what I should do. She'd make suggestions but nothing appealed to me—it all

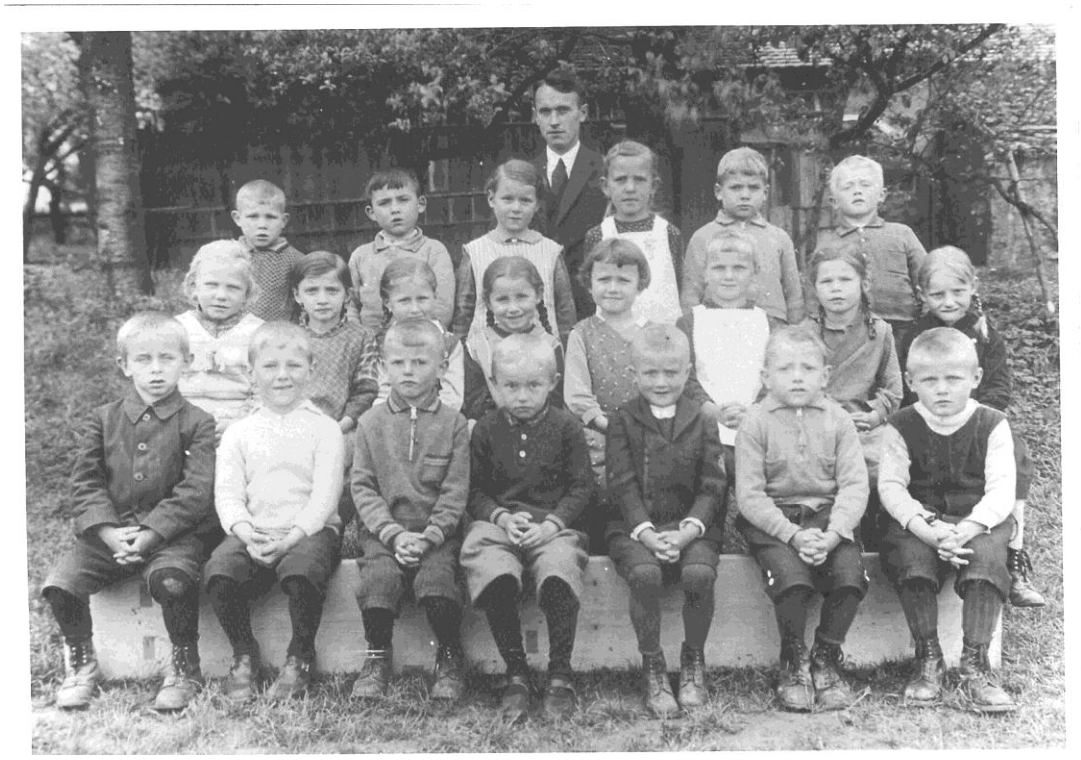
sounded humdrum. When you're bored, you start to provoke other people. That's one way to make something happen!

Once Mother suggested, "Why don't you pretend to be a weaver?"

So I found a "loom," a wooden chair with a heart carved into the back rest. Tying a thin rope to a piece of wood to create a make-shift shuttle, I threaded the rope into a pattern through the openings in the chair. Every so often to imitate the clacking sounds of a weaver, I'd slap the contraption with my shuttle, happy with my new diversion.

4

FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL, APRIL 1935



First Grade Class Picture (I'm in the second row, third from the left)

My excitement began several days before school started when I was allowed to choose a brand new backpack—a rectangular-shaped leather satchel with shoulder straps. The brown leather smelled so good, and I could slip it on effortlessly, adjusting the shiny buckles however I needed. I proudly added my pretty pencil box, covered with brightly colored foil.

My slate, required for daily homework assignnments, had one side pre-lined for penmanship practice and the other grid-lined for doing sums. A wet sponge "eraser" was attached to the wooden frame. Woe to the child who forgot his duty and arrived at school with a dry "eraser"! We'd secretly spit on our sponges to keep them wet, making sure the teacher didn't catch us! A primer with large letters and colorful illustrations and the beginner's arithmetic book went into my backpack as well. Now I was ready!

When the big day arrived, I proudly marched to school at my mother's side. We girls all wore an apron over our dress, the standard dress code, and styled our long hair into braids to which we

fastened colorful hair clips. Adult hairstyles such as perms were frowned upon, but ribbons were allowed.

Our teacher, Herr Stolle, and our village pastor welcomed us. My assigned seat was next to Edith Pudel who soon became my best friend—we sat together throughout our whole school career. After the mothers were seated, Herr Stolle opened with a greeting and the pastor said a prayer. I motioned impatiently for my mother to leave, eager to show my independence.

But not all the children felt confident like me. Suddenly, a piercing scream and our neighbor boy, Gerhard, hung on his mother's dress. He wailed piteously, throwing himself on the floor kicking and screaming. No amount of reasoning helped, and his red-faced mother was forced to take him home again. We children hid smug smiles—no, we weren't like *that!*

Then Herr Stolle began with basic classroom etiquette. When adults stepped into the classroom, we were to stand at attention and say "Good morning" or "Good afternoon." (In later years we chorused "Heil Hitler.") Then he taught us the prayer we recited every morning:

How happily I've awakened.
How well I've slept the whole night through.
I thank you, Heavenly Father,
That you stayed near me, too.
Protect me today
That no harm may come my way. Amen.

We set our slates and pencil boxes on the desktop and stored our backpacks in a compartment underneath. Our teacher took roll, addressing us by our last names (Haase, Pudel). We answered "Here" and called him "Herr Lehrer," which essentially means Mr. Teacher. We only spoke when spoken to, raised our hands for questions, and at all times addressed him respectfully.

He taught us to sit up straight, fold our hands primly on the desktop, and remain at attention, facing forward. Good posture was highly valued in our day. Our teacher did not let us slouch while writing—anyone who forgot soon received a rap on the knuckles. As a result, we all developed a habit of maintaining erect posture. German society demanded obedience, order, cleanliness, punctuality, and respect for authority figures, and school reflected these values.

First and second graders only attended school for two hours—from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon, six days a week. Soon our first day at school ended, and we stood to be dismissed for a closing prayer.

Then we stormed out of the classroom and hurried home. Tradition called for our parents to "sweeten" the first day of school with a treat—a large, colorful cardboard

cone filled to the brim with candy. My cone was green with pictures on it and had paper lace around the edges.[10] How proud I was to be such a big girl now.

It was 1935; people had work and the stores still carried everything. Hitler had not yet shown his true colors.

WALKING TO SCHOOL

The school year officially began after Easter and included vacations—four weeks in the summer, three weeks in the fall, two weeks over Christmas and three weeks over Easter. Otherwise, we attended school six days a week, year round. Beginning in third grade, school ran from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. during the winter and 7:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. during the summer. Our day included short breaks and a longer lunch recess that allowed for time to eat our buttered bread sandwiches and play ball or other games.

Today children travel to school in various ways, but we walked everywhere, regardless of the season. The three-kilometer trek to school took a good half hour, which meant that in winter we left the house at 7:15 a.m. in order to arrive by 8:00 a.m. in a timely manner. Sometimes all that walking left us dead tired; however, the exercise kept us slim.

Winter snowstorms and icy roads created dangerous conditions for children walking to school. We didn't own many warm clothes. Girls did not wear pants. Though we bundled up in coats, knitted stockings, bulky hats and scarves, the icy east wind blew through everything. At times, the bitter cold brought us to tears which froze crusts on our scarves.

My best friend, Edith, suffered frostbite on her hands once even though she wore two pairs of mittens wrapped in a muff. We always bundled up, vain enough to fear the sentence of living with the result of frostbite—permanently blue cheeks.

The walk to school seemed very long, especially when snow piled into huge drifts. But after a storm we'd play in the white winter wonderland. We made snow angel imprints and staged snowball fights.

We could expect no relief from the cold after arriving at school. During the war, our teachers heated the rooms sparingly. Germany did not have enough coal, and rationing affected everything, even our education. We sat in cold, wet clothes and did our work with chattering teeth, but life went on regardless of the hardships. Once in a while, though, I got special transportation!

SLEIGH RIDE TO SCHOOL

It had snowed all night. In the morning the horses stamped restlessly in the barn for they had been cooped up for a while. Father decided they needed exercise. This meant I'd get a sleigh ride

[10] Photo from magazine illustrating the first-day-of-school tradition in our region.

to school! Quickly he harnessed the horses and hung bells around their necks. People needed to be able hear us coming because soft snow on the road dampens sound.

Then Father pulled on his fur coat and hat, climbed onto his seat, and I happily scrambled up next to him. He cracked the whip and we were off.

I loved these outings. Along the way, we picked up all the other children on their way to school. Some hitched their sleds to our sleigh for a ride. What a tumult of shouting and laughing! The horses kept tossing their heads making the sleigh bells jingle. I loved this merry sound. Sitting on my perch next to my father, I held my head high, proud to be a farmer's daughter.

Sometimes Father also gave us a sleigh ride home from school. His reason? Because the horses needed exercise, of course. That suited me fine!

SICK IN BED

I hadn't been feeling well for several days. When Mother took my temperature one morning and it proved elevated, I smiled. I would not need to brave the winter's cold this morning. Mother quickly wrote a note to my teacher and sent it with the next student passing by on his way to school.

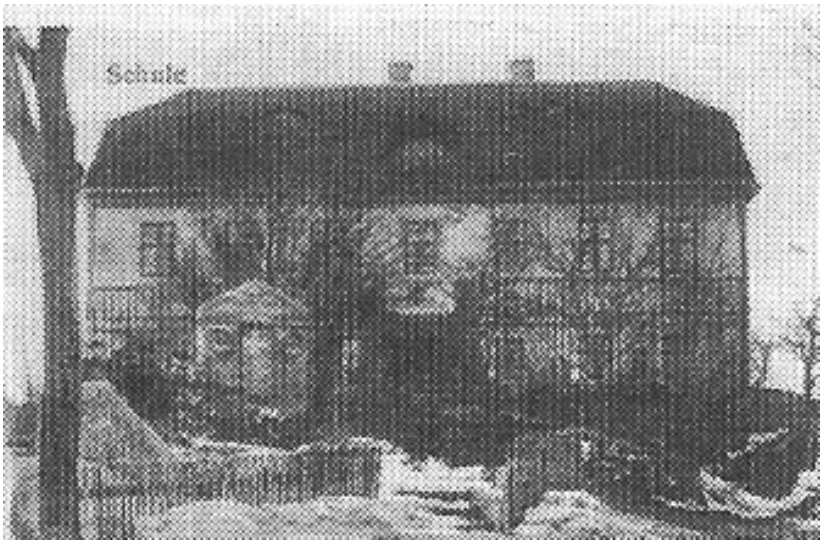
Then she fired up the furnace in my bedroom. I stayed in bed, drank hot tea and ate canned sweetened cranberries, known for their effectiveness against fighting fevers. And now came the part I hated—sweat therapy. I roasted red-faced under several down comforters while my aunt sat nearby preventing my escape. To ease my discomfort she read to me, but I only wanted out from under those suffocating quilts. Finally satisfied that I'd sweated enough, she towel dried me, dressed me in fresh clothes, and I soon drifted off to sleep.

I spent one more day in bed without a fever, then another day at home before returning to school. This protocol was observed by all families when illness struck. But after sick leave, our teacher expected us to hand in any missed homework. He allowed no grace period. Despite this small, dark cloud, I liked staying home sick because it meant extra attention and pampering—and avoiding the dreaded walk to school.

Parents today don't keep sick children home in bed so much anymore. But remember, in our day we couldn't count on antibiotics to save us if a nasty cold turned into pneumonia and possibly death.

SCHOOL LIFE

Before the war, our three-room school house boasted one teacher per room. Later when the war caused a teacher shortage, Herr Hoffman taught the whole school single-handedly, around 150 students. Sometimes he employed assistants. Herr Hoffman was my teacher from fifth through eighth grade.



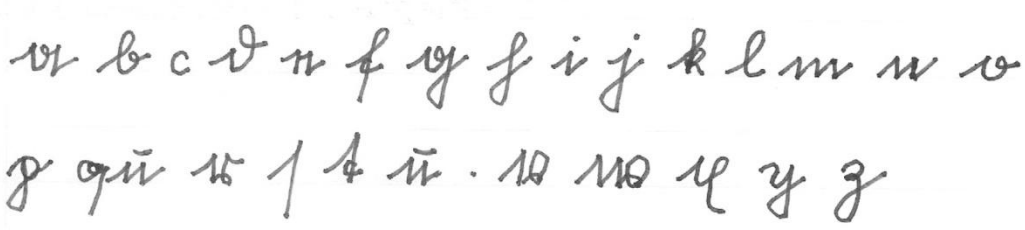
We sat in rows on benches at desks accommodating five students each. Boys sat on one side of the room and girls on the other. Our academic scores determined seating arrangement. Gifted students occupied the back row while slow learners sat in front under the watchful eye of Herr Hoffman, providing easier access to children who needed more help. Edith and I sat in the back row. As the top two students in our class, we often tutored other children. I always liked to help.

We received a thorough education in reading, writing and arithmetic but also studied other subjects such as geography, German, history, music, and science. From the beginning, our teachers insisted we speak up, enunciate, and read with expression. They despised sloppiness in any form.

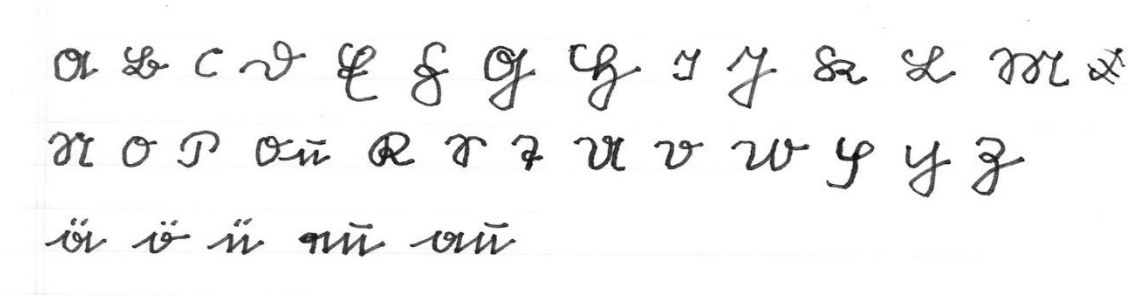
We learned to read Gothic in first grade and only later switched to contemporary print. Can you imagine reading a primer in Gothic print?

Der Herzog erwiderte lachend, daß er in den Wald geritten
ſei, um etwas Appetit für ſein Frühſtück zu bekommen; dann
wandte er ſich ſcharf an den Wilddieb:

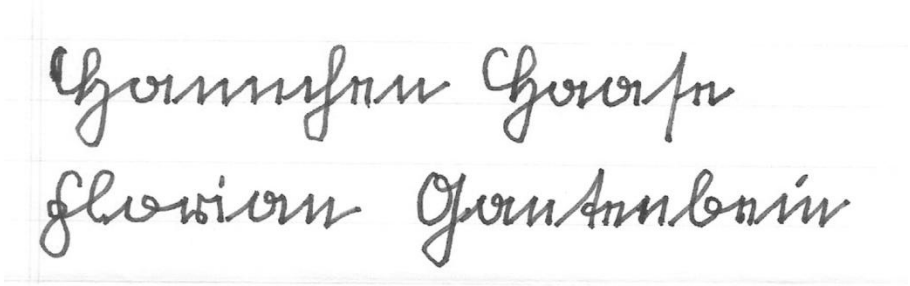
In first grade we also learned to write the ABCs in Suetterlin script. The lower case letters looked like this:



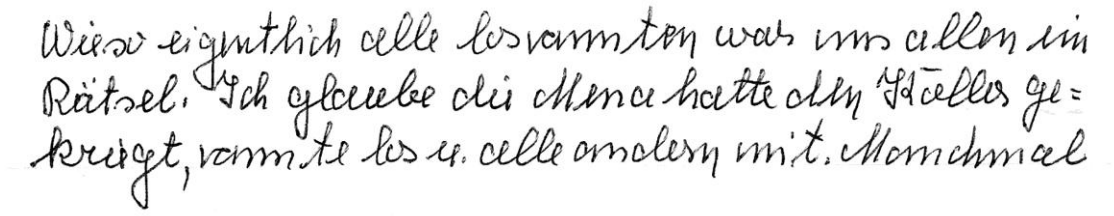
We wrote the uppercase letters and umlauts like this:



My maiden name and your grandfather's look like this in Suetterlin:



We practiced diligently on our slates but found writing difficult to master. Complicating matters further, the Gothic print in our primers differed radically from Suetterlin, as you can see. Not until sixth grade did we learn the new Latin cursive which I still use to this day. Our teachers never taught us how to print.



In second and third grade, though we still used the slate, we began to write with ink. Ink is tricky. You can easily make a blot which cannot be erased. We wrote in notebooks and used various quill pens for different assignments.

Pencils were reserved for drawing. In upper grades, we drew colorful borders around carefully-written essays. Teachers emphasized neat and orderly work. Once a year during open house, all the parents came to admire our notebooks.

WILLIE'S SCHOOL TROUBLES

One typical day in class, our teacher dictated a spelling list. As always, we left a wide margin on the left side for him to mark errors. He expected precise work. I was proud of my neatly written notebook.

Mentally I reviewed the words again. Did I make any mistakes? I wanted a perfect score, graded a 1 (an "A"), meaning "very good." Two mistakes garnered a 2 (a "B") for "good" and so on. Students with five errors or more took a stinging punishment and had to do the assignment over.

I looked up to see Herr Hoffman frowning at a paper in his hand. He soon barked, "Willie, you have six spelling mistakes. Come here!" I hated these scenes, and my stomach twisted in knots as Willie reluctantly made his way to the front of the classroom.

"Hold out your hands."

Herr Hoffman showed no mercy with the ruler. Willie's tears flowed silently as he returned to his desk and cupped his hands around the inkwell to cool them. He loved to draw, a past-time for which he needed his fingers.

I was grateful that learning came easily to me.

Another day Willie arrived at school without his assignments. He considered homework a useless way to spend time. Herr Hoffman approached Willie's desk and said, "Stretch out your hands, you lazy bum."

Willie stood up, put both his hands behind his back and said, "You are not going to hit my hands. The hands are meant for work."

Herr Hoffman grew red in the face and barked, "Bend over."

Willie did so and our teacher began whacking. But wait, what was that hollow sound?

"What do you have in your pants?" Herr Hoffman demanded. "Take it out!"

To everyone's surprise, Willie calmly extracted a bread basket he'd brought from home.

More furious than ever, Herr Hoffman grabbed the boy by the collar, pulled his pants taut and beat him until he was out of breath.

Poor Willie could hardly sit comfortably, but he looked triumphant. His art had prevailed! At least this once he had preserved his precious fingers.

HERR HOFFMAN

Herr Hoffmann let no one get away with anything. Whatever he demanded of us, we obeyed without question.

If a child tattled, they were likely to hear, "You old gossiping washwoman! Keep your wisdom to yourself. You need it!" That was the end of the story, and the tattler would be left red-faced.

When he needed to leave class for any reason, he set a boy in charge of the girls and a girl in charge of the boys. Often he gave me this leadership responsibility. We wrote the names of disobedient students in large letters on the blackboard. As punishment, they either stayed after school or completed extra homework.

Woe to the leaders if our teacher returned to a noisy classroom and no names stood on the blackboard! He held us responsible and often punished everyone with extra homework if the class was unruly.

With all this harsh discipline, perhaps you imagine that we hated school. Not at all. I recall many happy moments. For instance, on a child's birthday, the teacher allowed the celebrant to choose a song which we then sang with gusto. Then the birthday child stood at the head of class to receive congratulations as we filed by to shake his hand. The best part? Birthdays meant at least fifteen minutes less time for math!

For Herr Hoffman's birthday, we usually collected money to buy a lovely pot of flowers. When he walked into class, we'd chorus loudly, "Happy Birthday!" He'd smile and often allowed free time to read—a sure sign that our gift touched him despite his stern exterior.

Sometimes we took field trips to the forest where we'd collect mushrooms—for our education and our teacher's culinary enjoyment. Because of the danger of poisoning, none of us were allowed to eat or take any home. I sometimes thought it wasn't fair that Herr Hoffman enjoyed the fruits of our labor, while we didn't get even one bite.

In home economics, we girls knit socks and a scarf. I also sewed an apron and a nightgown. We had to take our measurements and then draw our own pattern.

The seventh and eighth graders cultivated a garden near the school which we spaded, weeded and watered, even during summer vacation. I planted kohlrabi and onions; Edith planted carrots and beans. This way we enjoyed a variety of vegetables from our garden during the lunch hour.

We had no air conditioning, and it got very humid in the summertime. School closed on days when temperatures reached 86 degrees. Herr Hoffman gave us the option to swim in the pond or go home. I always preferred swimming to going home where I knew chores awaited me.

You can be sure we all paid close attention to the thermometer! If our release looked promising, we'd write on the blackboard, "The sun shines hot, the wind shows no breeze. Sir, we want to go swimming, please." Sometimes he agreed and even joined us. Other times he'd scoff at our request, "Now that would be a fine thing, wouldn't it, playing hooky from school."

But we knew the rules—if it's too hot, there's no school, Herr Hoffman!

A MEMORABLE DAY

The school bell rang and we happily stormed out of the classroom, forming small groups for the walk home. Arm in arm, the girls ambled along while the boys circled like wolves around a flock

of sheep. They began shouting names and composed obnoxious rhymes to capture our attention. Edith's last name, Pudel (meaning poodle), inspired such taunts as, "Poodle, poodle, don't bite me, you've got a great big snout; you ate some liverwurst, and there's still some hanging outta yer mouth." My last name, Haase (meaning jackrabbit or hare), earned me the nickname of "Bunny Longlegs." However, no matter what the boys said, we girls kept our composure.

Unfortunately, our calm demeanor only provoked them further. Rudi, a strong twelve year-old, decided to attack. He moved in closer and began shouting "Ha" in short bursts. We continued to forbear, but then he lurched at me and screamed directly into my ear. My cool suddenly evaporated, and I exploded into action. With lightning speed, I seized Rudi's backpack and swung him in violent circles before finally hurling him into the ditch. Can you believe it? I, a normally shy, peace-loving girl!

Rudi blubbered, "Tomorrow I'm telling Herr Hoffman."

"Then I'm telling him my side of the story too," I retorted, convinced I'd acted in self-defense.

Fortunately, Rudi only suffered a couple of bruises. I had not meant to hurt him, only teach him a lesson. He never tattled and I, of course, held my tongue. From that day on the boys left us respectfully alone.

Imagine. A girl getting the best of a boy! Unthinkable in our day. My girlfriends and I still chuckle at this memory.

GIGGLING GIRLS

Edith and I could get the giggles something terrible. We'd dissolve into titters at every little thing, so much so that Mother once said, "A fool is known by his excessive laughter." Often she warned, and quite prophetically too, "Someday you will shed as many tears as you laugh."[11]

One day I noticed a substitute teacher's funny habit. I nudged Edith and said, "Psst, Herr Tatzel is saying "na" after every sentence." After that, it was impossible to maintain control because every time he uttered the expression we'd look at each other and break into giggling fits, suppressed, of course, and hidden behind the books we pretended to read.

Suddenly our teacher looked up, saw us tittering and called out, "Haase, why are you laughing?"

I turned beet red and stood to answer, "Because Pudel is laughing." There was no way I could say, "Because of you."

[11]Photo: Edith and I at age twelve

He turned to Edith, “And you, Pudel, why are you laughing?”

Oh my fright, I thought, *Edith, don’t you dare say anything.*

But she, too, stood and stammered, embarrassed, “Because Haase is laughing.”

“You two are a couple of silly geese. Be seated.”

Subdued, we sank back on our bench and exchanged a meaningful glance. Whew, got off easy that time!

5

HABENDORF'S CASTLE

The royal Von Seidlitz family lived in Habendorf's castle which had been built in the 14th century on the foundations of an old Knights Templar castle. They employed many people to maintain the grounds and estate. These people worked and lived on the premises in servants' housing. They maintained the castle park and managed the private forest land, cultivated trees and fed wild animals, such as deer, in winter. Two ponds were stocked with fish. The forest was the family's private hunting ground where they hunted pheasants or rabbits. If a farmer accidentally killed a rabbit, he had to deliver it to the castle or risk being fined.

The garden nursery belonged to the estate and sold flowers. The castle was the only place you could get ice in summer. The servants would collect large blocks from the ponds in winter and store them in a big cement basement embedded deep in the ground, sealed off by a large, thick door.

The thirty-five room castle included a chapel with an organ, and I attended Bible study there. Lord and Lady Von Seidlitz were very devout Christians; they were kind to their servants and always cared for the villagers, especially providing the sick with medicine. Lady Von Seidlitz came and visited my mother after she had her stroke. The family occupied their own private pew in the Rosenbach Lutheran church and in 1933 donated its bells.[12]

[12]A story is told about an ancestor of theirs, Julius von Seidlitz, who was friends with Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf., leader in the German Pietist movement and bishop of the Moravian church. Lord Von Seidlitz held prayer meetings in his home which were attended by people who came from near and far. His activities gained the attention of the Catholic Austrian government who had forbidden such meetings. Lord Von Seidlitz, however, was

COUNTRY FUNERAL

"All funeral singers please stay after school," Herr Hoffman announced as we headed out the door after class. Our schoolmate, Christa, had died of diphtheria after many days in quarantine. I knew her through Sunday school as a sweet, committed Christian girl, who attended faithfully. I felt so bad—she was only ten years old, two years younger than I. Many classmates had died that year—of diphtheria, scarlet fever and meningitis—even though schools closed during outbreaks to prevent further infections. We grew up no stranger to death.

I belonged to the school's funeral choir. We earned 35 or 45 "Pfennige" (pennies) for singing while the cross bearer received one "Mark" (dollar). He certainly deserved the money because his job required that he lead the funeral procession carrying the tall cross upright, sometimes for three kilometers. When a strong wind blew, others relieved him from time to time.

In preparation for Christa's funeral, our teacher taught us our three-part harmonies. I sang alto. Unfortunately, we didn't have the best sopranos and sounded pitiful, regardless how much Herr Hoffman frantically waved the violin bow as he conducted in comical, wildly threatening gestures. For some funerals, he would ask women in the village to help out his weak soprano section.

We practiced for three days and memorized the music. Meanwhile, I knew the preparations that would take place in Christa's home. The doctor would confirm the death. Then the village nurse would wash and dress her, placing her in a cool room or dark hall of the house. The village carpenter would come by to take measurements of the body, quickly build a coffin, then help the nurse bed the girl inside.

Cities like Reichenbach provided mortuaries for the deceased, and funeral processions transported the casket to the cemetery in special wagons drawn by horses, but we lived in the country and still did things the old way.

Before the funeral, a casket stood open in the house foyer for visitation. In summer this practice proved impossible because of the stench and caskets remained closed. But it was fall, and Christa's parents, Herr and Frau Heimann, devout Christians, invited her Sunday school class for a special farewell.

Usually we funeral singers accompanied the processions from house to cemetery and never entered the homes, so I had never seen a dead person. I didn't know what to expect. I was in Christa's Sunday School class, and when the eight of us arrived, Herr and Frau Heimann met us at the door. Though their faces were tear-stained, they radiated a quiet trust. Christa, her blond hair in braids, lay in a white casket surrounded by flowers, and a candle burned on each side. She looked beautiful, and we children stood in awe.

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convinced that one must obey God more than men and continued his work. The meetings grew larger and larger, and in 1739, the Austrians put him in jail. He was not released until a year later.

Frau Heimann whispered, “She’s in heaven now.”

Her words were reassuring. None of us felt frightened or gave way to sobbing in the peaceful atmosphere. I felt as if I was in the presence of angels. As our final farewell, we gathered around and sang Christa’s favorite song.

On the day of the funeral, our pastor, eight pallbearers, we school children, and Herr Hoffman arrived at Christa’s home. The men wore black suits, stovepipe hats and white gloves. I was proud that my father often served as pallbearer, though that meant more work for my sister and me—we cleaned his clothes and carefully washed the white gloves.

The women in Christa’s extended family wore hats with black, crepe veils while the men wore a black crepe armband on their jacket or coat sleeve. All mourners dressed in black and gathered outside the house door. Many brought wreaths decorated with white bows to carry to the cemetery. The women and children wept openly, but men remained stoic—tears indicated weakness.

We took our places before the open house door and sang our first song. Then our pastor said a few brief words, and when he prayed, the men removed their hats. After the short homily, the pallbearers lifted the casket to a litter and onto their shoulders. The cross bearer led the way, we singers followed, along with Herr Hoffman and the pastor; then came the pallbearers, and the mourners followed. Thus began our procession through the village to the cemetery.

From time to time during the long march we sang the song, “Jesus, My Assurance.” Much of the road lay on an incline. We stopped once so the pallbearers could set the casket down and rest before switching sides to carry their burden on the other shoulder.

I remembered one winter when the wind blew hard, driving the snow, making the pallbearers’ job dangerous and physically exhausting. Yet no one complained. This was the one time Herr Hoffman’s tuner froze. No matter how much he exerted himself, huffing and puffing until he turned red in the face, the tuner squeaked hoarsely, which sent us singers into repressed giggles despite the somber occasion—he looked so comical in his efforts. However, he managed to start us off in an appropriate key. I felt sorry for our pastor, too—he preached on and on with chattering teeth and a blue face. I was glad that we did not need to battle such conditions for Christa’s funeral.

When we finally reached the cemetery, the pallbearers set the coffin on planks over the open grave and stood along the sides, while the cross bearer and pastor stood at each end. Everyone else gathered around. Our pastor now preached on a fitting Bible verse. At various intervals we sang. Then the pallbearers removed the planks and lowered the casket with ropes into the grave.

This proved a wrenching moment for Christa’s family. This part of the service was always the hardest to endure, but we children were not shielded from the realities of life and death. Frau Heimann wrung her handkerchief weeping while her husband stood as in a trance, blinking and blinking and blinking. I felt a tightness in my chest. I didn’t want to lose my composure so I

forced my thoughts elsewhere. As the casket slowly disappeared into the earth, we sang the final song—but my voice sounded shaky.

Our pastor prayed, strewed a shovel of dirt over the coffin and said the traditional words, *"From dust you were taken, to dust you shall return. In the name of Jesus Christ, rest in peace until the Lord calls you on the day of the resurrection. Amen."*

Then the pallbearers stepped back from the grave, allowing family members and close friends to throw flowers onto the coffin. Herr and Frau Heimann were the first to step forward, each with a single white rose—a symbol of their final, loving goodbye.

One by one, the mourners approached to shake hands with the family and speak their condolences (people didn't hug in our culture). Slowly we all returned home.

In the weeks that followed, the Heimanns often visited the well-tended cemetery to meditate in quiet prayer and remembrance. They planted flowers on Christa's grave. Her tombstone read, "I Know That My Redeemer Lives."

During the traditional one-year mourning period, women wore only black dresses and men wore a black armband. They avoided all forms of entertainment such as dancing or parties. Later during the war everything was closed anyway. Only films with Nazi propaganda previews still played.

In the war years, almost everyone in our village wore black.

A FARM WEDDING IN SILESIA

For years, parents would lay aside items for their daughters' dowries. Fathers crafted bedroom and living room furniture out of oak. Mothers made pillows and down comforters from goose feathers, removing the quills. From early childhood, girls received gifts for their dowry at Christmas—pillows and linens, table cloths, silverware. When girls married they already possessed basic necessities. In my mother's day, the dowry also included lingerie and even a funeral shroud. My sister, Kaete, and I already had many things collected for our dowries by the time war broke out.

I was four years old when our family was invited to a wedding at the neighbor's. What were preparations like for a Silesian farm wedding?

The wedding hostess had to first determine her guest list according to the size of wedding they could afford. Only the closest relatives, friends and neighbors would celebrate this great day with them as they were not wealthy.

In planning her guest list the hostess needed to think about whom to pair up. Single ladies were always assigned an escort. Once her list was complete, she sent out invitations through a messenger, either by word of mouth or via formal hand-written cards.

Tradition dictated the appropriate dress code—ladies wore full length or three quarter-length dresses in the design and color of their own choosing, and men wore dark suits, white shirts, ties and stovepipe hats.

The hostess then made an appointment for a hair dresser to come to her house on the wedding day where all the guests gathered before festivities began. The ladies would want to have their hair curled with a crimping iron before the grand procession to the church. She also contacted various farmers in the area to reserve the proper number of carriages to transport her guests from her house to the church. The farmers cleaned and polished the horses' harnesses until they sparkled and it made everything look celebratory for the occasion.

She then hired a special cook for the day and planned the meals with her. Though she ordered *Torten* (cakes) at the bakery, she and the servant girls and the bride baked all the Streuselkuchen, apple cakes and cheesecakes at home. As far as the supply of wine or liquor, cigars and cigarettes—the hostess could count on the groom and his father to supply these. Weeks prior to the wedding, she butchered a pig so that enough meat and sausage was available. Also a goose or chickens were often added—whatever the menu required.

A few days before the wedding, the bride's family delivered large Streuselkuchen cakes to friends and neighbors not on the guest list. This "wedding cake" was made with pure butter and melted on your tongue. I thought it heavenly. Families could not invite everyone to the wedding, but it was the customary to include as many people as possible in the joy of the occasion.

The wedding hostess and her helpers then scrubbed and cleaned the whole house. She polished all brass curtain rods and knobs as well as the silverware and brought out the best and finest porcelain for washing. She worked in a flurry until the long tables in the large living room finally stood ready to receive her guests. The white damask linen cloths, fine china and flowers on the tables created a festive atmosphere.

As the special day approached, the bride and groom talked with the pastor who chose a fitting Bible verse for the ceremony that they could treasure as a guide for their life together. The day before the wedding, the bride and her husband-to-be visited the registry office for the civil marriage ceremony.

That night, friends set up Christmas-sized pine trees by the bride's front door and wound a garland around the door posts. They hung a red sign overhead saying, "God Bless the Bride and Groom."

At the groom's parents' house another tradition took place—*Polterabend*, meaning "evening smashing party." Polter means loud, noise-making. The whole village always looked forward to this event, especially the young people. They arrived with glass bottles, metal buckets, and other old junk to hurl in front of the door to make as much noise as possible. The beleaguered bridegroom had to offer whiskey to the young people dancing outside to music.

Then the revelers barred the door with old benches so the groom had to climb out the window in the morning. He was expected to clean up everything before driving to his bride's home looking dapper in his black suit, stovepipe hat and white gloves.

When the groom arrived for Selma at our neighbor's house, the guests were waiting and the coaches stood ready. A special carriage with beautiful horses waited for him, his bride and the flower girl. It was decorated with white bows and myrtle wreaths on the windows.

A small crowd of people showed up for *Brautschauen*[13] as always. They watched as the parents and elderly couples climbed into their coaches, then the young couples, and finally the bride and groom brought up the rear of the procession. Since I was a child I didn't go with them to the ceremony but was allowed to be part of the celebration when they returned home.

As the procession drove to the church, it was customary for village children to set up rope or garland barricades to stop the carriages. The wedding party tossed out candy or money to "persuade" them to open the road again, and with much rowdiness and laughter the procession continued.

At the church, flowers graced the altar and candles flickered. The choir in the loft prepared to sing, accompanied by the pipe organ. As soon as he saw the procession coming, the sexton rang the church bells.

Outside the church, the women lined up on one side of the door and the men on the other. As the bells pealed, the bride and groom walked arm in arm through their midst and into the church to the altar. The guests then fell in behind and took their seats as the choir sang.

Both the bride and groom entered the church wearing their wedding bands on their left hands, but during the ceremony they switched to the right. Germans traditionally wear a wedding ring on the right hand. The pastor gave a somber homily, spoke a blessing, prayed, and to the sound of bells ringing, everyone returned to their carriages. This time, the bride and groom's carriage led the procession home.

When they arrived at the farm, everyone congratulated the couple and showered them with flowers and presents. Selma and her new husband sat down at the head table and the guests found their place cards. Everyone was in high spirits, enjoying the good food and drink, the poetry recitations and speeches.

We were allowed to participate in this part of the wedding. I remember Kaete wore a pink dress and Kurt wore shorts and a white shirt. They were ten and eleven years old and I was four. I was excited about wearing my pretty white dress with red embroidered flowers.[14]

[13] Bride watching. A wedding provided entertainment in our day!

We children played in a separate room and had our own food while the adults celebrated in the banquet room. One by one they called us in to provide entertainment for the wedding guests.

I had memorized a poem for the occasion. I was very shy and scared that I wouldn't remember my poem, so mother kept a copy for back-up to help out in case of emergency. When it was my turn to go in to the banquet room, I gave the couple my present, a wooden cooking spoon, and said my poem though I shook with fright. I was happy to return to the playroom.

At midnight the bride removed her veil and danced the bridal veil dance. Then the couple said farewell to everyone and with tears said goodbye to their parents before driving to their new home. The guests continued to party until 3:00 a.m. in the morning, though we children had been tucked into our beds long before then.

A TRUE WEDDING STORY

Mother's school friend, Frau Pause (pronounced Powseh), who later sheltered Kaete and me from the Russians, lived on our lane in a small, cozy house. After losing her husband during World War I, she raised her two sons alone and they both learned a trade. Now the oldest, Heinz, wanted to marry.

The bride, Margarethe, was an orphan. She was thrilled at the prospect of gaining a mother along with a beloved husband and visited often. Because she had no parents, the couple planned a small wedding at the groom's home.

Soon the big day arrived. Margarethe, lovely in her simple wedding dress, sat waiting at the window for her fiance. I was about nine years old and my sister and I, like our neighbors, stood at our fence, eager to enjoy the entertainment of *Brautschauen*.

The carriages stood ready, but where was Heinz? That morning he had told his mother and Margarethe that he was going on a bike ride and he'd be back. We waited and waited. The horses pawed impatiently at the ground. As time continued to pass, we feared Heinz had been in an accident.

I could see Margarethe in the window of their house crying bitterly while Frau Pause walked back and forth wringing her hands. I felt terrible for the bride. It all seemed very sad to me. Everyone had been so happy she was getting married.

After an hour of futile waiting, the carriages drove away empty, and we slowly returned home, afraid something terrible had happened.

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[14] Front row from right to left: Kaete, me and Kurt on the end.

A week later, to everyone's surprise, Heinz reappeared. No catastrophe had struck him—he'd simply suffered a case of cold feet. The neighbors talked, but in the end forgave him saying, "After all, he had no father."

Later the couple quietly married in a civil ceremony. They moved to Langenbielau, a town nearby, and Margarethe often rode her bike to visit her mother-in-law.

Heinz died in World War II. They never had children.

WINTER FUN

Laughter, loud shouts, and calls of "all clear" echoed across the landscape. Our street was a wonderful place to go sledding, providing a long run and even a dangerous curve. No one owned cars—just horses and sleighs traveled our streets or people rode their bikes in the snow. This January evening the whole village was out "night sledding." My sister, Kaete, and I wanted to go too.

During wartime, flashlights were *verboten* (outdoor lights could attract enemy fire), so we dressed warmly and pinned on our white, star-shaped reflector badges.

"Mama, come with us," we begged. Mother shook her head and reminded us that she couldn't walk up steep inclines so well anymore.

"We'll pull you on the sled," we promised. "Please, at least go on one ride?"

It didn't occur to us that she had already experienced this excitement as a child. Finally consenting, she dressed in warm clothes, and we set out for the street. Fresh snow glittered in the moonlight and crunched beneath our leather winter shoes. Kaete and I huffed and puffed to pull Mother up the hill.

When we arrived, what a sight! Sleds of all sizes zipped down the slope. To increase speed, some children had tied them together, with the front man on his stomach, steering with his feet—a precarious position. Some boys zoomed by on skis. Street sledding was *verboten* because this created slick conditions, but the presence of the mayor's kids indicated that bureaucratic eyes conveniently looked the other way for the time being.

After our first ride, Mother said she enjoyed it but wanted to go home; we were satisfied that she'd gone once, as promised. My sister and I took turns on the sled. I loved flying down the hill, exhilarated by the speed and the wind in my ears.

Edith brought her sled which was bigger than ours, and we flew down the slope together. Our cheeks turned red and our hands and feet got cold, but sledding was fun. And romantic. Couples, pressed close together on their sled, shot down the hill. The world glittered and sparkled in the cold night air.

Finally we returned home to a warm, cozy kitchen and Mother served us mulled wine—a beverage similar to hot cider made with berry juice, hot water, and lemon juice—and she added a cinnamon stick to each drink.

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On another occasion we decided to toughen ourselves up and prepared two buckets, filling one with cold and one with warm water. Then we peeled off our shoes and socks and raced around the snowy courtyard twice—barefooted. Though our feet went numb by the end of the first round, our pride kept us going until we rushed into the house, reviving our feet in the bucket of cold water. You must warm numbed feet slowly, otherwise you'll experience terrible pain. Finally we were ready to step into the other bucket. Ah, that warm water felt good. Then a vigorous towel rub and our feet virtually glowed with heat.

Some time ago I read in the newspaper that this practice is considered healthy these days. See, we weren't too far behind the times!

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Once when I was in sixth grade, Herr Hoffman insisted we bring our sleds to school for P.E. He wanted us to ride down a steep hill and over a ski jump. This would have been fine except for the part about the ski jump, which of course, was built for skiers.

Our teacher gave the command that we were to begin. Edith and I zoomed down the hill and on meeting the ski jump, flew through the air and crashed. I fell on my back and couldn't get my breath. I thought I would die. As I lay on the side of the hill, there lay Edith, too—the same thing had happened to her. Slowly, under much pain, I began to breathe.

Our classmates helped us onto the sleds and pulled us up the hill. Herr Hoffman saw we were injured and was frightened because he had been responsible. He immediately cancelled class and ordered some boys to pull us home on the sleds.

When the doctor examined us at the clinic, he said that we had badly bruised our back muscles and needed rest, but fortunately, our lungs weren't affected and no ribs were broken. Edith's mother was so upset she gave Herr Hoffman a big piece of her mind. If Germany hadn't been at war and suffered teacher shortage, he certainly would have lost his job.

For a long time each breath produced pain. I assume, after what I know today, that we probably had a few cracked ribs.

HERDING COWS

I loved harvest time. The air filled with the fragrant aroma of freshly plowed earth, ripe fruit and fermenting beet tops in the silo. Women from the village came to help us harvest the potatoes; our farm bustled with activity and rang with laughter and jokes exchanged by busy workers. We

picked apples, pears, plums, cherries. Most of all, I relished the three-week vacation from school. I was happy to forgo that 30 minute walk every morning.

In these days before fences, we kept the cows in the barn all summer as there was no other way to keep them out of the fields. We needed the field grass for hay. In the fall, after haying, the cows could mow down the rest before winter.

I preferred staying home with the adults, but cow herding was my assigned chore. It was pointless to complain. In the afternoons, I drove our cows to the clover fields. To console myself, I brought along a small suitcase of books. I loved to read though Father believed reading was an indulgent waste of time. He believed in "first work, then pleasure" and feared I'd become lazy.

Once he threatened, "I'm going to burn your old books!"

I retorted, "I need them as much as you need your cigars." That got him off my back for a while.

The first day of the season, we released all the cows and their calves into the barnyard. The animals, intoxicated by their freedom, leaped in the air and ran back and forth in a joyful frenzy. I loved seeing them so frisky. Once they calmed down, we opened the gate that led to the field, and I walked ahead calling, "Loa, loa! loa!"

Believe me, these creatures maintain a "pecking order" and defend this ranking with horns. One by one the dairy cows fell in line while the calves brought up the rear, a farmhand or maid driving them from behind.

Once we arrived at the pasture, I stayed alone with the cows. That was fine with me as long as they nibbled their grass content, but we bordered on a field of beets, and once they wandered there, it was difficult to maintain control.

One cow, in particular, gave me trouble. Whenever fancy struck Mena, she'd flatten her ears and bolt, and I'd have to chase her with a long stick. She'd make me so furious, I wanted to butcher her on the spot. She was a troublemaker who led all the other cows astray. I often suggested to my parents that they sell this worthless animal. Every chance I could, I found an excuse to leave her home in the barn. After many years, Mena was the first cow we sold, to my great satisfaction.

But there were many things I liked about herding cows. When they grazed peacefully and a few rested contentedly in the grass, I sat by the edge of the path and read my books. One time I was so engrossed that I forgot all about them, and see here, they sensed my lack of attention. I looked up in time to catch the whole herd fleeing, tails high, in the direction of Peilau, the next town. I raced after them, my hair flying until my braids came completely undone, but it was impossible to stop them.

Luckily, my sister Kaete, and some farmhands saw my dilemma from afar and came to the rescue, rounding up the escapees. However, the cows' flight did plenty of damage to the neighbors' fields. Why all of them suddenly hightailed it for town puzzled us. I suspected that bad Mena got the itch, bolted, and the others followed. Exasperating!

Under clear skies and with a contented herd, I loved to lay on my back, watch the cloud pictures in the sky and listen to the sounds of quiet—the rushing nearby stream and the trees rustling their leaves in the wind. But often I felt very lonely, too. When fog blanketed the area, an eerie feeling crept over me, with the only sounds coming from the rattling, splashing water mill or the distant clopping of a horse and wagon. The crows would fly overhead and scream mercilessly—a sign the weather was turning cold. I'd wrap my long coat more tightly around myself and long for evening to come so I could go home. Back in the barn, I liked the peaceful feeling of seeing the cows contentedly chewing their hay.

Once a pregnant cow took off alone. I knew she was due soon and figured she was headed for home. Sure enough, when we arrived at the barnyard later that evening, her new-born stood proud on spindly legs.

Sometimes two or three neighbor boys joined me in the afternoons to help guard the field, and I loved the company. They liked to come along because Mother always packed a great afternoon snack for us of sandwiches and fruit, and they ate their fill.

We entertained ourselves in various ways. After raking together dry potato bushes, we'd burn them and then bake potatoes in the coals. How wonderful they tasted, these blackened vegetables, a regular feast out on the open range.

We also used spades to dig for mice. This was not my pleasure, but the boys loved it. One day we found a long burrow, and deep in the earth, a hamster's stash. Life out in the fields was highly interesting. Once in a while a wild rabbit would hop by. Wild pheasants nested in the fields and quails flew overhead. Sometimes I took a basket to the fields with me and picked white mushrooms to bring home. We dried them or fried them in butter. Tasty!

One day I came up with the bright idea to send our dog, Rolf, to round up a stray cow because I wanted to keep reading. I took a long rope and commanded him to drive the cow back. He bit her in the hind legs. The cow wheeled around and lunged at him with her horns, causing the dog to growl and bare his teeth. Okay, this didn't work.

Kaete helped me drive the cows home that evening as it was not a job I could do alone. Every so often they veered from the path, nibbling here and there. I noticed one particularly disobedient cow, Lene. Why not try dog training one more time?

"Go get her, Rolf," I said. He sped after her, barking wildly at the stubborn animal. She lowered her head and gave him a sharp push with her horns. This apparently proved too much for Rolf's doggy pride. He clamped hard onto her udder. With Rolf in tow, Lene shot off as if a pack of hyenas were chasing her. I gasped. Our best milk cow!

"Help," I screamed. "Help!" Kaete saw them coming, grabbed a pitch fork and began beating the dog until he let go. We were terrified that the cow's udder would get infected after this trauma.

That evening when Mother came in from the milking, she commented, "Lene gave so little milk tonight. I don't know what's ailing her." Kaete and I said nothing. Unthinkable, the tirade Father

would unleash on me if this valuable cow were damaged because of my carelessness. Fortunately, Lene recovered quickly, and I thanked God for saving me from Father's fury. Rolf also had avoided injuries, but that was my last attempt to train a dog in cow herding.

MOUSE STORIES

In the barn the threshing machine hummed. Mother sat at the top of the machine and fed it sheaves. She wore an old, long coat, a head scarf and a plastic mask over her face to protect her from the flying kernels. Suddenly the machine shut down, and I saw Father help my pale-faced Mother down from her perch. He took off her coat and out jumped a mouse. She had apparently felt it crawling under her coat and was very near fainting.

I was so frightened when I saw Mother white-faced like that, that I was actually glad the problem was only a mouse, even though I hate mice. I had feared the worst, but Mother was alive.

Another time Mother came out of the barn and when she took off her scarf, a mouse leaped down. She had such thick hair, she hadn't even felt it. We all screamed and then chased the mouse, who quickly lost his life.

A third time Mother called us all into the courtyard. She stood with a broom poised over a box on the ground and commanded us to arm ourselves with sticks and brooms because inside a mouse certainly scurried around.

"Now, carefully lift the lid, but watch out!" she instructed

We obeyed but what was that? Only a large bug crawling around cheerfully.

PEDDLERS AND BEGGARS

Various peddlers would come by our farm either on bicycles pulling a small trailer, by horse and buggy, or by car.

They brought all kinds of wares—shoe laces, needles and thread, socks, dresses and shoes, yes, even smoked herring and cheese. They'd cart all their wares into the house for Mother's leisurely inspection. She often sighed, saying, "I don't have time to look at everything. Dinner has to be served promptly." Between our family and the hired help, she usually cooked for nine people. Many times she bought something simply to get the peddler to leave quickly.

Some peddlers dropped by to sharpen our scissors or knives, working on site in our courtyard. They also repaired the zinc bed warmers, soldering holes to prevent leakage.

Other peddlers dropped by to sell Father piglets or farming equipment. Some days it was just "a coming and a going" and the poor dog got no break from barking.

Once a peddler made a suggestive comment to Mother and she later told Father. When the peddler stopped in on his next round, Father charged at him with the pitch fork shouting, "You good-for-nothing! Don't ever show your face here again or I'll impale you!"

Knees knocking, the peddler backed away and never returned. Yes, in those days, men defended their women and their honor!

Before the war, beggars also dropped by. One man played the trumpet for handouts, entertaining with songs like "You Can't Stay Faithful" or "There Was One Time a Loyal Military Horseman." His clothes were dirty, and he smelled as if he hadn't taken a bath in a long time. But his tanned, wrinkled face was always smiling.

One day he came by again and Mother handed hand him some money and a sandwich saying, "It would be better if you wouldn't play for us today. The trumpet bothers the dog's ears."

He gratefully devoured the food and smiled. "Thank you very much," he said shaking her hand. "But please, do let me show my appreciation."

And with that, he shook the spittle out of his instrument, raised it to his lips and blasted away. Unfortunately, he played off key, and our dog howled a pitiful accompaniment to every painful note. The trumpet-dog duet continued without end it seemed. As each verse ended, we fervently hoped it was the last. No, beggars wouldn't let you just give them something without giving in return. They had their pride. So he blasted away while we listened helplessly.

Every so often the organ grinder visited. He was a middle-aged World War I veteran with a gray beard and a wooden leg. After setting his cap on the ground to collect coins, he turned his crank and the music tumbled out of the box. We children loved it when he came and "danced" to his music by spinning round and round in circles. He laughed and joked with us and expressed his sincerest gratitude for any token dropped in his cap.

During the war, begging was *verboten* because the Nazis believed it lowered self-esteem and that hand-outs degraded people. Their motto: "No one shall hunger or freeze; work for all." And the beggars disappeared because the Nazis followed through on their motto to employ everyone.

MEMORY OF MOTHER'S DAY IN SILESIA

The lilacs and many wildflowers in the fields and woods bloomed this Mother's Day, the second Sunday in May. The cuckoo called from the woods and we children called back: "Cuckoo, how many years do I have left to live?" Then we'd count and hope for many calls. According to folklore, if the cuckoo called from the woods the weather would stay nice; however, if you heard him in the village, it would soon rain.

We decorated the table with a bouquet of lilacs, our cards, and a chocolate heart wrapped in silver foil and large bow. I secretly hoped that someday when I was a mother, my future husband would also give me such a lovely gift.

Mother was touched by all our expressions of love and buried her face in the flowers to hide her tears. It made me so happy that we'd brought her joy.

Father invited the family for a carriage ride through the fields. He showed Mother the progress they were making—how the seedlings had grown and what still needed to be done. The larks sang and once in a while a rabbit shot across the way. Deep peace reigned all around.

During Hitler's time, Mother's Day was celebrated with all kinds of honors. Women who had borne four children received the bronze cross, those who had borne six and seven received the silver cross, and women who bore eight children or more, received a gold cross. Long, festive tables stood with pastries and coffee. Poems were recited, songs were sung—everything in honor of mothers:

I love nothing so much as you, my Mama,
Except perhaps the dear Lord in heaven Himself.
Him I love because he gave me you, my dear, precious Mama—The best Mama in all the world.

I liked that song—it expressed how I felt.

Mothers and Fathers were honored, and we children were proud of our parents. I was always sad that Mother never received a cross of honor. She had three living children and the fourth died at birth.

In complete vanity, I often admired myself in Mother's armoire mirror. The interior, scented with good quality perfume and mothballs, proved more interesting. Her wedding dress which she dyed red to wear for other occasions hung there, as well as Sunday dresses and summer and winter coats. All came with matching hats and gloves. In the drawer lay delicately crocheted fingerless gloves that reached to the elbows and other gloves in black or white satin. Up above she kept her hats; below the dresses, she stored her shoes. I dreamed of someday having an armoire like hers.

GROWN UP

Parents taught children to always make eye contact and greet adults politely in all situations, friends and strangers alike. Etiquette required that whoever entered a room took initiative to shake hands with the others already there. In addition, girls curtsied while boys bowed. Adults simply shook hands. However, in the presence of visitors, children never spoke unless spoken to.

At fourteen years of age we reached adulthood. After we finished eighth grade and completed confirmation in the Lutheran church, everyone addressed us with the German formality "Sie" instead of "Du." We were addressed as Mr. or Miss, and I became "Frauelein Haase."

Once I was a Frauelein, society expected me to act like one and rise to the challenge of responsibilities. Everyone responded well to this expectation, not just me; it was part of our culture and generation. We did our work and didn't whine. On the contrary, we were proud to be acknowledged as adults and proud of our ability to work hard.

Up to fourteen years of age boys wore shorts. In the winter they wore shorts with long stockings, but in the summer went bare-legged. Little boys wore knitted thigh stockings held in place by garters. Older boys' stockings were held up by elastic bands. But as soon as boys were confirmed at age fourteen, they wore long pants, except in the summer when it was warm. Wearing trousers meant they were adults, they shouldered responsibility, and they were proud of it.

I well remember the first time I wore silk stockings. It was for my confirmation. Up to that time I had always worn cotton ones in summer and wool ones in winter. Stockings were held up by garters. Wearing the silk stockings was a special privilege! Over and over I stole admiring glances at my terrific legs.

It is good to have such rites of passage in life. We children looked forward to being treated as grownups. If you have to wait for the fulfillment of something, you appreciate it so much more. Today children often dress like adults. If they paint their nails already at five years old, what's left? Better to hold children back in such things than to encourage them growing up too fast. Let kids be kids. Don't skip the innocent time of childhood. It never returns.

MY CONFIRMATION

In January 1943 I turned fourteen and on March 7th I was confirmed. (Photo from my confirmation celebration.)

For two years I attended confirmation class once a week after school. Our pastor taught us church history and also the symbolism in church architecture. The long structure of our building symbolized Noah's ark and was to remind us of the refuge found in God. The church steeples point like fingers toward heaven to God. The bells call people to the worship service singing, "Come, come, come." The wooden pulpit was carved with symbols from Revelation.

At the altar of our church, where people knelt to pray, a picture of the Last Supper hung on the wall and above the picture was depicted the eye of God, a reminder that God always sees us. In front of the picture stood a table with two lighted candles. The

altar was fenced in, with two steps leading to the place we knelt and received communion.

We learned many songs, the Ten Commandments and also Psalms and other Bible verses. And we learned many Bible stories. The pastor explained to us that Jesus was nailed to the cross as a sacrifice for our sins and that we must believe in Him in order to be saved.

Once our Pastor told us the story of Ruth and Naomi. Suddenly he asked, "Is there anyone here with the name Ruth? No? That's too bad. It's such a beautiful name." I was so impressed with the faithful love and character of this biblical woman, I promised myself that my first daughter would be named after her. Yes, and that is exactly what I did!

To be confirmed meant saying "yes" to Jesus' sacrifice for my sins. I was agreeing to the commitment my parents and godparents made to the Lord at my infant baptism. Sadly, only a few took this promise to heart, but I was serious about it.

A few days before the ceremony, our pastor encouraged us to examine our lives and to make things right with others—to apologize to people we may have hurt, or if we had stolen something to come forward. His reasoning was that we should not partake of communion in an unworthy manner. So we all went first to our teacher and asked for forgiveness if we'd irritated or troubled him—some cried during this confession—then we went to our parents, which also wasn't easy. Some boys went to neighbors to admit they'd stolen apples from their garden and asked forgiveness.

We decorated the church with garlands of pine boughs. Those of us to be confirmed wore black—the boys in dark suits, the girls in black dresses. We girls wore myrtle wreaths in our hair. The boys wore a matching boutonniere. I did not foresee that I would wear that dress for many years in mourning.

As the bells rang, we proceeded into the church and seated ourselves in the reserved pews in the church nave. My brother, Kurt, was not there as he was already in the military. Otherwise, quite a few of my relatives came, also my godfather, Onkel Friederich who was Jewish but became a Christian. Mother told me later that because my godfather was Jewish, this would bring a special blessing to me.

My godparents remembered my baptism and told me the story. Because it was such a cold January and a record-breaking harsh winter, my parents couldn't baptize me until April because our church was unheated. But it was still so cold in April that they had to bundle me in many layers. Every so often they would check to see if I was still alive. They had been afraid they might be suffocating me with too many wrappings.

My confirmation is a beautiful memory. I will never forget the sermon our pastor preached. His message was, "Hold fast to Jesus Christ, the beginning and completer of all things." In my heart I promised to follow Him forever.

By threes we approached the altar and each of us were given a Bible verse for our life. Mine read, "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." (Romans 12:12). Then we were

allowed to take communion for the first time. It was all very celebratory. Edith, Grete and I knelt at the altar. First we received the wafer the pastor laid on our tongue, the symbol for the body of Jesus, then we were handed the cup of wine and each of us took a small sip. This symbolized the blood of Jesus shed for us. During communion, the congregation sang my favorite song about opening up your heart's door saying, "Oh Lord, I embrace you. Never let me go."

In this way we always celebrated communion. Only after our confirmation, after we had learned the full meaning of communion, were we allowed to participate. It was part of the rite of passage to adulthood.

At home we celebrated with all the relatives who came for the great occasion. Neighbors brought flowers and I received cards and gifts.

Mother had hired a cook for the day, who at one time had worked at the castle, and two maids also helped prepare the feast. This freed Mother to entertain the guests.

There were several courses to the meal. First soup, then roast goose with all the trimmings, and a lemon dessert. This was a very unique dessert, and I've never had anything like it ever again. It was made with eggs and egg whites and was very light and fluffy, a heavenly concoction! In the afternoon, several tortes and different cakes were served along with strong black coffee. In the evening, Mother served sandwiches with black tea and other things. The table stood beautifully decorated with greenery and a white damask table cloth.

I was now officially an adult. Five weeks later Mother suffered a stroke.

6

WAR

War. What a terrible word. It started September 1, 1939. On August 31st our school took a bus to the Schneekoppe, a nearby butte, and hiked for four hours. From the top we were able to see Czechoslovakia and saw airplanes already flying overhead. Everyone hoped for a quick end to the conflict. Sadly, it was to be our last field trip.

In the war everything was rationed. Ration cards for clothing came with a point allowance. If we used up all our points nothing could be bought anymore, so we had to budget carefully. Only two pairs of shoes were allowed per year. Under these conditions we had to buy them extra large and stuff the toes with cotton balls, because we children were still growing. Sometimes I wore old hand-me-downs from my siblings, but these didn't fit right, and my toes turned white from the pressure. As a result of constantly wearing shoes too small for me, my big toes grew deformed.

Shoes were crafted out of leather and required daily care. We needed a second pair in winter in case one pair got wet. Many children would go barefooted all summer long. Not me. I leaped in the air at every little pebble and should have toughened up more.

All groceries were rationed. Every month the government issued new ration cards—cards for the regular user, the laborer, pregnant mothers and small children. Each person was assigned to a category which determined the amount of food allotted. Salt and fruit were not rationed. You could over-salt your life but not over-sweeten it. Believe me, there were no overweight people.

Of course, cigarettes and cigars were also were rationed. Though they did not smoke, Mother and Kaete would buy their allotment so that when Father's moods grew too intolerable, they could pacify him. He'd even smoke cigar butts, cigarette butts, or peppermint tea in a pipe, though he wasn't normally a pipe smoker. To the end of his life he never overcame this addiction, despite doctor's orders to quit because of his ulcers.

Coats and bicycle tire tubes were also only available by permit. "Wheels must roll for victory" was the saying. In order to ride the train we had to have a special permit. The trains posted signs that read, "Warning! Enemy listens in" or "Don't spit out of the window."

Evenings we darkened all windows with black paper as a precaution against air raids. If any light escaped, someone was sure to rap on your window to let you know. As further safety precautions, we pointed flashlights downward and wore reflectors to see one another on the streets.

The government required us to hang a sign on our radio that said, "The listening of foreign stations is *verboten*." Disobedience could land you in jail. We broke this rule and listened to a Swiss station at night, noticing that their news often contradicted ours.

Dr. Goebbels, the propaganda minister, talked big. Sarcastically we often said, "He already has victory in his pocket—he just won't take it out."

We learned how to be resourceful and threw nothing away. For example, we made our own slippers. You can try this sometime—here's how: (1) stand on cardboard and draw around the foot, (2) cut out your drawing for the sole, (3) sew braided rags onto the cardboard, (4) cover the inside sole with fabric, (5) cut out the upper part from an old coat or pants, and sew everything together. Voila! Finished.

Kurt was seventeen when the war started, and he and Father often discussed world events heatedly. The clash between the experienced soldier and the young man who eagerly followed world events certainly showed a generation gap.

Father often predicted, "You will amass victories to death," or "If you finish the war like we did in 1918, you can be happy because no enemy set foot on German soil."

Kurt was of another opinion. "See how far our troops have advanced."

Father would counter, "Are they crazy, advancing that far into enemy territory? That means the reinforcements always get farther behind. And what will they do when the Russian winter comes?"

Father ended up being right about everything, and after Kurt saw war up close, they got along much better again.

Yes, every generation must experience life for itself. It's still that way today. We parents cannot live our children's lives. They have to become convinced themselves about this or that. But we can warn them and pray for them.

Father often said, "We can never win, because we are persecuting the Jews. In the Bible it says, 'Woe to them who touch the apple of mine eye.' The Jews are God's special people and whoever touches them will be punished."

Yes, and we Germans paid dearly for the guilt on our heads through the Nazis. There was barely a house or a family that did not suffer terribly in the war.

After I came to America, people sometimes asked me if I ever saw Hitler. In films, yes, but never in person. I never had a desire to see this screaming demi-god. Because of my father, screaming men frighten me.

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Terrible things happened the night of November 9, 1938 when Tante Ida and Tante Emma, who lived across from the Reichenbach synagogue, woke suddenly to the sound of breaking windows and doors. From their window they watched, horrified, as the Nazis destroyed the synagogue and carted away the rabbi and his family. They had always enjoyed watching the children play in the courtyard and felt attached to them. Now this innocent family was being hauled away for no reason and they could do nothing about it. To whom do you report when government is committing the crime? They couldn't sleep for days afterward they were so upset.

The Nazis hung a swastika in the synagogue and transformed the building into a Hitler youth center. Other businesses were also destroyed by the S.A. as many of the big stores belonged to Jews. I remember how upset and angry my aunts were when they arrived at the farm and told us about these events in the "big city." We were shocked.

On the radio the Nazis railed: "Jews hog all the wealth; they lie and cheat; they hurt the land." Father had several Jewish friends in Reichenbach and was shocked and saddened to learn that they, too, had been taken away.

We continued to worry about my Jewish godfather, Onkel Friedrich, who was married to Tante Gustel, Mother's sister. He came from Czechoslovakia and knew Hebrew and Czech.

We children loved him—he never had any children of his own. When he came to visit it was exciting because he sometimes brought us special toys from Czechoslovakia.

To our sorrow, the Gestapo came for him two months before the war ended, and we never heard from him again.

The war brought horrific news every day.

FATHER AND MOTHER DURING WORLD WAR II

Even though he was not a Nazi party member, Father was appointed by the mayor as the agricultural leader of Habendorf since all the men were enlisted and he was too old for the military. His responsibilities entailed making sure that farmers did not leave tools in their fields over the winter. Most farmers operated in an orderly fashion, but two usually needed reminding.

As the agricultural leader, Father assessed how many and what kind of crops each farmer must plant according to the amount of land owned and what percent of grains the state required during the war effort. Flax was grown for oil and spun into thread for clothing. All flax had to be delivered to the government; we were not allowed to keep any.

During the war, we delivered all produce and goods to the government. They paid us, and each family was allowed to keep a certain amount for themselves. Remember, everything was rationed in those days. For example, we owned thirty-five chickens and two roosters. We were allowed to keep the eggs from eight hens (one hen per person)—all the rest had to be handed over to the government.

Every Thursday the contracted delivery man picked up the eggs; they were weighed, counted, recorded and paid for. Each hen was expected to produce one egg per day, and when that didn't happen, we were required to give up some of our personal allowance or we were fined. The same with milk. A certain amount was expected per cow and needed to be delivered to the dairy. Everything was precisely recorded and inspected.

When the authorities assigned *Einquartierung*, requiring Habendorf to shelter incoming troops, Father was responsible for the army's horses and their feed. This always brought hardship because the farmers had to give up their own rations—feed, oats and hay.

After World War I, Father belonged to the Stalhelm, a party loyal to the Kaiser, or emperor, of Germany.[15] Unfortunately, this party was in the minority and couldn't stop the S.A. from rising to power, and the S.A. supported Hitler.[16] Later during elections, they maintained that the Stahlhelm was voting for Hitler, which was a lie, and shortly thereafter, the Stahlhelm disbanded. As Father had been a flag bearer, we hid the Stahlhelm flag in our attic where it survived the war.

Father often said, "A man of the street like Hitler, will lead us back to the streets." Because of his outspokenness against the regime, people warned him that he needed to watch what he said or he could be reported some day. The Nazis in town left him alone, mainly because they needed him. Only old men and boys under age 16 remained in the village. Boys that came of age were drafted by the Volksturm and sent to war.[17]

As the village agricultural leader, the decision whether or not to evacuate Habendorf farmers fell to Father. Evacuation meant releasing all the animals, loading up your wagons and joining the refugees on the road. I thank the Lord, Father made the right decision and we stayed home.

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Before Hitler came to power, Mother belonged to the "Luisenbund." This club, named after Queen Luise, consisted of women loyal to the Kaiser who followed the noble creed "I serve." These women wore royal Prussian blue dresses with white collars when they went to their meetings.

The "Jungluisen" for girls fifteen and older and the "Kornbluemchen" for girls ten to fourteen were a club like girl scouts. They also wore blue dresses as their uniform.

The men who considered themselves Kaiser loyalists participated in the "Stahlhelm" and boys joined the "Scharnhorst." These clubs were later all disbanded by Hitler. Instead, he implemented the "Pflicht Frauenschaft," the Nazi party's "Women of Duty" which Mother did not join. However, she was required to join the "Frauenwerk."[18] You had no say whether you

[15] The Nationalists, Stalhelm, fought the Communists in street clashes.
[16] S.A. – Socialist worker party that dressed in brown uniforms.
[17] Volksturm—the organization supporting the war effort on the home front, responsible for home security.
[18] Frauenwerk— "Women Workers," an organization that supported the war effort.

were in this organization or not. If you didn't join the Pflicht Frauenschaft, then you were automatically drafted into the Frauenwerk.

I remember how bitterly my mother wept when all this happened. She said, "I do not like this organization—I don't want to belong to them." The Frauenwerk would drop by and pressure her to give money or materials. They started a fundraiser which encouraged us to part with some of our rationed groceries, for example, to give a pound of flour, sugar or butter. The donations were collected and then they baked for the soldiers. Or they asked us to knit socks and slippers—all for the Fatherland and for the soldiers. Mother cared about the soldiers, but she found the pressure, expectations and critical attitude among the Frauenwerk difficult to bear.

My parents also were required to report to authorities who wanted to see papers, questioned them about their genealogy and examined them for Jewish features, looking for a prominent nose or darker complexion. My parents could not understand this demand but were forced to comply. What was happening to their country?

SCHOOL DURING THE WAR YEARS

Because of a teacher shortage during the war, several schools in neighboring areas closed. Von Rosenbach and the Catholic school merged with Habendorf. At first religious studies continued, with separate classes for Protestants and Catholics. Up to that time, Protestants and Catholics always educated their children in separate schools.

Later, the government dropped religion from the curriculum altogether. Instead, we learned about Hitler and politics. When Hitler gave a speech on the radio, Herr Hoffman crammed the whole school into the largest classroom to listen. Of course we didn't mind since we welcomed any distractions from schoolwork.

The government required schools to participate in the war effort. For example, in spring we students planted cabbage in the estate fields belonging to the castle as many of their workers now served in the army.

We planted the fields in stages. The first group of children dug holes one foot apart. Then the next group placed a cabbage in each hole. The older students pressed them firmly into the ground, and the little ones followed behind to water. With this system we planted many fields. We even received a small payment, and volunteers who worked beyond required school hours earned extra money. I liked that.

In the fall we helped bring in the potato harvest, filling baskets which the older boys carried to waiting wagons. Everyone pitched in so no food spoiled. Yes, it was very important to keep sowing, planting and harvesting because of the trade embargo against Germany. In the early 1940s, Germany fed and clothed 80 million people and still found the resources to make war. We were innovative and rigidly disciplined—determined to survive. People poured their energy into a united effort, often saying, "What use is it if we're all so smart and still lose the war? Wheels must roll for victory!" But in the end, all our blood, sweat and tears gained us nothing.

We also supported the war effort by collecting items for recycling. You can give us credit as early pioneers in the environmental movement! Factories wove new fabric from rags, manufactured soap from animal bones and crafted hairbrushes from pig bristles. They pressed paper from pulp and melted down metal for new uses.

We children collected rags, bones, metal, iron, paper, toothpaste tubes, foil—just about anything—and brought our loot to the school shed where it was sorted and taken to a larger collection site in the next town. For one pound of rags, usually old clothes, we received five points, for bones, two, and so on. With 100 points you could acquire a book.

Of course, I was motivated. I loved books and they were no longer available in stores. When Father slaughtered a pig, oh joy, I collected many bones and bristles. Once I pulled an old zinc manure barrel on a small wagon to school. That was hard work despite Edith's help, but I earned many extra points which made the effort worth it.

A popular song at the time, "We're collecting rags, bones, foil, paper and knocked-out teeth," joked how far we Germans would go in our frugality. We kept our sense of humor—despite the grave matter of our country's survival.

During my early school years we sang Christmas carols, but this practice eventually disappeared. Because of his hatred for all things Jewish and since Jesus was a Jew, Hitler did away with Christmas in schools. Instead, he instituted the Festival of Lights, winter solstice, which Germanic tribes celebrated long ago. We sang "Sun Return Again" or songs about the night sky.

Our leaders praised the pagan gods of our ancestors—the sun, the moon and stars—in an attempt to brainwash us. Fine, that was school, but at home and in our churches we cheerfully celebrated the holiday as before, with a Christmas tree and the manger. Do you see why America's politically-correct culture and efforts to banish God and Christmas from public life today feels strangely familiar to me?

Hitler upheld our ancestors as models of rugged strength and believed in raising German youths like Spartans—tough as leather, fleet as greyhounds, and hard as iron." Herr Hoffman drilled this phrase into us regularly. Here is what it meant:

Tough as leather: Endure cold, heat and hunger without complaining and don't whine at every little thing. For example, on frosty mornings we exercised outside in lightweight clothes; in the summers we swam in cold water.

Fleet as greyhounds: Be the fastest athletes, the quickest learners and the swiftest workers.

Hard as iron: Be tough, especially on yourself. This also included living by a strict moral code. Our elders taught us to always tell the truth and punished liars severely, usually with a beating. We were raised with the saying, "He who lies once will not be believed again, even if he tells the truth."

All children, ten years old and up, attended mandatory Hitler Youth meetings. During this one-hour Wednesday afternoon program, we learned something about Hitler's life, played games or did crafts and exercised. Physical activity mostly centered on the long jump, the 60 meter race and ball-throwing skills. Children who met fitness standards received a victor's pin. Hitler considered exercise important for young people. He emphasized good posture in sports and school for health reasons. He demanded the development of disciple as we were being trained to become the super race.

The longer Hitler ruled, the stronger the propaganda became against Jews. The atmosphere in the culture permeated the schools as well. Teachers would drop remarks saying Jews were bad; they lie and cheat and rob the German people of their wealth. Slowly people started believing these myths.

Jews owned most of the businesses in Germany. My father knew many in Reichenbach, the city nearest our village. He'd gone to school with them and faithfully continued to give these shop owners his business until they suddenly disappeared. No Jews lived in Habendorf.

We did not know about the concentration camps. We heard rumors that the Jews were dispossessed and evacuated, but we were told, "They are being taken to Palestine." Later we also saw some who were forced to build Panzer barricades under military supervision.

Remember, we lived in a small village in the country and no one traveled anymore. Only soldiers were allowed to use transportation. Civilians needed a special permit to use the train. Radio was our only connection with the outside world, and we listened to foreign stations at great risk for this was *verboten*. We wondered who was telling us the truth.

I was thankful for my good home—my parents stood against Hitler. They stressed that he was a little antichrist, and today I understand this well. As a child I didn't. I could have cared less whether we said "Heil Hitler" or "Good Morning." But from the perspective of an adult, I see why my parents railed against the arrogance of this required greeting. "Heil Hitler" essentially meant "Hail to King Hitler," as if he were asking for an allegiance close to worship. How easily we mimic expressions as a child, unaware of what we're saying.

During his first six years in power, Hitler created economic prosperity with jobs for everyone—a blue collar worker could even afford to build a small house. And Hitler built the autobahn. With childish short-sightedness, I sometimes wondered why my parents ranted against him—everything seemed to be going so well.

However, lively discussions with Father and Mother protected me from the propaganda at school. Every time our teacher made snide remarks about Jews or Jesus, I always thought, *He's wrong; my parents know better*. This is why parents need to cultivate good relationships with their children. Discussing issues helps children think for themselves. I am so grateful to the Lord for my stable home and the wise parents he gave me.

My education ended in eighth grade. Only students with a certain grade point and teacher's approval were allowed to attend high school. Herr Hoffman recommended Edith and me for the

Gymnasium in Reichenbach, but my parents refused to let me go. Though I was disappointed in their decision, they had good reasons. Because it would have been impossible to bike the five miles from Habendorf to the city in harsh winters, and no other transportation was available, attending Gymnasium would have meant leaving home. I could have lived with my aunts, but my parents were leery of the intense Nazi influence I would have come under at the school. The propaganda and pressures from the party were much greater in that environment. Students who graduated and wanted to enter the workforce in their chosen career had to prove they had no Jewish ancestors by authenticating their genealogy with certificates from the courthouse or a family Bible.

When Edith's parents heard that mine would not let me go to the Gymnasium, they decided not to send her either. A small consolation. Four weeks after completing eighth grade, Mother had a stroke and my childhood ended abruptly anyway.

SAYINGS DURING WORLD WAR II

Oh the things that were said in Hitler's time! Behind cupped hands we sang in whispers, "It all shall pass, it all flows by, you see. Hitler is the first to go, then the party." Or we joked, "The Fuehrer has victory in his pocket. He just won't take it out." Or, very cynically, "Do you already have Hitler's picture? Nope, but tomorrow we'll buy one yet." Our family for sure did not hang a portrait of Hitler in our house.

I once read a joke that went like this: A gentleman was given a gift of three portraits—of Hitler, Goering and Goebels. "What on earth shall I do with these?" the man asked. Another replied, "That's easy. Best thing is you just hang all three together."

The German people weren't necessarily so Hitler friendly, and when such jokes went around, you had to be careful to whom you repeated them so that they weren't heard by the "wrong" ears, otherwise you could get arrested.

Another popular saying went like this: "Enjoy the war. Peacetime will be gruesome." We experienced this literally. During the war we enjoyed calm while in West Germany people suffered and died under constant air raids. After the war ended, our "peacetime" turned into a nightmare under the Russian occupation.

WARTIME ROMANCE

Our neighbors had four boys. The oldest, Herbert, was Kurt's age and had a bad case of acne. Herbert was a graphic artist, and every day after work, he came and sat with us as we ate. He'd talk and talk, all the while staring at Kaete to make sure he was making an impression.

Wherever Kaete went, Herbert always seemed to show up, and when she attended the Christian girls' group, he escorted her home. She was sixteen and very pretty with her dark hair and green eyes.

Kaete enjoyed being admired and into her eyes came a dreamy look. Once when Herbert brought her home, I hid by the entrance to eavesdrop and heard him give her a hearty kiss. I told her about it the next day. Oh, was she mad at me for being such a pesky little sister.

At eighteen Herbert was drafted and never came back. He died in action. That was also a very sad day when we received the news.

Once after a community dance Kaete let a hired man from another farm bring her home, all very innocently. The other farmer told Father that his employee was bragging about it. Then Kaete got an earful. Father roared like a wounded lion, "What were you thinking, lowering your standards like that?" A hired man was considered lower class, often not very bright in school.

When a girl let a man bring her home, she implied that she had an interest in him. So in that way the hired man scored, giving him something to brag about, which created the gossip. Kaete cried but Mother brought everything into the proper light, as always.

Once Habendorf housed a tank division of southern German Bavarian soldiers for six weeks because it snowed so much that all roads were closed and had to be shoveled clear.

Two of the soldiers stayed with us. They were very happy and said, "Here one can certainly endure the war." One soldier, Herr Hinsel, was married and already had a child. The other, Martin, had a great sense of humor and the cutest Bavarian accent. Because he had a slight build, I once tried on his uniform and let my sister take a picture.

Martin fell head over heels in love with Kaete and she with him. In the evenings we all played "Aggravation," and he and Kaete did not want to throw each other out of the game. When they kept protecting each other, Herr Hinsel and I protested, "That's not fair. You two are cheating!" But we protested in vain.

We completely spoiled our two Bavarians. We laid heated bricks wrapped in newspapers or rags in their beds at night, so they'd have some warmth when they came home from the night watch. The soldiers were also allowed to eat with us. In exchange they gave us from their provisions.

They told funny Bavarian jokes that made us laugh. Often other soldiers from the division came over to play games. They sighed, "If only we could stay here until the miserable war is over." It was a beautiful, happy time.

But then the day arrived when they had to move on, and the whole village came to see them off, waving goodbye. Many cried.

Kaete and Martin wrote each other constantly. I helped her compose special salutations such as, “My ardently beloved, Martin,” or “my darling sweetheart.”

Sometimes she let me read his letters. But when she hid one, I searched until I found it. I found it irresistibly entertaining to provoke her, and so with passionate drama I’d quote her bits and pieces I’d read. This drove her wild. Understandably.

Herr Hinsel corresponded with Mother and always included special greetings for me. Then came the end of the war, and we never heard from either of them again. We assumed they both died in combat.

One of my teachers, a young man who taught for a short time, also fell in love with Kaete. As a result I enjoyed special privileges. For example, he sent me to the post office or put me in charge of class during reading time.

After one special event, when he wanted to bring Kaete home, Mother told her I had to go with them. Poor teacher, thwarted by the little sister.

A short time later he was drafted, and we never heard from him again. We assumed that he also died in the war. Oh, this terrible hero’s death!

Another time Habendorf quartered a horse regiment from Sachsen. That time we took in four soldiers and two horses. We enjoyed game nights with these young men also. One evening, news came over the radio that Dresden was under severe bombardment and the city was on fire. I will never forget how one soldier paced the room like a wounded animal, wringing his hands in agony and crying because his family was there. We all worried with him. What would happen to them? We never learned if he lost loved ones or not because his company moved on shortly thereafter. He was only twenty-one.

We housed the Italians (our allies) next. They stayed overnight in our horse barn. Our courtyard looked like barracks.

We also housed a Russian regiment that surrendered to the Germans. They had gotten so tired of the oppression from the Bolsheviks, they wanted to fight with the enemy to free their own country. Oh, how they hated the communists.

Russians love hard liquor. One evening we heard one of them cursing. He had come home drunk and fell into the manure pit. That gave us quite a laugh. He sure sobered up quickly.

Our German soldiers often warned us, “Don’t go outside alone—those Russians are all dangerous.” We did not fully understand what these early warnings meant until later.

Being around all these soldiers was very interesting for us girls, and we were, of course, also of interest to them.

Once I ran an errand to our neighbors who had taken in four tank soldiers. As I stepped into the house they chorused, “A girl!” and surrounded me on all sides. One tall, dark, handsome young man said, “Please, will you go out with me tonight?” and told me where to meet him.

I retorted, “That won’t work. My father would never allow it.”

“Your father doesn’t ever need to know about it. Besides, I am serious about you,” he insisted. And he kept trying to persuade me to meet with him that night.

Of course, I didn’t go, heeding Father’s saying: “Soldier’s love is water in a sieve. You never know what is hidden beneath a uniform.” Later, after the soldiers had moved on, I saw my neighbor and he said, “Fraeulein Hannchen, that young man sure was disappointed you didn’t show up. He was serious about you, and he was the son of a wealthy land estate owner.”

“Oh, really?!” I was not one bit sorry. I was only fifteen years old and too young for romance.

The last group we housed before the war’s end was the Air Defense. They wore blue uniforms and only stayed a week. War brought a continual coming and going and constant farewells.

7

OUR FOREIGNERS

During the war we employed foreigners for hired help, usually two hired hands and one maid.

Josef came from west Poland and learned German; he even spoke our dialect. He was a sweet man, a bit slow in his work, but faithful and conscientious. He and Kurt got along well. At that time Kurt was still at home. Josef loved to eat in great quantities and with gusto. For breakfast he consumed five boiled potatoes with butter or whey-cheese and bread. As he ate, the sweat would run down his face. We'd never seen anyone eat quite like him.

Once we served a fatty soup steaming hot. Kurt sampled a small spoonful and then declared, "This soup is cold! Well, then, let's eat, Josef." Josef dove in and burned his tongue right smartly. From then on he exercised a bit more restraint in his manners.

Once Josef's uncle visited him and Josef proudly showed him around the place as if it belonged to him.

Another time as we sat around the table, an S.A. Nazi policeman came by and asked, "Where was Josef last night? Thieves have been about."

Father said, "You better look elsewhere. Josef would never do anything like that. I'd place my hand in the fire for him."

"For a foreigner you should never put your hand in the fire," the policemen countered. "Besides, for what you just said, I could arrest you."

Father shot back, "I would not put it past you. You Nazis are lowlife!"

"Well, what are you doing letting Josef eat at the same table with you? That is *verboten*!"

"This is our table and under my roof everyone eats together," Father answered. Luckily, he and the officer had gone to school together; another may have arrested him.

Yes, and then Josef applied for German citizenship. He was accepted, but unfortunately, the authorities drafted him into the military. With tears he departed from us, and we never heard from him again.

Since Kurt was drafted before Josef, we needed another man on the farm and Antek, a Ukrainian, was sent to us. With black, penetrating eyes and jet black hair, he looked like the stereotypical

criminal. He was lazy and instead of working the potatoes with Josef, he would lay down in a furrow and sleep.

Once Father caught him in the deed. Josef had waved him over, “Come quickly and see,” and there was Antek, peacefully dozing in a potato furrow. Furious, Father yelled, “You lazy bum! It’s about time you get to work!” Antek leaped into the air, shocked to his senses. Father didn’t touch him as physical punishment was verboten and foreigners had the right to complain to the authorities, but shouting wasn’t prohibited. Antek didn’t stay with us for long before he was ordered elsewhere. I was glad; he was not trustworthy and something about him scared me. His black eyes seemed to gleam with hate.

Father’s sister, Tante Ella, also employed a foreigner. Once she was so irritated with the girl—she was very short on patience anyway—that she slapped her. The girl reported her, and if Tante Ella hadn’t come with gifts of bacon and sausage to appease the authorities, she would have been jailed. No, foreigners also had rights.

Once a maid named Maria worked for us. She came from Russia, was well-educated and spoke fluent German. She was a sweet, pretty girl, and a gifted artist. Unfortunately, she had eczema and couldn’t do the work. We felt so sorry for her, but no remedies helped. So the authorities said they would find new employment where her hands could heal and she could tolerate the work. With sorrow we said goodbye, and we all cried because she had won our hearts. We never heard from her again.

Then came Baraska, a short, wiry Ukrainian with small, blue eyes. She loved to work and would get up early in the mornings around five to get started. Father had to tell her, “Don’t get up so early. The cows need their rest. They have to stay on their schedule in order to give milk.”

She knew quite a bit of German and used it, sometimes even quite cheekily. She was very feisty and not even Father intimidated her. Once he didn’t think she swept up the straw the way she should have and yelled at her. With fiery eyes she shouted back, ”You crazy. I good worker. Do good. You always scolding.” Father was astonished, and she was right—she was a very hard worker. I was impressed; I would never have had the courage to talk to Father like that.

Baraska often said, “We willing to work. Volunteer. We so afraid of Russians.” When we asked, “Why? Aren’t they your people?” She spit on the floor and then spewed out, “You not know what Russians are.”

Her boyfriend was a Belgian POW and they hoped to marry secretly. At the end of the war she wanted to flee with us, but we stayed home. She left and we never learned what became of her. Did the Russians capture her? Rumors flew that those who worked for Germany would be killed if they fell into Russian hands. They had seen too much of a different way of life, which threatened the communists.

Then prisoners of war from Belgium and France came to live and work on our farms. That's when another Josef, a Belgian POW, came to work for us. He and some other POWs were held in a hotel and given a considerable amount of freedom.

In the mornings they marched through the village on their way to the farms. They were happy to work, enjoyed good food and were treated well—for them the war was over. Romance sometimes blossomed between farmers' widows and these young men. I knew a couple Belgians who, after the Allies invaded, went home but soon returned to marry and take their brides back to their country.

Josef was twenty-four years old, built rather delicately and was always cheerful. His parents were no longer alive. I loved to hear him sing in French, his mother tongue. He liked being in Germany and also cultivated a secret love.

A friend of his fashioned a ring for me out of a two-Reichsmark silver coin I gave him. I later smuggled this ring past the evacuation checkpoint and Ruth now has it.

We never learned what happened to Josef at the end of the war either. It was all so chaotic.

MOTHER'S STROKE

For some time, Mother had not felt well. Her blood pressure was too high, and the doctor warned my father that he should send her on a special vacation to recover her health. Father said, "No, that will not work. I need Mother here. I can't run the farm without her." Yes, and later he learned that he would have to run it without her after all.

I was already in bed on April 12, 1943. Suddenly I heard Father yell, "Come help! Hurry!" I knew immediately that something was terribly wrong and leaped out of bed, frightened.

Mother lay collapsed in the barn where they had been assisting the birth of a foal. She was unconscious, half dead. We all carried her into the house and began cutting the dress off her because she was sweating and couldn't seem to breathe.

I kept thinking, "No, no, no, it cannot be. It's too soon for her to die." We tried to make her comfortable, doing all we knew to save her. Kaete ran to the neighbor who had a phone and called the doctor.[19]

After the doctor arrived and examined her he said, "There's little hope. She has suffered a massive stroke and is paralyzed on her right side." This was simply horrific for all of us. How could life change like this from one minute to the next?

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[19] We had few telephones in the village.

I went outside into the garden. I couldn't comprehend that I should no longer have a mother. In my heart I screamed to the Lord, pleading, "Please leave Mama with me a little while longer. Please, I want to have more time to show her my love, to just be with her." I was not ready to let her go.

In my desperation I prayed as I had never prayed before. He alone could help. Over and over I begged God to spare her.

And to our joy, she continued to breathe. We gave her strong coffee administered in drops, and little by little over a period of six weeks she came to and recognized us again. Her right side was lame, and her speech was a bit slower and a little slurred, but she could speak again. Using a beaker cup, we infused her with soup and other fluids and spoon-fed her like a baby, making sure she swallowed.

Dr. Stammwitz had just recently come to our region. After several visits we discovered that he was Mother's cousin, the son of my Mother's uncle. He remembered that as a boy his large family often visited our farm. One of his brothers was a chiropractor and had fixed Kurt's back once. When Mother later recovered her memory they often talked during his house visits about days gone by and how they used to play together.

April 13th, the evening after Mother had her stroke, we suddenly heard a knock at the door. To our utter surprise, there stood Kurt. After one and a half years he was sent on leave, and now he came home only to find Mother in crisis.

It was so sad for all of us. How much Kurt had looked forward to a reunion with his beloved mother. Now she didn't know him and her life hung by a thread. He often brought her flowers and freshly cut birch branches and sat by her bed though she was not coherent.

Kurt plowed the fields every day and was happy to be home despite the sorrow with Mother. He loved bowls of green salad and also tortes, relishing the good food. After three weeks leave, he had to return, and Mother had not recognized him the entire time he was there.

MOTHER'S CARE

Kaete was twenty and I was fourteen when Mother suffered her stroke. Though she regained her speech, she remained paralyzed on her right side. Since Mother was no longer able to work, we took over her chores. Kaete shouldered Mother's responsibilities in the barn and the outdoors. I began cooking for seven to eight people and tended the chickens, the geese and the pigs.

Tante Ida also came to help nurse Mother at home. To prevent bedsores we regularly adjusted her pillows, shifted her weight, or lifted her onto her side. To use the bedpan, she had to be lifted. We took turns sharing the night watch.

Father did all he could to make life easier for Mother. No task seemed too much for him when it came to helping her, even though he was also sick with bleeding ulcers.

Caring for Mother added an extra layer of work to the ongoing demands of the farm, but no one complained. We felt she received the most loving care at home and would never have given her up to the hospital.

The village nurse came by almost every day. We massaged Mother's arms and legs and gave her electrical stimulation with a special machine, hoping to rehabilitate her with this therapy. Sometimes she could move her right fingers a little, but that was all—her arm hung lifeless and often hurt. We learned how to bind up her leg to give more stability when she walked with her cane.

Unable to work, Mother often said, "If I could only peel potatoes and help you with something. I am such a burden." And she would cry.

We were simply glad to still have her with us. I could talk things over with her. She reminisced about the old days and recited many songs for me because now she had time for this. But above all, we could talk about the Lord Jesus.

The last two years with Mother were one of the most beautiful and blessed times of my life, a precious gift from God. I didn't go anywhere. Even in the evenings I stayed home. While other young people went out walking together, I preferred being with Mother, Father, and Kaete. We enjoyed such cozy times together.

Oh, how we missed Kurt. We worried and prayed. The news about the war was terribly upsetting. At home we dealt not only with Mother, but as Father's ulcers worsened, he soon required our attention too. To care for him I needed to cook according to special dietary restrictions.

These were difficult times, and yet I have to say that I had no time to feel sorry for myself or to complain. I was where God wanted me and liked feeling needed. I felt happy and contented even though I was often tired from the night watches with Mother.

KURT KILLED IN ODESSA

In the fall Kurt came home on leave once again for three weeks. By then Mother could already sit up and even walk a little with a cane. She had regained her speech and you could converse with her. The two enjoyed long conversations together. We continued to pray for them both.

Then it was time for him to go back to the front. This parting seemed particularly hard for Kurt. He walked around the house and the courtyard, petted a horse and also the dog—it was as if he was saying goodbye to everything. Then he shook hands with each of us, and oh, how we all bravely swallowed our tears hoping to make the farewell easier for one another.

Father drove Kurt to the train station. As they passed by on the village street, Kurt leaned far out of the carriage, waved and smiled, his final, oh so beautiful, smile. I knew in my heart this was the last time I'd see him. It was so hard. This is how I've kept him in my memory and how I will see him again in heaven.[20]

After he and Father drove away, we all cried openly then. I felt as if the sun had gone down forever.

After the second leave, Kurt was sent to Ukraine by the Black Sea. He wrote us long letters, reporting that it was very hot there, the soil was excellent for farming, the girls were beautiful, and melons and tropical fruits grew in abundance. They fried eggs on their tanks; that's how hot it was. Kurt's physical had found him fit for tropical duty, and the heat didn't bother him.

Then he wrote about a fierce battle where grenades exploded all around him and many died. This was known as the "Stalin Organ."

He was a messenger and delivered important communications between divisions, a very dangerous job. One of Kurt's school friends told me years later that his regiment once found themselves in a place where they no longer knew their position. They had lost communication. Suddenly, a messenger jumped into the trench, and to his surprise, it was Kurt. Here in the middle of Russia, two former classmates met unexpectedly. Kurt explained the way out and then quickly left again, but the regiment was saved.

My brother also wrote that he had sent final greetings to the family of a dying comrade, Lord von Finkenstein. Sometimes he wrote, "Save good food for when I come home on leave."

We sent him many packages. The limit allowed was one pound, and he always appreciated the delicious butter cookies from home. All our dear soldiers were homesick and would much rather have been home with their loved ones than in this hellish war.

[20] Photo: The last time our family was together, September 1943.

As the year 1943 came to a close we waited for news from Kurt. One night I dreamed I saw him in his uniform sitting at the table, and every time I wanted to go to him he disappeared. I awoke feeling sorrowful.

Then a letter came, not in his handwriting, but he had dictated it. He let us know that he was in the army's field hospital because his right collarbone had been injured by a grenade splinter, but we shouldn't worry. He would come home soon. For a few weeks we heard nothing more.

Then the morning of January 12, 1944, the village major came and spoke with Father in the courtyard. I stood in the door of the entryway and saw Father turn white in the face. Repeatedly he shook his head in disbelief. The major stared at the ground—his son and Kurt were good friends.

I immediately knew what this meant and the blood froze in my veins. Inwardly I screamed, "No, that can't be, my beloved brother dead? There must be some mistake." All life seemed to drain from me and I began to shake.

Even though we knew Kurt was in harm's way, we were still unprepared, especially because the last letter assured us his injury was not serious. Never before had I experienced death so closely.

My concern now turned to Mother. It was morning, and she was still in bed because we had not yet dressed her. Father walked past me and said in a flat voice, "Yes, Kurt died from his injury. I will tell Mother."

Mother said later he'd thrown himself on her bed with loud sobs and she knew right away—it was Kurt. And they cried together. Then Mother said, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord." Though she was paralyzed and helpless, she comforted the rest of us.

We were thankful that he died in the Lord and that we knew exactly how and when he died and where he was buried. Many never learned what happened to their loved ones. They simply received the news "missing in action" or "dead."

Kaete and I cried in the kitchen and all the hired help cried with us. They loved Kurt too—he had been so good to them and they liked working with him. We had all looked forward to his homecoming.

As long as I live, I will never forget this terrible day.

They sent us his things. In his wallet he had preserved the splinter—he'd wanted to show us how he'd been injured. Kurt always saved everything. He had regularly sent long reports on the war and told us we should save his letters. Unfortunately, Kaete lost them over the years. I had to leave and couldn't take anything with me, and it saddened me greatly to learn of this loss later.

The army chaplain wrote us saying that the splinter not only shattered the collarbone but also went into the lung and they operated too late. The chaplain had celebrated communion with Kurt before he died peacefully on December 29, 1943. We were thankful to learn all this.

Later we learned that a relative of ours, a highly ranked officer who served in Odessa also, visited Kurt's grave. He buried a bottle with important information at the foot of the grave. The cemetery was to be leveled because Germany was retreating from Russia.

We held a memorial service in our church. Mother attended leaning on her cane, and I marveled at her strength. When the church bells rang, the congregation sang:

My anxious heart be still, it was the Father's will
The Father's will is good. What his hand has loaned us
May he not also rescind? And will you reprove Him?
This world is not our home.

Besides Kurt, many more in our circle of relatives and friends lost their lives:

- Herbert Koschwitz, 21, died in action. A neighbor and good friend of Kurt and Kaete.
- Cousin Heinz Naefe, 18, only a few days in Russia. Died of a gunshot wound to the head.
- Cousin Rudolf Deport, 26, missing in action. Never heard anything from him again. Father of one child.
- The husband of cousin Lotte, father of three children. Died in action.

Some were maimed for life: Cousin Heinz Haase, twenty-three and married, was critically wounded during an explosion near the end of the war. He lost his eyesight and his right hand. Only the thumb and little finger remained on his left hand. His wife immediately divorced him. However, he courageously managed his disability, worked as a telephone operator and later married his caregiver. His life could inspire a book.

The war claimed victims in every house: Friedrich Simmel, the Jewish husband of my mother's youngest sister and my godfather, was taken by the Gestapo two months before the end of the war. We never heard from him again.

By the end of the war, Habendorf, with only a population of 1000, had lost sixty people. Later the count rose higher when the Russians came, because in the chaos of the war's end not all deaths were reported.

One funeral after another was held in those days. Most people wore black. We lived in a world of grief and tears.

THE YEAR 1945

It was winter 1945. Our troops were retreating, forcing many Germans to flee. The refugees came through Habendorf on wagons, or on foot transporting children in baby carriages. Hordes

of cows and sheep clogged the roads as they were driven deeper into Germany to escape the rapidly approaching Russian front. What "mooing" and "baa-ing" and absolute chaos.

Once some refugees and soldiers drove about fifty cows into our courtyard. Some of the cows' udders were raw and infected. We milked like crazy, poured the milk into barrels, warmed it in pans and served it to the soldiers and refugees passing through. This was *verboten*, but no one cared anymore.

Then several soldiers butchered a cow on the spot. Also *verboten*. They cut up the meat in the barn, and we women cooked it in the kitchen. What a delicious feast for so many hungry folks.

In every nook and cranny we housed refugees and soldiers. Only one bedroom in the house remained for our family where all four of us slept. Yes, people even dragged straw into the kitchen and slept there. We ran from here to there, and throughout all this craziness we also cared for Mother. She sat with large, sad eyes in her chair wishing she could help.

Bombs, battle sounds, and machine gun fire came closer and closer. At night our windows often rattled from the noise. It was so frightening. The battle front was only sixty kilometers away now.

Breslau was declared a stronghold that must be held at any cost. The women and children evacuated; however, old men and boys from sixteen years of age were placed in uniforms and commanded to fight and hold the city. How? With what weapons? What for?

MOTHER'S PASSING

With every din, crash and ground-shaking enemy fire, concern for our beloved Mama increased. Every day she was growing weaker. What should we do when the Russians came? Dismayed at our situation, our soldiers constantly advised us to flee or hide, but this seemed impossible.

One day Tante Ida said, "Let's pray that the Lord will take your Mama home." I saw how much she suffered and was finally ready to let go. The Lord had given us two more years since the stroke, and now at age sixteen I felt more mature.

The next day the village nurse came and celebrated communion with Mother, Father, and Kaete. I had to go out to the fields to oversee the foreigners planting potatoes. I wanted so much to join the family at this last communion, but Father said, "If we don't plant anything, then we will not have a harvest and go hungry." He was absolutely right in this decision as we saw later.

As she neared the last days of her life, Mother's eyes remained closed. She no longer spoke to any of us, but only kept saying, "Lord Jesus, help me. Please, help me." Oh, how she longed heaven.

I often sat by Mother's bed to help her drink and moisten parched lips. Two days before her passing, Mother lost consciousness and the death rattle began. The morning of April 11th, I stood at her bed once more before going out to the fields. Oh, how I would have rather stayed.

Around two o'clock Kaete appeared on the hill and waved me home. She said, "Mama left us quietly. Her passing was like a clock that wound down and finally stopped ticking."

A great sense of abandonment overcame me. Without my Mama, my best and dearest friend, I would be so alone in the world. But I was glad to know her safe in the Lord's hands and comforted myself with the thought that one day in heaven I would see her again.

Tante Ida said, "Come look. She is so beautiful and peaceful." But I just couldn't. I preferred to remember her alive. I didn't know how to face it—I was still young and felt so overwhelmed by everything.

Mother was kept for three days in the carriage house because it was coolest there. Then came the day of the funeral and pall bearers carried her as we followed for the half hour walk to the cemetery.

Kaete, Father, and I stood at the open grave as the pastor gave the eulogy. Men in our culture did not cry, and Father stood like a stone. He kept shaking his head over and over, as if to say, "I can't believe that my dear 'Tielchen' is no longer living."

I thought about how much he loved Mother despite his rough exterior. Whenever he entered the house, his first words were, "Where is Mama?" When she'd appear, he'd call out, "Now where have you been keeping yourself?!" She was the only one who could calm him down when he got in one of his moods, when nothing could please him because he didn't have a cigar. During the two years nursing mother, Kaete and I often marveled at his loving manner and new-found patience as he helped take care of her.

The pastor said a final prayer and the coffin was lowered into the ground. In the distance cannons thundered and the earth shook.

About 40 miles away in Breslau, the war raged. In the coming weeks, as the Russian occupation took over our lives, I was so grateful that Mother did not have to live through the horror of those days, but I carried an empty aching in my heart. Sometimes in my mind I'd hear her call and want to go to her bed to help, but she wasn't there anymore. We all missed her. But I learned an important lesson in overcoming grief. It helps you go on if you can be there for others. With all the chaos that came when the war ended, I had little time to think about my own troubles because I was busy helping others.

Father had often said, "When Mama dies, I will not want to live anymore." And so it came to pass. However, in the six weeks before he was buried next to his 'Tielchen,' he had yet to endure terrible events.

THE SIX WEEKS BEFORE FATHER'S PASSING

There was no time to mourn because streams of refugees and soldiers passed through our village and needed housing and food. In the chaos of the advancing eastern front, our courtyard resembled military barracks teeming with horses, soldiers, refugees and cows.

Along the roadsides lay dead cows that needed to be buried. Refugees sometimes arrived with deceased loved ones that also required proper burial. My father was responsible for digging the graves. When the refugees first started coming through in the winter of 1945 it was a difficult job to unearth the frozen ground, but now it was May.

In the meantime, the gunfire drew nearer. Fleeing the Russians, streams of German soldiers and refugees headed west or escaped to Czechoslovakia.

We received word to leave and loaded a wagon with provisions for people and horses. What should we take? What was important? We packed food, a few blankets to keep warm, enough oats for the horses, and a few souvenirs. Oh, it was so hard. If we left we would have to release the cows and all livestock, giving them over to Fate.

Kaete decided to bury our valuable jewelry. We collected grandmother's gold necklace, mother's gold teardrop earrings, a silver braided chain bracelet, a silver necklace with amytheysts and Kaete's ruby ring and put them in a metal box. Kaete secretly buried it under a hazelnut bush in our orchard.

When the Poles discovered that some people were burying their treasures in graveyards, they ransacked the cemeteries, digging up graves in their search for valuables and looting marble from the headstones.

Not until many years later did my sister finally feel safe enough to dig up the box and retrieve the jewelry.

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THE WAR ENDS

Many women and children from Habendorf had already escaped to Czechoslovakia, but farmers and their families always were always the last to leave because the entire country depended on them to keep the economy going. The Russians were now closer than ever. We had already packed our box cart with bedding, dried noodles, fruit, flour, sugar, some clothes, photographs and the Bible.

Our foreigners also wanted to go with us. We asked them astonished, "Why don't you want to go to your own people?" They answered, "You not know Russian." No, we didn't but would soon find out. They explained, "We voluntary work here. Russian find out, they kill us."

Father, as the agricultural association's leader, needed to decide whether Habendorf's farmers would flee or stay. He struck out on his bike to investigate the road conditions. When he returned he said, "The roads are congested with soldiers, refugee wagons, cows—it's a big mess. The war is almost over. It's nonsense to leave." And he was right.

So he gave the order, "Habendorf farmers will not flee. Please do not release the animals. All is lost anyway. At home we are more protected than on the road."

So we unpacked the wagon and fed the animals as the cannon thunder came closer and closer. German soldiers came by heading west. We began hearing terrible stories of things the fleeing refugees endured when the Russians caught them on the open roads. We were deeply grateful for Father's decision because at home there were places to hide.

Those who made it to Czechoslovakia were likely to be tortured, mistreated, raped and plundered by the Czechs and Russians. Many children died on this trek, and I knew several. Mothers alone with their children in baby carriages fled over the border. Husbands and fathers were either fighting or had died in combat.

War is particularly hard on children. There was hardly any milk left. Babies whimpered, no longer strong enough to cry. One baby in our village became jaundiced and stopped growing before it died. How much pain and suffering we witnessed while still so young. No one can imagine the suffering, grief and stress of war unless they, too, have lived through it.

THE RUSSIANS ARRIVE IN HABENDORF

On May 8, 1945, the day Germany surrendered, the Soviet Red Army and the Communist Polish Army descended on us with their gunners. Breslau, a city east of us, had fallen. We were caught in the crossfire between German troops entrenched in our hills and the advancing enemy.

Father told us to lie down by the entrance to the courtyard, next to the barn wall. He felt this would provide the best shelter against potential grenade splinters. Oh, how Kaete and I shook with fear and prayed in desperation. A whistling sound screeched overhead, then a loud *Boom*. Was that behind our barn? Again, a second time. The air cracked, popped and detonated all around us in a horrendous noise.

Little by little it grew quieter, and we cautiously sat up. Father, as the first to rise, immediately inspected the property. In the orchard behind the barn, he found two large grenade craters three feet deep and four or five feet wide. Had they landed at the gate, we probably would not have survived. If the barn had been hit it could have started a fire. Later we learned that these grenades came from friendly fire.

Now with the Russians close by, we figured out a hiding place for emergencies. The pigeon loft could be reached quickly from the attic and quickly became inaccessible once the ladder was pulled up.

Night fell and we went to bed fully clothed, prepared to escape to our hideout the moment the dog barked. In the distance shots rang out, dogs barked, and we heard screams.

Strangely enough neither our dog nor the neighbors' made a sound when they usually barked at the least provocation. It was so quiet we actually slept a little. The next morning when we learned what other Habendorfers went through, we were shocked. Surely angels had watched over us.

TERRIBLE NEWS

Before I tell this story, you need a little background.

About one and a half kilometers outside Habendorf, surrounded by woods and meadows, stood two water-powered mills, the Brook Mill and the Border Mill. A torrential river powered the water wheels that ground the wheat into flour. In April and May the water ran at peak levels. The two elderly ladies at the mills were Mother's best friends.[21]

[21] Many of our fields neighbored those of the Border Mill farm. Sometimes we drove there in our carriage. On those outings Mother also allowed me to come along. When she was still well, it was a special treat for her to go visiting since she saw her friends so seldom. Farmers' wives were extremely busy. During the war when Mother was sick, we often went to the Border Mill farm to pick up buttermilk and butter for her. They were still allowed to make their own since they lived too remote to deliver to a processing plant. The Brook Mill stood in a deep hollow, and a pond on the grounds was used as a reservoir in the dry season. This mill still operated during the war, and the owner did not have to enlist. Tragically, he died of appendicitis, leaving behind a wife, three children and his old father to take over mill operations.

The Border Mill was so-called because it stood along a major road where Habendorf bordered on Gnadenfrei. Mother's friend and her husband lived there with their two daughters, Emma and Lisbeth. The girls had lost a husband and a fiancé in the war and Emma had a child. Together they worked the farm that belonged to the mill, and the women did the men's work, tilling the ground with machines and horses.

As I said, we survived the night the Russians marched into Habendorf and no soldiers came to our house. The following day around noon our neighbor walked into our courtyard. White-faced and continually brushing tears from his eyes, he reported the following:

"Many women had fled to our farm. The Russians raped them in beastly fashion. Most of the soldiers were drunk and on a rampage breaking things. They threw my grown son on the manure pile and trampled him. It was terrible.

"I was worried about my Border Mill relatives, wondering if they had also experienced such terrible things the previous night as they live on a well-traveled road. On the way there I became more and more anxious. I arrived to find the place in absolute shambles. Lisbeth lay on the sofa completely soaked, incoherent.

"Finally I learned that she, her father, mother, and sister had all thrown themselves into the river to commit suicide. Emma was still holding her child when they fished her out. Lisbeth didn't know how she came to be on the sofa.

Some Russians were there who tried to explain to me what had happened. They must have been the ones who rescued Lisbeth. All the others are dead. My relatives experienced unspeakable horror."

We stood shocked at his words and didn't know what to say. Then sobbing, he turned around and left. It was the last time we saw him.

The following day we received more shocking news. After coming to our house, this neighbor had gone home. He and his son and their wives hung themselves; the four grandchildren lay strangled on the floor. The three girls were resuscitated, but the little boy didn't make it.

The atrocities that occurred when we were conquered caused many people to lose their will to live because they could no longer see any hope for the future.

It was unthinkable that things like this could happen to people we knew. We stood horrified.

An aunt took in the orphan girls and raised them with her own three children—a great sacrifice during the post-war years with the scarcity of food and cramped living spaces. Women like these were heroines. Most of them raised the children alone since their husbands had died in the war. They didn't complain but worked hard to survive. There were many such stories of bravery.

We heard about other tragedies that occurred. Some villagers died during the cannon fire over Habendorf. One man's leg was shot off and he bled to death. Another woman, I knew her well,

died from a grenade splinter, and several others in the upper village also died. Words fail me to describe the terror, the horror and gruesomeness of war.

In our neighborhood, the Russians shot and killed a fleeing German soldier. No one knew who he was. Father and several others dug a shallow grave and buried him right where he was gunned down in the neighbor's yard. We always wondered whose father, son, or brother he was. His death was so very sad.

Around that time also, two German soldiers came to our house and asked us to hide them. They were only sixteen and eighteen. We told them to hide in the barn and secretly brought them food and civilian clothes. The following day, Father drove them a ways down the road in his wagon. They were heading west, trying to get back home. None of the soldiers wanted to be captured by the Russians.

After the invasion it seemed that wherever you went people shared bad news. This was very frightening. Today I can see that it is easier for youth than their elders to retain hope for a better future. In a way our youthful innocence protected us. We did not fully understand what it meant to be occupied by the enemy and what it would mean to be stripped of citizen rights and government protection. We felt vibrant, strong and adventuresome. Above all, we were determined to survive.

RUSSIAN AND POLISH OCCUPATION

Habendorf's aristocrats endured the same fate as so many others. Lord von Seidlitz had fallen in defending the eastern front at Breslau in February 1945. The Russians plundered the castle and raped seventy-year-old Lady von Seidlitz. Then they forced the family and all the servants to vacate the castle allowing only a few possessions in their backpacks.

The family fled to West Germany. Lady Von Seidlitz was now penniless as well as helpless. As an aristocrat she had never learned to do any work; she did not even know how to sew on a button. A former servant kindly took her in. When she died she was buried in a pauper's grave. I have good memories of her as a lovely Christian lady.

The Russians and Poles now occupied the castle. They knocked out windows and doors and stole everything. Later we saw Polish women walking around wearing the castle table cloths as shawls; they didn't know what the table cloths were for. The conquerors rode the stolen bicycles and wore Lord Von Seitlitz's pajamas in public. It would have been funny had it not been so heartbreaking.

The Russians were completely obsessed with clocks and were sure to "deliver" us of these. We heard all kinds of humorous stories. One Russian had pocketed an alarm clock when the alarm suddenly went off. He screamed, tossed the clock, and ran shouting, "Help! It's the devil!" Another Russian tried riding his stolen bike and wasn't having any success. In a cussing rage he threw it into the ditch and proceeded to stomp on it. A sight to behold! We smirked with "Schadenfreude" at the occupiers' vexations.

ACQUIRING MEDICINE

Father's health was declining, and he needed medicine for his ulcers from Reichenbach, five miles away. Usually I was sent on these errands and Kaete stayed home to nurse Father.

All Germans were required to wear a white armband to identify us as the conquered enemy. On this errand I decided not to wear the armband that branded me. I tied on a bright head scarf and tried to look as Polish as possible. I had already learned a few phrases of their language.

So that's how I took off on my bike; and sure enough, from the town of Peilau on, whole columns of Russian soldiers traveled on the main road. I had to pedal along the bike path right next to them. They looked at me curiously and shouted, "Gendopri Panjenka" and I called back cheekily, "Gendopri Pan!" (Good morning Miss, Good morning, Sir). Then they were satisfied and left me alone, but the whole way I was so scared and shook and cried out continually to the Lord for protection. But I couldn't show any fear.

Everyone was thankful when I returned home safely, glad that no one had taken my bike. Russians and Poles were always on the lookout for these. They were our liberators all right, freeing us of all our belongings—jewelry, watches, bicycles, radios, etc. We didn't dare wear earrings—they'd yank them right out causing severe injury to earlobes. I took mine out and have since only worn clip-ons.

The last trip I made to Reichenbach I walked—by then the Russians had come and taken the bike. Again I traveled without my armband and wore the Polish-looking headscarf. No mishaps occurred on the way there, and I happily made my way home. I was walking along a stretch of road surrounded by wide open fields when suddenly in the distance I heard horses clopping and a carriage rolling towards me. There was no place to hide. I could hardly keep walking in my fright, I shook so much. In my heart I screamed, "Lord, help me!"

The carriage stopped. The door opened and a group of Russian officers gestured for me to step inside. A Pole was the driver and he had recognized me. Inwardly I screamed, "Lord, stand by me." Then with knocking knees, expecting the worst, I climbed in.

To my great surprise they scooted together, creating room for me to sit and said, "German girl, do not be afraid. We only want that you get home faster." They spoke German well and treated me like a lady. They even offered me bonbons. How I thanked God for his protection.

Father and Kaete were astonished when I came home much earlier than they expected. We were all so thankful. The Lord knew that my cup of suffering was near to overflowing. I think I would have suffered a nervous breakdown had they assaulted me. Too much had already happened in my young life.

Many of my friends did not fare so well. Stalin promised his army plenty of liquor and permission to rape the German women. Yes, and this is what the Russian soldier found worth fighting for. They were allowed to loot, plunder, and destroy without consequences. It was complete anarchy.

One friend shared with me that a Russian dragged her into the bedroom and raped her while her mother stood weeping and pleading outside the locked door. No, details she did not share—it had been too terrible. Another friend also told me years after the event how a Russian soldier had thrown her on the bed and she fainted. When she came to, he was gone, but she knew she had been raped.

Why did so many women not tell their stories until years later? Because they were too ashamed, shattered and broken by the humiliating, coarse violence to which they had been subjected.

In Reichenbach many women were not only raped, but some were also tortured to death. People can turn into beasts, especially under the influence of alcohol. The danger of acquiring sexually transmitted diseases was also an issue, but women were allowed free doctor visits and exams. Whether doctors also performed abortions, I do not know.

Our worst suffering came in the war's aftermath, which was why the terror under the Russians and Poles seemed all the more horrific. You can't imagine what it is like to be without rights and at the mercy of the enemy. We should always be grateful when we have a government that provides order. It is a nightmare not to have any rights and to belong nowhere.

The enemy could do with us as they pleased. It took a long time until we were allowed to make complaints if we suffered injustice under our "liberators." However, the Russians and the Poles did not love each other, and so we could often play them against each other to our advantage.

OUR HORSES ARE TAKEN AWAY

One day several girls came to visit. They were relating terrible events when suddenly our dog barked. On cue we raced to the pigeon loft, pulled up the ladder, and locked the door.

Safely hidden, we settled down on the floor. I finally risked peeking through the slats of the roof hatch. From my hiding place, I could see three armed Russians gesturing to Father to bring the horses out of the barn. Father's face was snow white. I could see it took great effort for him to not yell at them. His horses! The horses he had lovingly raised from birth. His pride and joy. Now he was forced to give them up in such a demeaning way? My throat constricted as I watched him walk, shoulders drooping, towards the barn.

Suddenly one of the girls collapsed. She had caught sight of the Russians through the slats. Her whole body shook so hard her teeth were clattering together as she tried to stifle her weeping. She had experienced terrible horrors the last few days, including assault the night before. We were desperate to calm her down and kept reassuring her, "You don't need to be afraid. Our hiding place is safe. They won't find us here." But she was having a nervous breakdown. We feared she would scream and give us away. Slowly we were able to help her regain some composure.

We did not dare to go down into the house until everything appeared quiet again. Father said in a flat voice, "Now they have taken them away." Yes, what could you say? Little by little everything was taken from us.

The Russians had set Michael, one of our former workers, as commander over the village. He was twenty-four, blond, blue-eyed, spoke excellent German and had attended university in his homeland. He was dependable, and we had been very pleased with him over the past two years. When Michael heard about the horses, he immediately found out where they were and returned them to us. Again and again Father stroked the horses' heads as they whinnied and snorted.

A NIGHT OF TERROR

The Russians continued to terrorize us. We had no rights. At night, women were forced to hide themselves in barns and attics to escape prowling soldiers. Kaete and I stayed at home because we didn't want to leave our sick father alone. We relied on the pigeon loft for emergencies. During the day, every woman kept vigilant eyes on her surroundings, alert to the nearest hiding place at all times.

About two weeks had passed since the Russians invaded. Father, Kaete and I all slept in the same room because a refugee family, the Grabolles, stayed with us as the time.[22] One night after we'd all gone to bed, we suddenly heard pounding on the front door and shouts, "You have to open up. We are looking for German soldiers." Two drunk Russian soldiers stood outside. I quickly climbed the pigeon loft and pulled up the ladder.

Herr Grabolle went downstairs and let them in. He had no choice. We either had to let them in or they would have forced open the door.

The soldiers strode around pretending to inspect everything, their usual mode of operating when looking for women. They intoned, "We are seeking German soldiers." I could hear much that was going on from my hiding place and trembled in fear, but my heart nearly stopped when I heard them ask, "Where is the person who sleeps here?" They had found my still-warm, empty bed in Father's room. They shouted, "You are hiding a German soldier. Where is he?" In my heart I screamed to God for help. I was so afraid someone would be forced to betray me.

The men finally turned and went out into the hall, I learned later, and it appeared that the inspection was over and they were leaving. Kaete quickly locked herself in with Father in our bedroom. He was very sick now, needing care, and she did not want to leave him alone.

Apparently the men had only gone into the hall to plan their strategy. Suddenly they returned and attacked. One Russian grabbed Frau Grabolle, dragging her into their bedroom and bolted the door. Her husband stood outside, pounding on the door, weeping, "Please leave my wife alone, my wife, she is my wife."

The commotion was terrifying. I shook from head to toe and prayed in silent screams to the Lord. My heart beat so loud and fast I feared I'd soon have a heart attack and make all kinds of noise—then they'd surely come looking for me. After all, they knew a missing person belonged to the empty bed.

[22] Herr Grabolle was a steward, managing a castle estate in eastern Germany before fleeing the Russians.

Oh, I was so afraid the Russians would force the others to betray my secret hiding place. If they shot someone in their efforts to gain a confession, I feared I'd scream and be found. And if someone was killed because of me…I didn't think I could forgive myself.

The other Russian kept knocking on Father's bedroom door. When Kaete didn't open, he began beating in the door with his boot until it splintered. Later they told me that he crawled with drawn pistol through the hole he'd punched in the door. In drunken stupor he seized Kaete. Father tried to help her, but the soldier kicked him in the stomach, and he fell backwards on the bed. To keep him down, the Russian slammed Father's nail-spiked work shoe over his head.

The following I did not learn until forty years later when Kaete and I were reunited for the first time. I had always believed the soldier had only roughed her up, and that she'd been able to fight him off. But she revealed that the Russian, pistol in hand, threw her on the bed and raped her, though she resisted. I can't imagine how witnessing this atrocity must have affected Father.

Once the Russians left, we all assembled in Father's bedroom. Frau Grabolle's night jacket hung in shreds over her body. Her twelve-year-old son, Franzel, stood there trembling and covered in cow dung. Upon hearing the soldiers enter, he had leaped from the second story window in his fright, landing in some cow pies. An angel must have caught him because he was not injured.

Herr Grabolle was white in the face and shook with helpless rage. Kaete and Father looked disheveled and devastated. You could see the nail marks in Father's head from the shoe beating. I thought we all looked like a bunch of spooked chickens.

All of a sudden, instead of dissolving into tears, we broke out in hysterical laughter. Our nerves were completely frayed—the situation was so horrific and sad. Why were we always so vulnerable and helpless against the enemy? To this day the overwhelming panic and horror of that night still terrorizes my dreams.

Father said, "That was the last straw and the most horrific of all."

Throughout the night Father's condition worsened. He had been suffering from ulcers, but the kick to his stomach severely injured him. The next day we wanted to take him to the hospital but needed permission from the Polish police because of the Russian threat. A Pole was sent with a carriage to drive us. All along the way, just for entertainment, he shot his gun randomly into the air. My nerves could hardly take it.

The doctors examined Father and said, "It's too late; we cannot operate." Apparently something ruptured in his stomach from the kick.

Father only stayed in the hospital four days. Tante Ella who lived across from the hospital visited him often. But while Father languished in the hospital, the Russians came and took the horses away again. Unfortunately, Michael had been transferred, and that left us without protection. Since he had not come to say goodbye, we suspected bad news. According to rumor, all Russians who had once worked for the Germans were shot. Good-hearted Michael; he was like family to us. We never heard from him again.

When I visited Father he immediately asked, "How are the horses?" I didn't have the heart to tell him that the Russians had taken them again since Michael was transferred.[23]

I could only say, "Please don't worry. Everything is in order." I wanted to say a lot more but felt paralyzed and words would not come. I did not want to upset him.

I knew very well how concerned he was for us. How could life go on like this? Yet Father seemed at peace during my last visit with him. He still held out hope for recovery.

Years later (1980), Onkel Alfred told my daughter Ruth about his brother's last days. I had not heard this account before. He said that when the doctors told Father they couldn't operate and that nothing more could be done for him, he leaped from his death bed and went raging and shouting through the hospital. I can only imagine the panic of knowing you're leaving your daughters behind in such conditions and the feelings of helplessness because you can protect them no longer.

On May 29th, we received the phone call. Father had died peacefully. It was exactly six weeks since we laid Mother to rest. On May 15th they would have celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary.

At Mother's funeral we heard cannon fire from the advancing front and now the Russians were here. Father's coffin was lifted onto the box cart that the hired help had decorated with evergreen boughs, and the Russian ponies, not his own, pulled the wagon in a sad procession to the cemetery. I felt numb and wondered what else would be taken from me.

Our pastor spoke on this verse, "For if my father and mother should (leave), you would welcome and comfort me" (Psalm 27:10).[24] He said that the Lord would always be with us and would never leave or forsake us.

In the coming years I would often recall his message.

[23] After father died and I was evacuated, the Russians came and got the two carriages we owned, too.
[24] The Living Bible with additional paraphrase to better translate the German version.

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AFTER FATHER'S PASSING

The authorities replaced Father's horses with two small Russian ponies which were not suited for plowing. I wanted to ride one, so I got a chair and climbed on. But the horse refused to walk. Maybe it didn't understand German?

Kaete pulled on the halter until he finally moved, but at every little dip in the ground the animal stood still, and I had to get down and lead him. Finally I gave up. How I missed Father. He would have gotten after that horse, but now he had been gone for several weeks, and we had to manage by ourselves.

After Father died, only Kaete and I and the Grabolle family remained at the farm. We continued to take care of the animals. Because Father made a wise decision to not flee or release the animals, we still had our cows. We had also planted because Father said, "We are going to plant whether we stay or leave." We were so thankful for his sharp foresight.

Now we had a harvest. Every so often hordes would come through and plunder all our provisions, taking whatever they found. Food was scarce and we had to hide everything. Our chickens had all been butchered because of disease, so we had no chicken meat and no eggs. The Russians also came to take away our cows, but we had hidden a few, and here is how we managed this surprising feat.

Someone tipped us off that the Russians were collecting cows again. We wanted to save the two cows we had left so that we'd be able to make a little butter from their milk. But, how do you hide cows?

We drove the animals up two stairs into the empty chicken stall, then into a small chamber with a tiny window. That was quite an undertaking, squeezing those two in there tail to tail. We gave them a lot of grass, hoping and praying they would not "moo" at the wrong time.

Soon the Russians came for inspection.

"No cows?"

"Go ahead and look," we said.

The barn was empty. The stalls were empty.

"Okay then, Dowicemia!"[25]

Whew, thank you Lord!

We hid bags of flour in wooden boxes and covered these with hay to protect them from mice. The miller had ground wheat for us, so we had flour to bake bread. Because the bakery no longer existed, we taught ourselves to bake bread in the large, antique oven attached to the house outside. This oven could bake twelve to fourteen loaves of bread at once. All the stores had been plundered and looted so we couldn't get anything anymore. But because we stayed on the farm we always had something to eat, even if our meal consisted only of old potatoes.

Josef, a Pole, was employed on the castle grounds during the war and knew us. He brought his brother, Woezek, to help us manage the farm. Woezek was like an angel, truly a gift from heaven. He was our protector, made no demands, and acted as advocate with the Russians.

At night, Kaete and I, along with all the women in the neighborhood, slept in barns or hid in our neighbor's secret attic bedroom. When the dogs barked, we knew the Russians were searching our house looking for girls. Then we'd hear shots, and we knew they were angry because they hadn't found us. We always lived in fear. Would the soldiers force Woezek at gunpoint to betray our whereabouts? Or would they shoot him in a drunken rage? Sometimes when people didn't confess, the Russians just shot them on the spot. This happened on several occasions in the village.

When we came home in the mornings, we often found the house in complete disarray, drawers emptied, the living room full of vomit—but thank God, Woezek, our protector, was still alive, though he was pale as chalk from the stress and worry.

These were completely abnormal times. You never knew what would happen the next hour. Once some Russians dropped by, and I had to think quickly where to hide. Our zinc bathtub leaned against the house hall—I quickly turned it over and crawled under it, keeping very still. They didn't find me. We women became more and more creative in evading the Russians. Another time at sight of the enemy I ran into the barn and hid between the cows in the feeding trough.

I often ran for shelter to my neighbor, Frau Pause, a widow from World War I and a friend of my mother's. She'd hide me in a secret attic bedroom adjacent to her living room, pushed an armoire in front of the door, and no one would guess another room existed. Frau Pause was a sweet lady and looked out for me.

Kaete also hid herself constantly. Wherever we went, we always kept an eye out for places to take cover quickly. We lived like this for a whole year. The stress I endured throughout my teen years have affected me all my life. Now, my dear children, you may understand why I am such a nervous wreck and jump at every little noise!

[25]Dowicemia—goodbye in Polish

One night, ten to twelve of us women hid in our neighbor's barn in the hay. The old men closed off the entrance with cut dried brush and twigs so that you couldn't see the stairs. I was sad to have to hide day and night—it was a beautiful May that year and the trees were in bloom.

After we were safely hidden, some Russian soldiers arrived and took over the courtyard and the house to lodge the night. Through a small hole in the roof we could observe them. We trembled in fear. Would the old men be forced to betray us? When the coast was clear, the old men secretly brought us something to eat and we made our way home.

Once in the middle of the night I noticed the hay moving next to me. I thought surely one of the soldiers had crept into our hiding place unnoticed. My heart started pounding, and I lay still as a mouse, not daring to breathe. After a while I realized it was only my imagination, and it was only the girl lying next to me who moved. We lived under such stress that our nerves were just shot.

That first year after the occupation we women had to be extremely watchful because danger lurked everywhere. I was constantly living in fear that a Russian would catch me. Better sleep with mice, which repulse me, than to fall into Russian hands. The occupying government eventually outlawed such attacks, but the hoodlums had been out of control for so long, that the authorities had difficulty reining them in. Only under threat of the death penalty was law and order once again restored.

In the meantime, more and more Poles came and occupied the farms. Woezek's parents and sister were now also staying with us. Russians and Poles didn't care for one another. They trusted the Germans more than they trusted their own countrymen.

Since Habendorf had been completely plundered, no shops were open to buy anything. Clothing items became very valuable—everyone was always on the sharp lookout for them. At Woezek's recommendation, we hid Kurt's suits in the barn in a box under the straw. Somehow his brother, Josef, found the hiding place and stole them. When Woezek asked him about it he denied the theft, but we were certain he had them. So Woezek asked the Russians to intervene. They arrested Josef and locked him in the basement of the command station in Reichenbach.

The next day we headed to "court." Marta, who worked on our farm, and I went along as witnesses. Woezek set me on his bicycle handlebars and Marta rode on the Russian escort's who provided protection and gave us access through each checkpoint. It was always a relief when the soldiers lowered their pointing guns to let us pass.

Finally we stood before the feared Russian Commandant and brought our case against Josef.[26] At first when they questioned him he lied about everything. Irritated and impatient, the Commandant shouted, "I will hang you if you don't confess." Josef paled but continued to lie. So the Commandant sent him back to his cell. It looked like we had lost our case.

As we left the building we heard a knock from the basement window. It was Josef. Seizing the opportunity, Woezek had it out with his brother, shouting and gesturing wildly. I understood

[26] Commandant—Commanding officer

enough Polish to hear him say, “Don’t be so stupid, Josef! Admit everything, and tell us where you hid the suits. Why stay in jail?” Finally Josef relented and agreed to confess.

So all of us turned around and tromped back to the Russian Commandant. It was good that Woezek also understood Russian and some German. The Commandant scolded us for hiding things.

“But the Poles keep stealing from us,” we said.

“They aren’t allowed to do that. You have to report theft at once. They will get severely punished for it,” he reassured us.

Later the Commandant released Josef because he confessed everything, Josef returned the suits, and we hung them back in the armoire.

Josef held a deep-seated grudge against Marta and me for this incident. Unfortunately, he was an alcoholic. One night I was peeling potatoes in the kitchen. Woezek sat at the table eating dinner. Suddenly Josef appeared in the doorway holding a large bayonet, and it was obvious he had been drinking. His bright blue, glassy eyes fixated on me in a trancelike stare.

“You Malutka,” he shouted. “You tattle. I go jail.” He glared at me red-faced and raised the bayonet.

“I going kill you,” he screamed and charged me.

I darted behind the kitchen table. He followed.

“Woezek, help me,” I screamed.

As Josef kept lunging at me, I kept darting around the table to stay away from him.

“Josef, you crazy?!” Woezek shouted.

My heart was pounding. Oh, I was so scared. Out of the corner of my eye I could see Woezek crouching towards his brother, seeking the right moment to tackle him.

Suddenly Josef grabbed the overhanging lamp, the bulb shattered, and the light went out. The room was pitch dark now except for the radio light which enabled me to still watch my attacker’s every move. He lunged again and I darted out of the way.

We raced once more around the table. Finally Woezek pounced and grabbed his brother, wrestling the bayonet away from him. I ran out the door and raced to Frau Pause, who hid me in her secret room where I stayed all night. I didn’t dare return home until the next day. My whole body trembled and shook, but I was so thankful to the Lord for his protection.

If Woezek had not been there, I know that Josef would have stabbed me to death and committed a terrible crime in his drunken rage. And he would have been very sorry. When sober he was usually nice and called me, "Wadny Malutka," which means "the pretty little one." He liked me.

Once in another drunken rage he went after his wife with an axe, Kaete told me. Only by quickly leaping through an open window did she save herself. Terrible, what drinking can do to people. Many years later Josef died in a ditch in an alcoholic stupor, leaving behind his lovely wife and five children.

Podolski was another alcoholic Pole who moved in with us around that time. He'd say to me, "Germans sh_t."

I'd say, "Yes, you are right."

I saw no point in arguing with a drunk. But Kaete would get upset at his rants and provoke him. When he was in a drunken rage, he'd shatter bowls and scold, "Kaete sh_t, war prima, war good. Woman home, husband kaput."[27] Oh, when he was drunk you could sure experience something. At those times I tried to avoid conversations with him and stay out of sight.

The Poles were deeply offended if you didn't drink with them. They considered it a serious breach of etiquette and good manners, a personal rejection. They told me, "You not drink, that like spitting on us."

In particular, they would not let me refuse their special home-brewed whiskey they made from potatoes. The first time I tried it, I took only a few sips but got very sick. I could hardly walk, suffered from a headache all night long and experienced a terrible hangover the next day. That's what a miniscule amount of their pure distilled alcohol could do to you.

After that, whenever the Poles were drinking, I left the premises. However, sometimes I could not get away and had to join them in raising a toast to good times. On those occasions I pretended to sip from my glass before pouring it under the table when no one was looking. At least they didn't keep refilling your glass. If you had one drink with them they were satisfied.

As we adjusted to the resettlement and the Poles taking over our land, we still had to remain vigilant against the Russian occupiers despite their government's efforts to restrain them.

One day I was in the orchard and didn't notice an armed Russian approaching. He hadn't come through the courtyard—the dog would have barked and given me time to hide. A split second of horror and then I ran. "Stop!" he shouted.

I raced through the neighbor's yard and around the house. He ran after me, shooting randomly into the air. By the way he shouted and ran he had obviously been drinking, and I was quicker than he. Suddenly, a high stone wall blocked my path. In my terror I had completely forgotten it. An equally high picket fence flanked the left and a creek ran to the right.

[27] Kaput—finished off. He was saying the war was good because the men die and they get the women.

I was trapped. *No! Oh God, help me!* I screamed inside. Frantically I reached for the seven-foot ledge, and in the next moment unseen hands seemed to lift me over the structure landing me in a manure pile, but I was saved. Again I ran to Frau Pause to hide.

There's a scripture that says, "With my God I can leap over a wall." (Psalm 18:29 NKJV) And it seems I did. In 1984, forty years later, I showed my husband this wall. A Polish family now lived on the property, and when the lady saw me gesturing, she was visibly distressed, took my hand and led me back to the road. I tried to communicate with her, but she couldn't understand German, and we couldn't speak Polish. She seemed to doubt my sanity.

When a German-Polish woman came by and explained, we all had a good laugh. The Polish woman just kept shaking her head at my story.

Memories flood your mind when you return home. I remembered the feeling of weightlessness as I went over the wall. But so many things had changed. The neighbor's pond had dried up. In my day it teemed with all kinds of fish. We swam and ice skated there. This was the pond where Kurt and Kaete broke through the ice. It saddened me to see it gone.

FORCED LABOR

In August 1945 the Russians demanded that we build trenches in the hills as they wanted to practice maneuvers. Every house needed to send a representative. Of course Woezek sent me because he would not have wanted to part with his darling Kaete.

The work crew consisted mostly of women but also a few boys, fifteen or sixteen-year-olds, and a few old men. We had to bring a pick axe or a spade or shovel and marched under Russian security to the work camp. Like dogs the armed guards slinked around us as others drove a small horse-drawn wagon alongside. I had become sassy and said, "I'm tired. Why can't I ride in that wagon? Why do I have to walk?" To my surprise they let me hop onto the cart. Yes, it was definitely too far to walk in my opinion.

The Russians assigned everyone a plot of land fifteen feet long and then required us to dig four feet down, deep enough to contain a large man. It was hard work. My land was rocky, and I had to pick axe every centimeter before I could shovel. If we complained about the hard work, our task masters replied, "Russian woman do much harder work." I believed it!

We worked for three days and nights, and they fed us only a thin cabbage soup. Under clear August night skies we slept on the ground, out in the open, but we had no blankets or anything with which to cover ourselves. Close by, bundles of straw lay stored in a big pile. We took some to lie on and used a little to cover ourselves too.

At night we laid down in a row—a few women, a man, a few women, etc. We figured that if we all stayed together and the Russians came, they wouldn't do anything to us. And they didn't, but every so often it appeared they came to check if any prey had separated from the herd—maybe some young thing to drag off to the side.

The men burned straw so that we could warm ourselves. Lying on the bare earth at night does get cold. At least it didn't rain.

So we had to dig and dig. Farther up the hill we were assigned another fifteen feet, but this time we only had to dig one foot down to supposedly create an artificial battle line. We heard a rumor that the Americans would attack and hoped it was true. Unfortunately, we hoped in vain.

I only slept outside one night because I pleaded with the German-speaking Commandant to give me permission to stay with my Tante who lived in the town nearby. I was so happy to be able to wash up and sleep in a bed.

The next morning I brought the Commandant and the work crew fresh coffee. The second evening I was almost over the hill on my way to Tante's house when the Russian guard on duty shouted, "Stop!" and pointed his gun at me. I stood still and he sauntered over. In vain I tried to explain that I had permission to leave, but he forced me to return to camp.

I was furious, so I handed him my heavy pick axe and said, "Then you have to carry this." He was so surprised at my impudence that he complied. The Commandant saw us coming, said a few words I didn't understand to my guard, and now this same soldier had to accompany me back up the hill until I was out of the danger zone. I breathed a sigh of relief to be on my way and thanked the Lord.

Despite the heavy work, we had enjoyable conversations with one another and with our Russian overlords, and a feeling of community presided over the project. Most of the officers spoke German. We helped one another however we could. Once in a while a Russian officer would sit down near us to watch and practice his German. They would have rather been home with their loved ones, too. This bad, terrible war. We all suffered under it.

RESETTLEMENT

When the war ended, we hung out white bed sheets facing the street to indicate our surrender, hoping the Americans would come. Instead the Russians invaded. A year later, when rumors circulated that we would be evacuated, we didn't want to believe it, hoping fervently that the Americans would still drive back the communists. But they didn't and we remained under Russian occupation.

Then we received news that Silesia had been given to Poland and that all natives must be "resettled."[28] Since the Russians had taken some land from the Poles, they sent the disenfranchised Poles to settle our region as compensation. More and more Polish families arrived and moved into our homes and took over our farms. We had nothing to say about it.

[28] Under the terms of the Yalta Conference agreements held in 1944 and the Potsdam Agreement of 1945, German Silesia east of the rivers Oder and Lusatian Neisse was granted to Poland.
http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Silesia

Here is a translated announcement posted in another town in Silesia so that you can gain a better understanding of what resettlement meant:

ANNOUNCEMENT

FOR THE GERMAN POPULATION OF BAD SALZBRUNN

According to the Requirements of the Polish government:

1. On July 14, 1945, from 6:00 to 9:00 a.m. the re-settling of the German population will take place.

2. The German population will be re-settled to the region west of the river Neisse.

3. Every German may only take up to 50 pounds luggage.

4. No transportation (wagons, oxen, horses or cows) are allowed.

5. The complete living and dead inventory of the area will remain undamaged under the ownership of the Polish government.[29]

6. The last resettlement march will take place July 14th at 10:00 a.m.

7. Non-compliance will be punished severely, namely with the use of weapons.

8. The use of weapons will also be used to prevent sabotage and theft.

9. Evacuees will line up in a procession, four persons wide, on Bad Salzbrunn Adelsbacher Street.

10. Those Germans and their families in the possession of an exemption permit may not leave their home from 5:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

11. All apartments and homes in town must remain unlocked with the keys left in the front door.

Yes, this was the procedure of our "resettlement." Some residents actually cleaned house before they left, hoping to return. Ironically, many of these orderly homes were trashed by their new Polish owners. The resettled Germans were never allowed to return, and to this day, the injustice committed against them has never been made right.[30]

KAETE AND WOEZEK

Woezek, like many other young men before him, fell in love with Kaete. He was tall and handsome with beautiful green eyes. As the incoming Polish settler on our property, he could

[29] In particular, gold, jewelry and watches were not to leave the area, and the Poles inspected all evacuees carefully before departure.

[30] Ten to 12 million Germans were expelled from East Prussia and the areas east of the Oder and Neisse rivers (approximately 50 miles east of Berlin) after these territories had been annexed by the Soviets. The expulsion of the German population, conducted by Russians, Poles and Czechs who had suffered under the German occupation, were accompanied by acts of revenge. In a hasty, forced departure, most people could only take a few belongings. https://foothill.edu/german-unification-study/historical.html

have lorded it over us. Instead, he remained humble and teachable, a real gentleman in all respects. Unlike many Polish men, he did not have a drinking habit.

Kaete liked him and enjoyed his attention, but she was a drama queen. One day the stress we were living under really must have gotten to her. Woezek and I were sitting in the kitchen when suddenly she appeared around the corner, suitcase in hand, visibly upset.

"I'm fed up; I've simply had it," she shouted and marched to the door. "I'm leaving," she yelled and walked out. Just like that.

Woezek was surprised and distressed—he didn't know what to say or do. "Where she going?" he asked me in his broken German and nervously fumbled for a cigarette in his pocket.

"Don't worry. She's not going far," I reassured him, amused at Kaete's antics. "I saw her throw only a few stockings in the suitcase. She probably just went to the neighbor's."

Woezek couldn't seem to find the matches for his cigarette. Finally he succeeded and shakily lit his pacifier. "My nerves, my nerves." he said. "She makes me crazy." After that he smoked one cigarette after another until Kaete returned as I had predicted.

Another time we were in the courtyard and Kaete was trying to explain some work procedures to Woezek. He was still learning operations on a farm as he had no previous experience, but apparently he had not performed according to her satisfaction. Finally Kaete exploded, "You're not listening," she shouted. "You just don't understand what I'm talking about!"

"What I do wrong now?"

"I give up on you," she stormed on. "I can't take this. Now I'm going to the pond to drown myself!"

Woezek paled. "No, don't. You crazy?" But Kaete stomped off.

I laughed as he nervously fumbled for a cigarette. "Oh, Woezek, just let her go," I said, familiar with my sister's wild outbursts. "She won't jump in. She can't swim!"

When Kaete was stressed she let off steam with dramatic scenes like this. And of course, it was romantically interesting to see how her suitor would react.

"Don't take everything she does or says so seriously," I advised him. Woezek really cared about her or he wouldn't have let her play him like that.

When it looked like we would soon be soon, Kaete decided to accept his marriage proposal. Only Germans married to a Pole could stay, and she hoped to somehow save the farm.

I counseled her against that decision. I liked Woezek, he was a good man, but I found the alcoholism in Polish society intolerable to live under. Also, the Poles were Catholic, and I would have never married outside my religion, as I felt the challenges of such unions brought about much heartache.

Material things were very important to Kaete, and she hoped that by staying she could prevent the Poles from breaking everything. As a child, when she had trouble sharing, Mother often warned, "Someday life will be difficult for you." In the end, her inability to tear herself away from things trapped her behind the iron curtain.

So Kaete stayed and I left. Ironically, we both ended up in two different countries eventually, each having to learn a new language and adapt to a new culture.

Kaete and Woezek married in July. The times were too chaotic for a church wedding so they simply performed a civil ceremony at the court house.

Many years later Kaete told me she regretted her decision even though Woezek was a good man and kind to her, but the difference in religion as well as learning to adapt to Polish culture was difficult, and her life as a farmer's wife was hard and laborious.

Because her children had a German mother, they were persecuted—school children called them names and beat up her daughter, Eva. The harassment only stopped after Woezek complained to the police and vigorously stood his ground.

Father often said, "You must never drop out of the school of life." My sister endured to the end, and so a blessing remains on her family. Woezek's and Kaete's four children and their families are all doing well today.

MY MARRIAGE PROPOSAL

Woezek received many visits from his countrymen and they talked and talked. I listened and tried to learn as much Polish as I could. One day he said to me in his broken German, "Nice young Polish man, twenty years old, want marry you. He very serious."

Oh, my goodness! What in the world was the fellow thinking? He was a handsome young man but had never even spoken to me. I hardly knew him and thought this must be a joke.

"I'm only sixteen!" I said. "Nein, never. Please tell him I am too young."

"Oh," said Woezek, "in Poland many girls marry age sixteen." I was shocked. Woezek smiled, "So tomorrow evening he sit on bench next to house and wait for answer."

Now the flea of mischief bit me.

“Fine,” I said. “I’ll be at the upstairs window. When he comes I’ll pour a bucket of water over his head!”

“You crazy?” Woezek was alarmed and looked at me sternly. “You not know what he can do. Has gun and with the police.”

“Then please meet him at the appointed time and let him down gently,” I replied. “Tell him I’m just too young. I will stay out of sight.”

So I was nowhere to be seen when Woezek tactfully broke the news to my suitor that German girls, unlike Polish ones, don’t marry so young.

When I was later evacuated, my would-be suitor was in armed uniform accompanying us to the train station, but his pride did not allow me another glance.

10

EVACUATION

The first resettlement evacuations began after we had been living under our "liberators" for about a year. In April 1946 the Habendorf farmers were called up. Kaete and I still stayed because Woezek advocated for us and we had a permit. Everyone else was driven out except a few individuals who worked for the Russians.

That sad day is still so present in my memory. I climbed the hill behind our house to watch the procession slowly move down the road in the direction of Peilau. People with box carts and backpacks, women holding children by the hand, old men. I knew them all. Generations of farmers had lived on the land and now they were being chased away like dogs. And what is a farmer without his land? He has no other skills to make a living. We said to one another, "We won't cry. We won't give our enemies the satisfaction of seeing how hard this is for us."

As I followed the procession, I knew each one faced his heartache with stoicism, but every so often they'd stand still and sadly look back. They were leaving their home, their life. It broke my heart to watch them. The future was so uncertain. What would happen to them, to me?

My best friend, Edith, her mother and grandmother were also leaving. She had news that her father languished in Russian captivity. Watching them go, it felt like something was dying within me. I stood alone on the hill and tears streamed down my cheeks. Everyone I knew and loved was going away.

At that time we believed we'd only be driven out for a short time. We figured our captors wanted to finish plundering us and then they'd let us return. This was not the case, however.

In August 1946 another transport was scheduled to leave and I was going this time as well. It was impossible to live under the Poles. So many were alcoholics and impudent. I didn't see how you could have a decent life among them.

I made myself a purse with layers of folded fabric from which I planned to sew clothes in the future. Between layers of the lining I hid my savings account records, the money Father deposited after each good harvest. In this way I brought the records safely to the West.

I packed a feather bed, a pillow, and hid 500 Reichsmark of rolled bills in the down featherbed. Some paper money I hid in rolls of thread. I also packed Kurt's Bible and mine, a plate and a silver spoon, a few photographs, a porcelain cup, and a can full of buttons.[31]

Then the day arrived when the authorities stopped by and announced, "Tomorrow you will be evacuated." I was ready. My things were packed. The next morning I put on three dresses and a coat, and they marched us the five miles to Reichenbach.

In Reichenbach we helped a woman who brought a lot of fabric she had been given by fleeing soldiers. We knew the authorities would take it away, so we cut it up and divided it among us women, wearing the cloth as shawls, sashes or turbans. In this way we smuggled quite a bit through the checkpoint for her. We felt pretty clever about our success.

At the checkpoint, the Poles forced us to lay all our possessions on tables while they searched through everything and took many more things away. In a particularly harsh incident, the authorities confiscated all the family photos of one of my school friends.

One young controller tried to take a scarf from me. This was a gift I had once given Mother. I tore it from his hand and said, "You are not getting this." Astonished, he let me pass. For sure an angel stood nearby and gave me courage.

In particular the Poles were on the lookout for jewelry. I wore a ring but held my other hand over it and said, "I don't have anything." They could just go ahead and search. May God forgive me this lie. The controller let me pass.

We were raised to be scrupulously honest to such an extent that some villagers, under questioning, even confessed to hidden belongings they'd brought along.

But I boiled with an inner rage against the whole Russian/Polish establishment. After all they had already taken, they were completely heartless to plunder the last pathetic items we owned in the world. It made me furious. Living under the Russians and the Poles turned me into a pretty hardened, cynical young woman.

LEAVING HOME

That night we slept on our luggage in the Reichenbach train station.

The next morning, I stood freezing with the other Habendorf villagers awaiting our train. Suddenly I heard someone call my name. There behind the gate stood Tante Friedel waving to me. She had learned that the second Habendorf resettlement was coming through. Quickly I walked to her. My dear Tante, she brought me hot coffee and a few sandwiches. I was deeply touched and thanked her with all my heart. Oh, how good the food tasted.

[31] Many years later in America, my husband was rummaging in this button can and found an old coin. I didn't know it was in there. It was a Ducat, probably over a hundred years old.

Tante Friedel lived in Reichenbach and was still allowed to stay, but she too was soon scheduled to leave. She had heard from Onkel—he was safe and had found employment in West Germany—and they hoped to reunite. As Tante and I sadly said farewell, I wondered when and where we would see each other again.

Shortly before the train left, Kaete arrived to say goodbye. I was seventeen years old and she was twenty-three. Neither of us dreamed that we would not see each other again for forty years, until after we were grandmothers. It was a good thing we didn't know this at the time.

Saying goodbye was difficult but we were brave. Taught to suppress feelings, we held back tears even to the point of nausea. Sometimes I couldn't force myself to swallow the tears anymore. To not let sorrow overwhelm us, we had to be very tough on ourselves emotionally.

Neither Kaete nor I cried. It was our way of helping each other cope with this difficult farewell. Of course Kaete and I hoped we'd only be separated for a short time.

One last hug, one last glance, one last memory…I climbed onto my train.

THE TRIP WEST

We were sandwiched with our belongings into freight cars. Each car held about thirty-five people—we didn't know how to sit or where to place our feet to avoid bumping into another person. When the train left I couldn't see much because there were no windows, just sliding doors.

It was a hot August day, and soon I was suffocating from the heat in my three dresses, but I wanted to keep as many belongings on my person at all times so that the authorities wouldn't take them. It was unbearable, and I felt as if I was choking to death. We all endured much, but the trip was especially hard on small children and the elderly.

We didn't get any food either. All of us brought sandwiches for the first part of the trip. An old woman in our car told stories to keep our spirits up and often made us laugh with her anecdotes. In various ways we tried to encourage one another.

Then I learned that if we didn't pass over the Oder River soon,[32] we were headed east—perhaps then Russia would be the destination. I knew such evacuations did take place.

I told myself, *If we don't change directions soon, the next time the train stops, I will jump out and hide. Under no circumstances will I go east.* I gave away all my apples and prepared to defect. I knew it would mean leaving my belongings behind, but freedom was more important to me than my possessions.

[32] The Oder River flows through central Silesia.

Slowly the train crossed the Oder River again and headed west. I was so happy I refused to take back a single apple. No, a gift is a gift, and so the recipients devoured the fruit with gusto and obvious enjoyment.

Every so often the train stopped, and we quickly jumped out to do our business. We had to hurry because otherwise the train could take off without us. Both men and women quickly overcame any feelings of shame. We all just wanted to survive.

One eighty-year-old man moved slowly. By the time he climbed down from his pile of belongings and prepared to step out of the train to relieve himself, the train whistled and would already start rolling again. This happened to him several times. That poor man suffered something terrible.

We young people found the trip difficult, but we managed more easily. Now that I am old myself, I understand how strenuous such a trip must have been for the elderly.

My heart went out to the women with little children. Their husbands had either died in the war or remained in captivity. These women were now on their own to survive and provide for their children. The little ones got diarrhea—that was not a pleasant smell!

Temperatures remained high the whole week. Day and night we stayed on the train which didn't always run. Many track sections had been bombed and were still damaged from the war, which caused delays. Sometimes we just sat waiting for other trains to come through. Tightly sandwiched in, we couldn't stretch or lie down, but waiting endlessly in the sweltering heat made the ordeal seem even more unbearable.

When we arrived in the west zone, the train stopped, and we were all herded into an airport. Straw covered the airport floor where we would later be allowed to stretch out and sleep. Heavenly! Then we were registered and herded together for de-lousing. We didn't have lice but this was their policy. In a special room they powdered us with DDT, a weed killer. With an air pump they puffed the poison down our blouse collars, under our skirts and into the men's unzipped pants. Each person was required to receive a six minute treatment. If you shook off the powder when you left, they made you endure another treatment.

We came out of there snow white and shook ourselves like wet dogs. We badly wanted to wash, at least our hands and face, but there were no facilities. We all looked and smelled terrible—there had been nowhere to wash the entire trip.

Finally we received something to eat—a bit of soup, a piece of bread. Then we laid down on the straw and slept. Heavenly.

The next day they transferred us to a passenger train with wooden benches and windows for the ride through the Hartz region. This was better. We enjoyed watching the scenery and found fresh encouragement.

After a one-day journey we were again unloaded and de-loused and given something to eat—herring and a little bread. I couldn't eat anything anymore. I had such swollen legs and felt so sick, I just wanted to die. To my surprise I lived. I discovered you can't die so easily!

We spent the last days of the trip in cattle cars again, but then we enjoyed more room because they added more cars to the train. Instead of thirty-five people, about fifteen occupied a car, which allowed us to stretch out and lie down—a great luxury.

REFUGEE CAMP

After arriving at the train station in Halle, Westphalia, we were loaded into pickup trucks and driven to a refugee camp. What under normal conditions had been only a one-day trip, had taken eight days of grueling travel.

To be able to walk around again and have a place to sleep was heaven on earth. The refugee camp was set up in a large restaurant where they placed cots for us in the dance hall. The cots were hard but we could fully stretch out. Wonderful! No matter how primitive, all I wanted to do was lie down and sleep.

We all looked terrible, crusted over from traveling with no opportunities to wash. Mothers struggled to clean children and comb tangles out of hair. Someone brought us a small piece of soap, and we all shared, each using a little. What wonderful fragrance, what luxury! I thanked the Lord over and over for such blessings.

I was fortunate that I never went hungry, neither during the war nor afterwards, but food was scarce. Breakfast in camp consisted of a cup of coffee and a piece of bread, lunch meant cabbage soup and a piece of bread, and supper again consisted of coffee and bread. Once a girl found some potatoes, and when another woman produced a little bacon fat, we cooked a feast that evening. Potatoes never tasted so good.

One day as I stood outside the camp, I saw a man with a small basket of apples coming down the street. A moment of homesickness overcame me as I thought about the abundant variety we enjoyed on the farm. "And now, what I wouldn't give for just ONE apple," I thought.

To my surprise the stranger walked right up to me and asked, "Would you like one?"

I couldn't believe it. "Oh, yes, please!"

He smiled and handed me a shiny red specimen.

People did not have much, and I knew that he was making a sacrifice parting with even one apple. I thanked him profusely, and in my heart I whispered, "Thank you Heavenly Father for taking such good care of me."

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In the refugee camp we registered again. They found employment for young singles fairly quickly. I took a position as a housekeeper in the town of Halle, Westphalia, and was glad, after two weeks in the camp, to finally enjoy freedom again.

Women with children had a much more difficult time finding a place to live because of the scarcity of available housing since many buildings had been bombed. No one wanted to take in families. Some women and children ended up living in basements and were grateful for even these primitive accommodations, relieved to finally escape the refugee camp.

West Germans were required to take in refugees based on the amount of space in their homes or apartments. Many resented it. For example, one pastor in Halle wouldn't even take in his own refugee mother.

He and another West German Lutheran pastor ministered in the town along with a third pastor, a refugee from East Germany. The native pastors owned cars but assigned him the outlying areas even though he only had a bicycle for transportation. Though he was young, biking in inclement weather took its toll, and he soon died, leaving behind a wife and two children. I was so angry at this injustice. He was an effective and faithful servant—everyone liked him.

I learned a sad lesson from those West German pastors. Sometimes where you would expect mercy and compassion, you find a hard heart.

MY FIRST JOB

My employer owned a leather factory and lived in a beautiful house, a real villa. He was rarely home—I don't know where he spent his time—but he was cordial to me. Unfortunately, his wife, Helene, was my boss, and she suffered from mental illness.

This couple had two adopted children—a daughter my age, Ute, and two-year-old Helga. Ute was very nice to me, and I stayed in her room until they finished preparing one for me. Later I was glad to have my own place on the attic floor.

Since I came directly from the refugee camp, I asked Helene for permission to wash my things in their laundry room. She said, "Yes, but you may not use the washing machine. Take the wash board." Then she threw a piece of soap at me and said disparagingly, "You hussy. Here is a little soap." Oh, how I wanted to throw the soap back in her face, I felt so humiliated, and choked down tears. I now needed to learn how to be a servant, but at home our servants were never treated in such demeaning ways.

We refugees endured many such humiliations, but crying and complaining didn't help anything so we bit our tongues. Instead, we tried to see the humor in things.

An elderly spinster, Frauelein Tante Annie, and a young widow and her child lived on the top floor. My employers had to take them in as their quota to house refugees in the area.

My upper story housemates and I got along well. One evening after dark I decided to play a prank, perhaps give Tante Annie a little scare as she sat sewing by her window. I set a burning candle inside an old canning jar, tied a long string around it, and then from my attic room, lowered the glowing light down to Tante Annie's window. Suddenly I heard a piercing scream. In the same moment the glass exploded and fell to the ground.

Smitten by a guilty conscience, I rushed down the stairs and found poor Tante Annie white with fright. I apologized to her profusely and explained everything. Then my other housemates joined in the commotion, and we sat down for a hearty laugh. Regaining her composure, Tante Annie said, "I thought I spied the devil in my window!"

Afterwards I crept downstairs and swept up the broken glass so that Helene wouldn't catch me. When I told Ute about my prank later, she also laughed but didn't betray me.

My employers owned a dachshund and torments lay in store for me with this dog. One day Helene sent me grocery shopping with Helga in a small wagon and the dachshund on a leash. This would not have been so bad if the dachshund had obediently walked alongside. But no, he had other ideas. He latched onto Helgas' jacket and wouldn't let go. All my efforts to dislodge him failed. The child screamed; the dachshund held on, growling. Redfaced, I hardly knew what to do. People walked by and smiled at us. Did they think the child was mine? I was utterly mortified. After all, there were young men around!

When you're embarrassed you do what you can to retain your dignity. I held my head high and walked straight ahead, dragging the growling bundle all the way home.

Helene gasped when she saw me coming, but I said indignantly, "I will never take two such badly matched partners shopping again!"

She was dismayed at the large hole in Helga's beautiful jacket. I was sorry about it too, considering the scarcity of clothing, but I was too upset to apologize.

In hindsight I should have beaten the dog to make him let go of the sweater, but I was too shy to create more of a public scene.

Moral of the story—don't trust dachshunds!

I didn't stay long with Helene. She was simply impossible to work for. Her mental illness made it difficult to follow directions, and she was unpredictable, prone to making unreasonable demands. Involuntary screams would emit from her throughout the day. She'd take a daily steam bath and say, "ee, ee, ee, ee."

Actually she didn't have much work for me, but I was supposed to be the babysitter for the two-year-old. Because I came from a farm, Helene assumed I could do anything. Once she asked me to prune the hedges, but I had never done that before. They turned out great and Helene marveled at my skill. I also cooked my first pheasant here, and knitted a little sweater for Helga though I had never made something for a little one before. It's surprising how you can rise to a challenge!

I was very unhappy at Helene's but didn't know how to change my situation. I was only seventeen years old, orphaned, without a home. Where could I go? I began praying for God's help.

Helene allowed me to bathe only once the whole six weeks I was there. This was a luxury. Otherwise I washed up in the basement. I often visited Greta, a neighbor girl from Habendorf, who worked as a housekeeper in the same town. Her employer, Frau Bildman, invited me to take my weekly bath there. I was so grateful.

Frau Bildman was a lovely, compassionate Christian woman. They owned a large construction company and had five school-age children, but she suffered greatly under her alcoholic husband. She was so kind and approachable, that I told her my troubles. She said, "Hannchen, you cannot stay there. I know Helene. That is no place for you. I will find you a new job and take care of everything."

Within a week, Frau Bildman introduced me to new employers who hired me immediately. For two months I had been with Helene. Then the Lord led me out, providing wonderfully again. I thought of how often Mother assured me the last year of her life that the Lord would find paths for me "where your feet can go." In my great need, God's help drew near.

THE LUEKERS

I loved working for the Lueker family doing housework and working as a cashier in the grocery store. I felt at home with Opa, Oma, their forty-year-old bachelor son, a spinster daughter, and their niece, Ursula, who was my age. Thus began a wonderful season in my life despite the privations after the war.

All goods remained rationed; only salt was free. Rationing cards reflected appropriate quotas assigned to the average user, the hard laborer, pregnant mothers, and children. Every week different numbers were called up for the various categories. It was a challenge to stay current at the grocery store, and you always had to have old and new newspapers at hand to check on the listings. People paid close attention to make sure they received every gram they had coming to them.

At the end of the month the books had to balance before our store could apply for a permit from the bureau for new wares. This was all cumbersome work. Thankfully, the rationing system was later eliminated.

In the evenings we were all very tired from constantly doing sums in our heads or figuring things on paper. I loved the challenge of working in the store and learned to mentally add and subtract very quickly. Math is actually a matter of practice, like learning to play the piano. The more you do it, the better your brain works, and it becomes almost automatic.

We lived in difficult times. You could buy nothing with your money, only do a trade with food, which was *verboten*, but who cared? Once I didn't eat butter for a month so I could save my ration stamps. After accumulating enough, I went to a store and "purchased" a dress with my

stamps. Then I was allowed access to the basement to make my selection. I tried on a beautiful floral one and, thrilled with my purchase, kept admiring myself in the mirror.

Another time, relatives of the Luekers gave me some leather for shoes. I saved my butter ration stamps and hired a shoemaker to make me a pair.

Eventually Germany instituted a currency reform which abolished the Reichsmark and ushered in the Deutsch Mark. That historical day, everyone received 40 DM with which to make a new beginning, whether businessman or housewife. We were all equally rich, but by the end of the day, some people with business smarts had already managed to make money on their original 40 DM.

Suddenly the empty stores filled with goods. Prior to this, store owners refused to sell their inventory and kept everything in their basements because they knew that the currency would be devalued.

Now with the new currency in place, the stores restocked their shelves. I bought a pink undershirt and underwear set, for 16 DM. It was my first purchase with the new money. That took quite a chunk out of my 40 DM, and I determined to be frugal and only buy the most basic necessities. But everything seemed like an urgent necessity because for several years while stores stood empty we had lived with so little.

After a time, the government announced that our Reichsmark savings accounts would now be paid in Deutsch Marks at 10% of their original value. For example, for 200 Reichmarks, I received 20 Deutsch Marks. I had smuggled my records out in the lining of my purse, but unfortunately, I only received the money from the federal account. Everything that had been saved in Silesia was gone. At one time Father also had a 5000 Reichsmark life insurance policy. Now the insurance was worthless, because when the Russians came they canceled all such prior arrangements. In the end, I got very little from what I smuggled out.

Nor could I find the 500 Reichsmark I hid in my feather bed during the evacuation—and here was my last chance to cash in the money before the currency completely devalued. Many years later in America when I prepared to burn the feather bed because of my allergies, I found the bundle of bills. Why couldn't I find them when I needed them?! I was so irritated, I burned them with the feathers. That was foolish because today I'm sure they would be rare collectibles.

I had lost everything—money, property, my home and almost all the people I loved. What remained? I still possessed the best of all, and this, no one could take from me—my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, my Savior, and my God. I was rich!

Often I've pondered the lyrics to this song, "Nothing here is forever. Everything in life must one day pass away. Only what is done with a heart of love for Jesus remains for eternity."

I knew my Heavenly Father would never leave or forsake me.

11

MEMORIES FROM WESTPHALIA

One day our neighbors rushed into the store announcing, "We got a package!" Their American relatives had sent them coffee, sugar, milk powder, egg powder, lard, even chocolate and more. The other customers listened, envious. Everything revolved around getting enough to eat in those days of rationing. Who wouldn't have loved to receive a care package?

They planned to send a picture along with their thanks, they said, but the photo would only include the father and their two young boys as they still looked so thin. In their minds the wife looked too well-nourished to be in the picture, which was an exaggeration. But who could blame them; they simply hoped to receive another package, which soon came.

In winter it gets very cold in Westphalia. The koks, a type of coal used for central heating systems, were also rationed, so we had to be very frugal and heat as little as possible. In the store we also heated very little. We would take turns serving customers and then warm up in the attached cozy living room.

I went to bed dressed in warm layers. The bedrooms grew so cold that in the mornings I woke to walls frosted white, my featherbed stiffened by my breath, and frozen water in the pitcher used to wash up. Fraeulein Lueker would get up early to heat the kitchen stove, and when she came to wake me at 7:00 a.m., she would set a pitcher of warm water at my door, something I greatly appreciated.

But I was happy in my little room. Not much was in there but basic necessities, and Ursula and I shared the armoire. I only owned three dresses when I arrived and these hung in the closet.

Later, I made some new clothes out of old ones. For example, from some British soldier cast-off sweaters, I unraveled the yarn, wound it around a bottle and dunked it in water to straighten it. After the wool dried, I wound it into a long bundle and dyed it navy blue. Then I knit myself a bell skirt with a round needle. It would take me a whole evening to knit one row because the skirt had such a wide circle at the bottom.

My neighbor soon became a new friend. Karola was a year younger than I. With her father still in captivity, her mother, along with a few employees, ran a large grocery store. Karola helped too, but she was still in school. She invited me to attend a Christian girl's club. There I met some very sweet girls and a Diakonisse led the group.[33] We sang, played games, and once in a while the pastor taught a little Bible lesson, though this was mostly boring. Karola later became a

[33] Diakonisse—a protestant woman who commits to a life of celibacy and service through the Lutheran state church.

Diakonisse even though she could have married, but she wanted to serve the Lord wholeheartedly.

I felt very alone my first Christmas away from home, but Karola handed me a present and a card. She had made me a felt booklet to store sewing needles and included a little stationery. Tears came to my eyes. I was so thrilled with the gift, but most of all it was her thoughtfulness that touched me. She was truly one of those angels God brought into my life. To this day Karola still writes and sends me German books for Christmas. God bless my dear friend.

We could buy movie tickets with currency but to get them required standing in line for a few hours. A handsome admirer named Ervin offered to get my tickets because he wanted to sit with me.

"Fine," I said. "Under these conditions—I also need a ticket for my friend." We attended several movies this way and got good seats, but Grete tagging along prevented him from bringing me home. Despite this obstacle, he continued to acquire tickets for us. It must have been a great privilege to sit with me!

Ervin, always a smile on his face, was a farmer's son from Prussian refugees. He was very gentlemanly and kind. We attended the same dance class and often paired up. He was an excellent dancer and could swing a girl wonderfully in a waltz. Once at a ball, the teacher held an elimination contest. Whenever a couple made a mistake, he'd pull them off the floor. My partner and I were one of the last three couples left standing. We were so proud.

When Ervin wanted to get more serious and suggested we go out exclusively, I said no. I would be friends, yes, but not more, and we separated on friendly terms.

Once the fire department invited us to a ball. Underneath a large circus-style tent, they planned to set up a dance floor surrounded by wooden benches.

After Oma died, bachelor Karl Lueker married and planned to take his new wife to the ball. She said to me, "You should go too!"

"I don't have the right dress," I said.

"No problem. I'll loan you one I wore when I was young!"

She pulled out a dark deep red dress with black tulle; it was just beautiful. Best of all, it fit as if made just for me! At the ball, no wonder so many young men invited me to dance. But whenever they announced ladies' choice, I quickly disappeared because I didn't want to choose among them. After all, I didn't want to offend.

As so often when you're having fun, something must go wrong. After sitting on one of the wooden benches, I stood up, only to hear a fateful "rip," and now a hole marred the back of my beautiful dress. I felt terrible but determined to dance a few more rounds by discreetly pinching the torn fabric with one hand while keeping the other on my partner. Finally I'd had enough fun

for one night. I found Frau Leuker and explained about the dress, deeply apologetic. What a relief that she was not terribly upset.

All my dance partners were watching, hoping for a chance to walk me home. I needed a way to leave discreetly. Leaving my coat with Frau Lueker who could bring it later, I pretended to go to the restroom, slipped outside and ran home. She later reported that many an eager young man had indeed searched in vain.

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It was a warm, romantic summer night. Trees swayed gently in the cool breeze. I was in my room. Around 10:00 p.m. I heard a sound under my window. All of a sudden a chorus of male voices sang, "A boy came upon a little rose, a rose in the meadow. It was young and beautiful as the morning, a lovely vision…"

I tiptoed to the window and carefully peeked through the drapes. There stood several gentlemen gazing up at my window, serenading me with a love song. They must have been at some party drinking, these Romeos. I knew most of them from the business across the street because they often came in to the store to buy mineral water.

The next morning when the Romeos arrived, I thanked them for the lovely serenade, but they only smiled mischievously and denied knowing anything. Oh, really?

My work at the store brought me into contact with many people, and I had many admirers. I was eighteen now. I loved the barn dances where everyone danced in wooden clogs. The band played all kinds of conventional and unconventional instruments, often home-made. It was so much fun; we laughed and danced with anyone around. You didn't see love birds—we just enjoyed being together as young people. It was so nice to have a social life. In the war everything had been verboten.

CHANGES

I loved my life, but good times don't always encourage spiritual growth.

With some vacation days, I decided to visit my aunt and uncle, taking the train to Wuppertal. At one point the train slowed as it approached a once-bombed, rickety bridge, and then cautiously crept forward. I stared at the deep water below. Suddenly a terrifying fear seized me—if we went down this would be my end. Deeply shaken I vowed, "From now on I'm going to live closer to the Lord."

Realizing that so many vain things had become too important to me, I stopped going to the movies, though they were wholesome films, and lost my desire to attend dances. I took more time to pray and went to church once in a while.

The Lueker family didn't go to church but gave me freedom to attend if I wanted. Sometimes to prepare for the workweek we glued ration cards on Sunday mornings, but they would have never

forced me to join them. I stayed and helped out anyway. It would not have been right to leave all the work to them.

Slowly this season of my life came to an end. Oma Lueker had died; the bachelor had married. Ursula found work as a telephone receptionist elsewhere. The ration cards phased out and there was less work. I could tell they actually didn't need me anymore, but they would not have had the heart to send me away because I had nowhere to go. I wrote Onkel Alfred in Wuppertal, and in a short time he found a new position for me in the home of a wood factory owner, Herr Himmelmann.

Saying goodbye to the Lueker family was hard. They had taken me into their family and always referred to me as "our Hannchen" whenever they spoke of me to others. The evenings sitting together in their cozy living room listening to music and working on embroidery had been so lovely. Routinely at the stroke of 10:00 o'clock, Opa would stand up, say "Good Night," and go to bed. Not a minute earlier or a minute later.

When I took leave from Opa, he said to me, "You know that this house shall always be your home. You are welcome here any time." He couldn't have said anything nicer as I felt the loss of my parental home keenly. How their kindness had done my soul good. We need people to whom we belong, and the Lord sent such angels along my path again and again.

WUPPERTAL-CRONENBERG

And so I started over at Wuppertal-Cronenberg. This town lay on a hill overlooking the bombed ruins of Elberfeld and Barmen. You could find much beauty and things of interest in this hilly region—it was known for its deciduous trees and antique smithies where blacksmiths had once forged swords.

My new family consisted of Herr Himmelmann, the factory owner, his wife Edith, and their nine-year-old daughter, Jutta. To my dismay, two dachshunds also greeted me with loud barking when I arrived.

The Himmelmanns had been bombed out of their home in Barmen and now lived in a newly-built house. Their factory produced wooden crates in various sizes as well as other related products. A productive steel industry flourished in this region.

They gave me a room outfitted with new, white enamel furniture, central heat, running hot and cold water, and carpet. Very elegant.

The small kitchen contained an old gas stove in poor condition, but expensive Persian carpets and costly urns decorated the living room. The house included a basement and laundry room but, unfortunately, no washing machine, and I had to wash the underclothes by hand. They took the bed sheets and table linens to a laundromat.

The basement pantry was still stocked with hoarded food from rationing days. Most of it had gone bad and needed to be thrown away. I found worms in the flour and moldy items. Many

things were broken, and I mended clothes and sewed on buttons. What a big job, but it made me feel good to bring all this in order. Frau Edith had no time because she worked in the factory office.

From my new work place I could reach Tante Friedel and Onkle Alfred, father's brother, in ten minutes. Tante Friedel had brought me coffee at the train station in Reichenbach and now she and Onkel were also starting a new life in the West. I visited them on my afternoons off, and they'd listen to me talk while we drank coffee and enjoyed Tante Friedel's cake.

You might wonder why I didn't live with these relatives since I had no parental home, but they had no room for me. Besides, I did not want to impose on them but make my own way in the world.

At the Himmelmanns everything that had to do with cooking was left to me, and I cooked to my heart's content. They always loved everything I prepared. When other factory owners came to dinner, they would leave me a nice tip and praised my cooking. I was happy about the money because I did not have much.

When I worked for the Luekers, I earned 40 Deutsch Mark a month. They covered my health insurance and paid social security, and I had free room, board and laundry privileges. Now I made 60 Deutsch Mark a month and even earned 5 Deutsch Mark more for cleaning the factory bathroom.

But had I really improved my lot? I soon discovered that for a pay increase I had traded in my freedom. Upon taking the position, my employers requested that I babysit Jutta once in a while when they went out in the evenings. I was happy to agree to this. She was a sweet girl, and we got along well. But later they changed the terms and forbid me to leave evenings saying they needed me there to answer the phone in case it rang. However, this had not been our original arrangement.

My new employers gave me a weekday afternoon and Sunday afternoons free, which did not allow me to attend church. They expected me to cook Sunday mornings so that when they returned from their morning drive, lunch would be ready. I complained, but they remained firm in their demands.

Here I found no garden—only large stacks of factory boards stood behind the house. I felt like a prisoner.

Every Sunday morning when the church bells rang, I knelt by my bed and promised the Lord that in the future, I would always go to church if only he'd show me a way out of there. Life is often like that, isn't it? You really begin to treasure freedom only when you have lost it. My thirst to be in church and hear God's Word had never been stronger.

It took about a year before God answered my prayer. In the meantime those two dachshunds tormented me. Hella liked to steal my dust rag and would refuse to give it back. They peed and made piles whenever and wherever they liked. If I finished cleaning up a mess in the basement,

then another pile lay on the carpet. Unbelievable, the work those two little beasts created! I didn't like them and the feeling was mutual. To this day I despise dachshunds.

My employers worshiped their dogs who slept with them and were taken to the vet at the least little problem. I am a dog lover myself, but I don't believe animals should be elevated above people.

Herr and Frau Himmelmann didn't mind spending money on their dachshunds, but woe to any beggar who dropped by their house. One day a veteran missing an arm came to my kitchen door to sell a few cards, and I bought some to help him out. To my utter surprise, my employers gave me a huge lecture afterwards and forbid me to ever buy from a beggar again.

I learned an important lesson. Rich people in beautiful homes can be heartless and very harsh with their fellow man. Never again would I envy their wealth or influence. How different the Luekers were—so warmhearted in their simple home. I felt homesick for them.

CAUGHT BY POLICE

When large loads of wood arrived from Bayern, Herr Himmelmann sent me to the bank for money. I'd march home with several thousand Deutsch Mark in my purse, and no one would have suspected. Robberies rarely happened anyway.

On weekends the Himmelmanns traveled out of town, I took orders for crates. The vault remained unlocked because my employer trusted me.

We lived across from the train depot restaurant, but to get there safely you had to take a roundabout way. In the evenings, Herr Himmelmann usually sent me to get a few bottles of beer and insisted I take the short cut, "Now, run quickly across the tracks; that is a much shorter distance."

Fine, I obeyed, being extra careful before I crossed. One evening, a couple of policemen sitting in the restaurant observed my crossing. When I arrived, they confronted me and said, "Frauelein, crossing the tracks is against the law. We could fine you."

"I am simply following my boss's orders. Work it out with him!" I said.

They seemed impressed with my obedience (a strong German value at that time), and asked the name of my employer.

"Herr Himmelmann."

"Good. We will accompany you home and see if you're telling the truth."

"Bitte sehr, please do."

We walked out of the restaurant, and they headed back in the direction of the tracks.

I stopped, astonished. “What? Are we walking back over the tracks? I thought that was verboten!”

“Not if you’re with us,” they grinned at me.

When we got home, they gave Herr Himmelmann a stern lecture. What was he thinking, placing a girl in such danger?

“If this happens again, you will face a heavy fine!”

From then on I had to go the long way around. That was fine with me. Herr Himmelmann just had to wait a few extra minutes longer for his beer.

WALK IN THE WOODS

One beautiful spring day I had the afternoon off and decided to take a long walk in the woods. Soon I was marching merrily on my way, feeling pretty in my dirndl dress.[34] The birds sang. Everywhere fresh greenery sprouted. It was so quiet and peaceful among the trees. After a while I found myself on a narrow path. Suddenly an unexplained fear struck, and I thought, *No, you dare not go any farther.* So I turned around and headed back.

Suddenly a young man stepped out of the thicket and asked in a choked voice, “Mind if I join you?”

“That’s not necessary,” I replied. “I’m on my way to Cronenberg.”

“That’s where I’m going, too,” he said. An uneasy feeling crept over me.

As I walked I could feel his breath on my neck. *He’s following far too close,* my mind screamed. All my senses were on high alert now. I started to talk and talk while in my heart I cried out to my Heavenly Father for protection.

“Are you a believer?” I asked.

“No.”

So I told him about Jesus and the more I talked, the quieter he got.

There was not a house or any people in sight. My heart beat so hard I could feel it in my throat. Any moment now he could attack me. I berated myself for having been so careless and vowed never to walk this far alone again.

Finally we saw the first houses and the path broadened so that he could walk next to me. I breathed a little easier and made eye contact. He stood still, looked me full in the face and said,

[34] A dress with a close-fitting bodice and full skirt, commonly of colorful and strikingly patterned material, fashioned after Tyrolean peasant wear.

"I thank you. I must say that you are the first girl in such a situation that I have not overpowered. Now I have more respect for myself." With tears in his eyes he turned and walked away.

With all my heart I kept thanking the Lord over and over for His protection. Surely an angel had been with me.

I saw this young man only one other time. We crossed paths in town. From a distance he tipped his hat and greeted me warmly. I never saw him again since I left the area shortly thereafter.

VACATION

After one year in Wuppertal, I was entitled to a vacation, so Tante Friedel drove me to a travel agency. The girls in the office spent a great deal of time booking a trip to the Black Forest.

However after I left, a dark cloud descended on me, and I felt miserable. I kept thinking, *This trip is so much money. Actually I should buy myself a summer coat. I can't afford both. Have I just made a big mistake?*

Tante and I went out for a cup of coffee. My discomfort continued. Finally I told her I needed to cancel the trip. She couldn't understand why but accompanied me to the office anyway.

When I explained my change in plans, the travel agents could not believe it. "What in the world are you thinking? We bent over backwards telephoning around to get that reservation. You will have to pay for the calls." I gladly complied.

They continued making derogatory comments, but I felt much better for peace had returned to my heart. The dark cloud was gone. Only much later did I see that the Lord was guiding my destiny.

I decided to book a one-day bus tour along the Mosel River instead. Herr Himmelmann feared that this would be a drinking party and thought the Rhine preferable. He tried to get a reservation for me, but in vain. So then, the Mosel was going to be it.

Beautiful vineyards lined the Mosel River as we drove through the countryside. At lunch I bowed my head and prayed silently before the meal. A couple traveling with their daughter noticed and commented. They were believers!

We spent the rest of the day together. I confided in them about my problems at work, that I wasn't allowed to go to church or leave the premises in the evenings. My new friends listened with interest and said they knew a way out. Their Swiss relatives employed a housemaid who could only stay until March. They promised to put in a word for me, but I would have to wait until the position opened. We exchanged addresses.

I visited my new friends once in a while in Barmen where they operated a small store, and they were very kind to me. Then I didn't hear anything for a long time. Had they forgotten me?

One day they called. The job was available, write here, and apply. I acted immediately but stipulated guaranteed regular church attendance and the right to come and go as I pleased outside of work hours. After all, I was twenty-one years old and prized my freedom above all.

I did not want my employer knowing about my job search before I was prepared to act and give notice. But how would I hear about this new position without being discovered? Usually all the mail was delivered to the office. I would most certainly be questioned about who in the world had written me from Switzerland.

One day the kitchen doorbell rang. I opened and there stood a man who asked, "Are you Fraulein Haase?"

"Yes."

"Here is a letter for you. It was mistakenly delivered to us."

I was astonished. How wonderfully God was orchestrating things!

Once in the safety of my room, I opened the letter. They were going to honor all my stipulations! I quickly wrote back to accept the job.

Now Herr and Frau Himmelmann were completely taken aback that I wanted to leave. I had never agreed to be at their beck and call after hours. Only in emergency situations would I babysit Jutta, but they hadn't taken me seriously.

They offered another vacation if only I would stay. I said, "No, thank you." Then they tried to scare me by saying that maybe I had fallen into unscrupulous hands and would be forced into slavery.

I said, "No, they are Christians. Everything is surely above board." For me, God's leading was clear. I was amazed at his guidance and thanked him over and over for providing a way out. Good thing that in my desire to leave I hadn't acted rashly which could have resulted in only a short term solution.

I acquired a passport and visa for Switzerland. Then I had a week to pack at Onkel and Tante's home where I stored my featherbed, a pillow, and a few odds and ends.

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A NEW HOME

Soon I was ready to leave. My train would even take me through the Black Forest. After we crossed the border and reached Schaffhausen, Swiss officials announced, "All foreigners disembark. Leave your luggage in the train station and follow the customs official." I was shocked. In Germany theft was a problem. The six of us "foreigners" looked at each other uncertainly. Under no condition did we want to leave our luggage unattended. But we were reassured, "Don't worry. No one steals around here."

The bells rang as I looked around. No scenes of buildings in ruins from the war. *Oh, how peaceful.* People gave friendly smiles. *Yes, I want to stay here.*

Health department officials reviewed our papers, and we underwent a medical evaluation which included an X-ray. This proved vitally important later as you will see.

Several hours later, when everything checked out, we returned to our luggage. Nothing stolen! However, I noticed that my suitcase showed a new brown streak across the side. Apparently a dog had confused it for a tree. What a welcome! My travel companions teased me and asked if I had liquid in my bag. "I only hope things won't continue in that vein!" I laughed.

After re-boarding the train, I disembarked in Thayngen. There in the train depot stood three darling children waiting for me with a small wagon. How charming! I didn't know them, but they recognized me from the photo I'd sent.

The children spoke the Swiss dialect, and I was able to gather that their mother didn't have time to pick me up. So our little procession started down the street before tackling the steep hill to the house. The wagon carrying my luggage needed to be pushed and pulled hard to make the climb, but the children made it look like great fun. Shyly they stole glances at me from time to time.

I loved my new job as a housekeeper, cook, and nanny, but there were adjustments. One of my assignments was to prepare breakfast—coffee, hot milk, bread—and have the children at the

table, dressed and their hair combed, promptly at 7:00 a.m. Getting ready on time was the problem.

They had made a pact with one another that they would not obey me because I did not speak their dialect. So it happened more than once that I just wasn't ready with the children because they refused to let me dress them. Finally I told Herr Bernath my problem.

The next morning he came storming out of his bedroom, grabbed the nearest child, forced the clothes on him in the roughest manner and said, "So, you don't want to let Hannchen dress you? How do like being dressed like this?" They were subdued—from then on I had no more problems in the morning, much to my relief. That was the end of their resistance, and after that we got along great. I grew very attached to them.

Since Bernaths attended the Free Evangelical Church, I was happy to join them. Every Sunday I looked forward to the sermon. What a gift to be able to attend church again and hear the Word of God. The pastor gave simple, relevant-to-life messages. Of course, I had to adjust to the Swiss dialect.

Bernaths had much work for me which involved a lot of cooking because they entertained often, especially Sundays. As Zurich's city engineer, he would invite people from work or they would have church friends over. In the summer they received visitors from Germany. This meant extra work because these folks also stayed overnight. But I enjoyed their guests and found the discussions on religion and current events interesting.

Frau Bernath was a woman of dignity, grace and prayer. She treated me more like a daughter than like a servant. She'd always introduce me as "our house daughter" rather than as "our maid." It was her nature to express appreciation and to praise me for my work. In the five years I worked for her, I can honestly say that she thanked me daily for every task.

I lived nearly five years in Switzerland. Despite the hard work, these were some of the best years of my life.

ILLNESS

As someone who needed to earn her keep, I didn't feel I could take time off for illness, so when I caught the flu, I did not take to bed. Feeling terribly unwell, I struggled through wash day. At noon Frau Bernath sent me on an errand. On the way back I was overcome with dizziness and needed to steady myself at a wall nearby. Somehow I got home. Arriving in the kitchen I said, "I feel so awful." Then I fainted.

I learned later that Frau Bernath screamed, "Jakob, come quickly." Luckily Herr Bernath was still at home on his lunch break.

He carried me to bed and immediately called the doctor who came right away and gave me a shot. I had suffered a heart weakness and the collapse could have been fatal. The doctor spoke to

me solemnly, “You should never treat the flu lightly.” Yes, but I didn’t know what else I could have done. I had no parents to whom I could return for occasional respite.

The doctor prescribed bed rest for a few days, gave me pills, and every week I got shots to strengthen my heart. Everyone had received a shock when I collapsed. Frau Bernath nursed me with touching concern, and slowly I began to feel stronger.

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In Thayngen I constantly came down with colds and bronchitis, coughing continuously. To treat my chronic respiratory problems, the doctor prescribed four weeks recovery in the mountains. My employer paid my salary as well as reimbursement for meals. Frau Bernath was so kind—she sent me a package with sweets every week.

I thoroughly enjoyed these weeks at the *Christian Recuperation Center for Body and Soul.* I could sleep in as long as I wanted. The mornings were so peaceful. I loved to hear the goat herder call his animals to head up the mountain. I recovered completely.

A VISIT TO THE DENTIST

My tooth ached and I needed to see the dentist. Unfortunately, insurance didn’t pay for the visit; nevertheless, I made an appointment to see him.

The man had pudgy hands and worked clumsily. He kept slipping, giving me quite a few knocks in the face. *The whole procedure, sheer torture,* I thought. *This man’s in the wrong profession—he should have become a butcher.*

When it came time to pay, I couldn’t believe the outrageous amount he charged me. I made every effort not to show my dismay, swallowed hard and paid cash. But now all my money was gone. The dentist’s wife saw me to the door and asked all kinds of questions about who I was and what I did.

With a heavy heart I set out on the fifteen minute walk home. Payday was fourteen days away. I had already registered for a church retreat. “Lord Jesus, now I can’t go. I know the dentist overcharged me.” And then the tears came. I felt so helpless.

When I arrived home, Frau Bernath waved at me from an open window and called, “Turn right around and go back to the dentist. He telephoned and apologized that he overcharged you. He assumed you were one of our relatives.”

I returned with a happy heart, and the dentist’s wife gave me half my money back. All the way home, over and over, I thanked the Lord. He can touch men’s hearts and lead them to make things right.

Herr Bernath said, “Don’t dress up so much when you go to the dentist!”

I was wearing a brown skirt and a pink pullover I had knitted myself. Hardly fancy.

After that I rode the bike over the border to Germany to a new dentist who did expert work for a reasonable fee.

No way was I ever returning to the “butcher.”

BRIDESMAID

Gisela and Lothar wanted to marry, but where? Like me, they were both refugees. Lothar worked as an electrician and Gisela worked in a store, living with her employer who treated her like an adopted daughter. She had already saved money for some bedroom furniture.

Then Gisela’s employers declared they would make two medium-sized rooms in their house available for a small wedding reception.

Gisela chose me as her maid of honor, but where would I find an appropriate dress? Buy it? Impossible with my meager income. When a friend heard about my dilemma, she said, “Try on my mint green one.” Lo and behold, it fit perfectly, and I even thought it looked pretty on me. My first long dress, though borrowed. Gisela’s wedding dress and veil were also borrowed.

The ceremony took place in the Free Evangelical Church and then we drove to Gisela’s home for the reception. I rode with the bride and groom in charge of a bucket in case Gisela got car sick. What a

relief that she didn't need it!

I don't know how many people crammed into those two rooms in the house, but it was cozy. The employers provided food, and there was lots of singing and much laughter. I read the poem I had composed detailing Gisela and Lothar's love story and entertained everyone with short, funny rhymes highlighting each guest.

Even on a limited budget you can have so much fun! Someone took some pictures but photographs were not such a big deal in those days. We appreciated the fun and fellowship more.

TENT CRUSADE

In the summer of 1954, Pastor Wilhelm Busch held a tent crusade in the Raemismuehle. This famous, big-hearted man imprisoned during the Nazi years had suffered much.

I went with several young people to the meeting. The tent held a packed crowd. When Pastor Busch stepped to the podium, he appeared rather short and modest in his manner, but when he began to speak, what a voice—so full of love, compassion, and warmth.

Pastor Busch testified that without Jesus and the comfort of His word, the prison isolation cell would have driven him insane. To survive, he set up a daily program of quoting memorized scriptures and singing songs.

He was educated but also authentic and humble, and he preached sermons applicable to life. He explained why the Ten Commandments were a worthy guideline for life—they provide boundaries for our safety and well-being. His messages inspired, and I took the teachings to heart.

He was different than the men I knew. "I want to tell you about my grandmother," he said, "but please excuse me if I cry," and he would brush away tears as he spoke. This touched me because it showed what a great influence even a grandmother can have. I liked Pastor Busch's transparency. Men I knew rarely showed emotions.

He did not give altar calls but made himself available for counseling. One evening Pastor Busch gave a challenge: "Who is willing to follow the Lord, regardless of where He sends you? Would you stand to show your commitment?"

With sober resolve, and with no inkling that the Lord would hold me to my commitment several months later, I stood and hoped no one would see me.

HOW I MET FLORI

Bernaths had built a new house, the children were older, and having saved some money, I considered pursuing an education. The only other work available to me as a foreigner was waitressing or nursing. However, I knew one thing for sure—I wanted to stay in Switzerland.

Nursing school was strenuous and required physical health and stamina. I questioned my ability to keep up given my health challenges in the past. Financially it looked like the plan could work—I had saved for the uniform and a small allowance kept students afloat while they studied and worked.

So I prayed, "Lord, I plan to go to this three-year nursing school. However, I'm already twenty-five years old, and if you want me to get married instead, then you need to send the man *before* I enter the program because I won't be available once I start. You alone know my capacities and what I should do. In one week I'm filling out the application."

I knew no potential marriage candidates. Most men in my circles were too young. I was very serious with the Lord about this matter. I could not afford a mistake. If I failed the program, I would not be able to return to Bernaths or have anywhere else to go.

Shortly after my prayer, my friend Hanni sent me a letter saying that her cousin from America was coming. Oh, and he was looking for a wife. She said she told him about me and he was interested. *Oh horrors. Not me!*

"Could we set a time to meet?" she asked.

No, I thought. *I don't go on blind dates. Besides, this whole idea of meeting someone looking for a wife is so…unromantic. And awkward. And America? I love Switzerland!*

Then I remembered the prayer seeking direction for my life. I had negotiated with the Lord—now I needed to follow through. We arranged to meet in Schaffausen at the train station. When I arrived I walked quickly, heart pounding. Finally I saw Hanni, and Flori stood next to her. The man I might marry? *No, never. I don't like him.* I decided. *He's not my type.* He was already balding a little. I don't know what I had imagined exactly.

Flori's first impression? He said he liked how I came marching down the street like someone who knows what she wants. Yes children, in those days I did have a spring in my step!

The three of us spent the afternoon together awkwardly trying to make conversation, but I agreed to meet again the following week without Hanni.

On our next date, Flori took me to lunch at *Stein am Rhein*, a restaurant at Hohenklingen Castle. We spent a very nice afternoon together, but it was still awkward and tense, two people getting to know each other under such circumstances. Imagine knowing from the beginning this is the man you might marry. Furthermore, you would be expected to leave everything you love and go to a foreign country with him? Nerve-wracking!

As I got to know Flori, he started to impress me. We discussed matters of faith and found that we shared a common bond. He was different than I thought but also very quiet and shy. It was sometimes hard to get him to talk.

I invited him to meet Bernaths because I wanted their opinion. They approved because he was a hard worker and had a job, he seemed mature, and he was a believer. If they had advised me against the relationship, I would not have pursued it.

After only six weeks and six dates it was time for Flori to return to America. Now the feared question came. Would I be his wife? Oh, I still didn't know!

I said, "Let's pray together." We did, and then I was confident—this is the man God chose for me; therefore, he would also give me the right kind of love. Not the kind that's here today and gone tomorrow, but a love that lasts.

I said yes. We celebrated a small engagement party at Bernaths. Flori brought me a dozen red roses and slipped a simple gold band on my finger. Everything had gone so fast. I could hardly believe it.

For days afterwards, however, the doubts came. *Did I do the right thing?* I wanted to stay in Switzerland so badly. This was home. How was I supposed to go to a strange country with a man I hardly knew? *No,* I decided, *It's impossible. Lord, you can't expect that of me.*

I finally called Flori and said, "I need to call off the engagement. I just can't do it. Going to America is too overwhelming."

To my surprise he reacted calmly. "I understand," he said. "It would mean taking a courageous risk."

How he handled himself impressed me. He let ME back out without complaint. This was important to me because of how I value freedom. I had dated a young man in Germany who could not take "no" for an answer. For years, even after I moved to Switzerland, he harassed me with letters trying to force me to change my mind.

However, breaking off the engagement did not return peace. The opposite occurred. Like the time I booked the overly-expensive vacation to the Black Forest, a dark cloud hung over me, and I knew my decision was wrong.

A few days later I called Flori and asked if he was willing to resume the engagement. He was delighted and placed the ring on my finger again. *After all,* I thought, *there's still a whole year before I can immigrate. Maybe something will happen so we can stay in Switzerland.*

Flori showed me pictures of America. In one photo a cigarette dangled from his mouth. *No, not that!* All the bad memories of my father's addiction resurfaced.

So I asked, "Do you smoke?"

"Yes, once in a while."

"Do you think you could give up cigarettes for me?"

He thought for a moment. "Yes, I think I could do that. Actually, I've wanted to quit for a long time. Now I'd have a good reason."

To prove his intentions, he gave me his cigarette lighter. Fine, I would believe him. I thought, *If he can keep this promise, he can also keep his marriage vows.*

After Flori returned to the east coast, he flew his plane across the country and wrote me from every airport. It was already the end of October and the weather was unpredictable, not the best conditions for flying solo. I was most relieved when he let me know he'd finally arrived home.

Over the next year we communicated via letters. I had no way of knowing whether he was keeping his promise to give up smoking. I sniffed every letter he sent for incriminating evidence, but they all passed the test.

Flori never renewed the habit. In our day, people did not know the health risks of smoking. Later he was grateful I had made this request at the beginning of our relationship.

IMMIGRATION

For lawful status, the U.S. requires immigrants to name a sponsor who will take financial responsibility for them. Flori asked the Coquille Lutheran church to vouch for me and they agreed. Immigration was not something to take lightly nor was it an easy process.

I hated the thought of leaving—America seemed strange and far away. Every time an obstacle blocked my path, I hoped it would allow me to stay in my beloved Switzerland. Instead, the Lord repeatedly removed every hindrance.

First, authorities required a physical and an X-ray. After the results came back the doctor said, "Sorry, Frauelein Haase, you can't go. You have a tuberculosis scar and need to wait two years for clearance unless by some chance you have an X-ray taken a while back. In that case we could submit both images to prove the scar healed some time ago."

And wouldn't you know it, I had the films! Apparently as a child I had tuberculosis. Fortunately, the X-ray taken when I entered Switzerland proved that my lungs had healed by then. How wonderful the foresight of the Lord in preparing the way. At the prospect of waiting two more years, I would have certainly called off immigration plans.

Next I needed a passport for proper identification. I wrote Kaete to see if she could obtain my birth certificate. She replied, "You're in luck. The Poles destroyed all birth records except for the year you were born." Once again I was astonished how the Lord provided.

Then I learned that September ship reservations had sold out, but I certainly didn't want to travel in winter. A year had already passed, and it would have meant waiting at least another six months. So I decided, "If I can't go in September, the trip is off." Surely now my path was blocked.

To my surprise, I received a call from the ship's office—a booking had become available. Green light again! I had six weeks to pack before sailing.

When I reported to the American Embassy in Zurich, a large woman wearing butterfly earrings rose from her chair from behind her desk to greet me. I spoke no English and she did not understand German, so she called a translator. She asked me to raise my right hand and swear that I was not a Nazi nor had I ever been a Nazi. The butterfly lady seemed dead serious, but her appearance tickled my funny bone and surely she was joking that a child would be held responsible for a political affiliation.

"My goodness," I told the translator, "I was only sixteen years old when the war ended. This is too funny. I'm going to laugh."

"Don't you dare," she said, alarmed. "That woman has a lot of power. Look as somber as you can." I controlled myself.

GOODBYE SWITZERLAND

Soon it came time to leave. Flori sent money for the trip, and someone gave me an overseas trunk and a suitcase. I had all my papers. The ship sailed September 25, 1955.

My itinerary meant leaving the Basel train station on the night train to Paris. Then in this foreign city and not speaking French, how would I locate the travel office to pick up my Port Le Havre train ticket and ship boarding pass? My mother-in-law wanted to pay for someone to accompany me, but we couldn't find anyone—people either didn't have the time or didn't speak French. I prayed and prayed, agonizing if I should go or not. I finally concluded that it was God's will, and I would just have to trust Him.

Finally the day of my departure arrived. Saying goodbye was more difficult than I had anticipated. While waiting at the Basel train station I wrote in my journal:

"I'm spending the last hours in my beloved Switzerland… A wistful, melancholy feeling comes over me at the thought that I may be leaving my adopted homeland and dear friends forever. Yet it must be so. I have no choice but to tear myself away from the past and look courageously ahead. The clock hand moves ever nearer to 11:30 p.m. First I travel to Paris, of course. I am so anxious about this part of the trip…I'm seeking the Lord in prayer, and He's strengthening me."

Flori's sister saw me off. As we sauntered along the train tracks, I noticed a suitcase with the same tags as my ship, the *Italia*. Curious, I turned them over. Cabin 307, same as mine! At that moment a young woman stepped out of the train and walked towards us.

I asked, "Is this your suitcase?"

She affirmed that it was.

"Then you are my cabin mate on the *Italia*! Do you by any chance speak French?"

She did, and we were both delighted we had found each other this early in the journey because Marta, too, worried about taking the night train alone to Paris.

She said, "You are my angel."

I said, "You are my translator angel!"

Flori's sister was relieved I had found a French-speaking companion, and we said last tearful goodbyes.

What I learned from this experience was that sometimes the Lord expects us to blindly trust him; and if we do, His help will surely come at the right time.

As we boarded, a dull blue light gave off an eerie glow in the nearly empty train. Marta and I quickly sought out a compartment and made ourselves comfortable. We decided that if one was attacked, the other would not hesitate to pull the emergency brake.

Whenever young men peered into our compartment, Marta announced, "The train is still empty." But twice they ignored her implied suggestion and moved in with us anyway. We remained quiet and acted extremely bored, which eventually drove the unwelcome Romeos out. Over and over Marta and I remarked how grateful we were for each others' company.

In the morning we reached Paris. What hustle and bustle in this city. With no cross walks, we maneuvered between slow-moving bumper-to-bumper cars, trying to avoid getting run over.

We enjoyed breakfast in a charming restaurant. I wrote:

"I am bursting with a sense of adventure and need to pinch myself to be convinced I'm really here. The weather is gorgeous. We took a taxi to the Eiffel Tower, and after we arrived, we gazed in amazement. When you look up, you get the impression that the tower sways back and forth, but that's probably just an illusion…We climbed to the first level and arrived at the top huffing and puffing, but what a wonderful view in all directions…Paris, the city of my fears, is now the city of my greatest admiration."

We could see Versailles from the top of the Eiffel Tower. The taxi tour also took us by the Arc of Triumph which I found very impressive. It helped so much that Marta spoke French. I did not see how I could have mastered the situation myself.

All too soon the Paris dream passed. That evening we boarded our ship:

"The lights shine so welcoming in the dark night. The air is filled with the salty pungency of the sea. An odd feeling, when you cross the landing bridge and walk into the ship. To the left the stewards in their white uniforms greeted us…As soon as our cabin number was called, a young gentleman in white stepped to our side and led us to our room…We're on Deck A and have an outside cabin with a porthole view of the ocean…After settling in, we went to the dining room where a hearty supper awaited us. It is warm and cozy there, and the tables and walls are decorated with fresh flowers. Shortly before midnight we went on deck…"

As the *Italia* glided out of port, the ship's band played. We stood at the railing and watched moving farewell scenes. No one was there to see us off, to wave one last good-bye. I wondered when I would see my beloved Switzerland again. A piece of my heart would always stay there. That day I couldn't know that it would be seventeen

years before I returned.

The sea gulls cried overhead as we climbed the stairs to our cabin which was to be home for nine days. We shared the room with two other women—an American who was seasick the entire trip and a Turkish woman. That night, tucked into the bottom bunk with Marta above me, I drifted off to sleep, deeply grateful for all the ways the Lord had watched over me.

In the morning I jumped from my bed to look out the porthole and see if we were truly floating on the ocean now. Yes, we were moving along the English canal! At 8:00 a.m. the bell called us to breakfast. I enjoyed ordering whatever I wanted without worrying about the price. We reviewed the day's schedule and marveled at everything they offered—a morning concert, skeet shooting, a hat festival, Rheinland evening, etc. Our swimming hotel accommodated 1200 guests and a 500 member staff.

Later we reported to the deck for a life boat drill. We could see the coast of England in the distance which took several hours to pass by. This was our last glimpse of Europe for a while. The sea gulls accompanied us a ways and then we found ourselves alone on the high seas. I loved being outside in the fresh air and took many walks on the promenade deck.

Being in the cabin was a little more challenging as I wrote in my journal: *"At night it takes patience to put up with our Turkish roommate who smokes one cigarette after another because she can't sleep. That's not exactly pleasant for the rest of us considering the little bit of air we get through the vent. But even this we overcome with a sense of humor."*

Then we hit a twenty-four hour hurricane, and the crew spanned safety ropes in the ship to help us walk as the ship rolled. The ocean raged and the waves rose higher and higher. Many people got very seasick and "fed the fish" out on deck when dinner didn't stay down. I was feeling good and enjoyed the show the waves put on, the rise and fall of the white foaming crests on dark blue sea.

It was cold traveling at the end of September, but the sun shone in a blue sky—only the hurricane winds battered us for a while. I enjoyed bundling up and spending time on deck in the lounge chairs and wrote:

"Tonight is a gorgeous evening. A full moon shines a soft light over the water. So beautiful how the silver beam plays in the waves. No car noise, nothing disturbs this lovely display in the middle of the ocean. A great peace lies over all. I can hardly tear myself away. How quietly the sea lies, as if it could never be angry. Wild or tame, you just have to love it..."

When I visited the captain's bridge, I was impressed with the pilot's confidence steering the ship towards its invisible destination, guided, of course, by a compass. It made me think—Christians are traveling to an invisible destination too, a heavenly one, and must be guided by a compass as well. That is why we have God's Word, the Bible; it is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

Marta and I spent many happy hours together on the boat, relaxing in the lounge chairs, going for walks on the promenade deck, and watching the moon on the water. The last two days sailing from Halifax, Canada, down the coast to New York, the ocean lay flat, and we saw many whales and flying fish. As Marta and I stood at the railing and watched the show, I wished my eyes could see all the way to the bottom of the ocean. The sea contains such interesting mysteries.

Once we arrived in America, Marta and I never saw each other again. However, to this day we've stayed in contact, always writing or calling each other on Christmas. And from time to time we say, "Do you remember…?"

13

NEW YORK CITY

"*Today we are all on deck early. Slowly the blood-red sun rises out of the fog. All kinds of large and small boats rock on the water around us. We are approaching New York...*"

Soon the New York skyline and the Statue of Liberty emerged, though still somewhat shrouded in mist. It was an unforgettable moment. Here and there people wiped tears from their eyes. We had arrived. And we hadn't become fish food (my great fear).

I felt a bit apprehensive. So this was the land that would become my new home? But I also thought, *Here there will never be war. Thank you, Lord.*

As we continued to approach the harbor, I saw an odd flying object in the sky and asked, "What is that?"

A bystander enlightened me, "That is a helicopter," he said. I had never seen one and was fascinated by this invention.

We disembarked and collected our luggage. Then we filled out forms to pass customs. I hoped fervently I would not have to open my baggage for inspection as it can take forever to repack.

A woman I knew from the ship spoke four languages, and I was with her. She spotted an Italian customs agent and headed straight towards him. As soon as she addressed him in his mother tongue he melted completely. He kept shouting, "Oh, Mama mia, Mama mia." We didn't have to open a thing. He was so happy to be conversing in Italian that he just slapped his stamp on everything and we were through. What a relief!

A Swiss friend, Fraulein Cattaruzza, picked me up. First she helped me send the large trunk ahead and then assisted me in filling out more forms. Another angel. Then we drove to the Swiss Townhouse where I stayed for three days. Much to my relief. they spoke German there. I wrote in my journal:

"The television plays deep into the night. I'm sleeping in a huge room on a couch. I want to breathe more freely and try to open a window. But it doesn't operate the way I'm used to, and I have to push from the bottom before it responds. So different from home. The air that streams into my room is not good. Today there's 80% humidity, and it feels like being in a laundry room. I don't like it at all, and I'll be glad to continue my journey."

I was uneasy with the place—everything was strange. The unfamiliar smells and the heavily curtained, living-room-sized accommodations felt oppressive and eerie. My door couldn't be locked and that unsettled me, but I entrusted myself to God's care and tried to sleep. Strange music drifted into the room from outside, African Americans singing the blues. This sounded very frightening to me as I'd never heard anything like it before. Yes, this was definitely a foreign country.

I tried to sleep. Then suddenly the door opened and someone slipped in. My heart stopped. It was too dark to see the person. I barely breathed and slid further under my blanket hoping to remain unseen. Whoever came in apparently just wanted to get something and left again, but I could hardly sleep after that.

I was relieved when morning came. The townhouse put on a wonderful breakfast buffet, another new experience. The variety and quantity of food astonished me, but I ate very little because I wasn't accustomed to big breakfasts.

The next day Frauelein Cataruzza and I drove to the train station. The murals at the station impressed me so much, they were certainly worth a trip across the Atlantic! We purchased my airline ticket to Portland, Oregon, and then telegrammed Flori the flight information.

In my opinion, New York in daylight seemed dull compared to its neon-lit version. In this city you could certainly see all the races of the world, and for the first time I encountered African Americans.

The next day, the Swiss Townhouse ordered a taxi and told the driver to take me to the airport. He drove and drove and I started to wonder where he was taking me. I was not used to driving such distances in Europe, and because of the language barrier, I couldn't ask about it. The longer the drive, the greater my distress grew, and I cried out to the Lord for help. My guardian angel sure had a full-time job on his hands with this scaredy-cat! Suddenly we drove through a long, well-lit tunnel. Today I know it lies under the Hudson River. Good thing I didn't know that then!

When we arrived at the terminal, I climbed out of the taxi and a couple of African American porters carried my suitcases. After tipping them, I went to the counter and showed my ticket. When they tried to tell me where to go, I could only shrug my shoulders to show I didn't understand. They made a telephone call and a translator explained, "Go to Gate 5 and a bus will take you directly to your airplane."

Well, that was good. I could understand German. They told me to go with a lady that was taking the same flight. This plan worked perfectly, and soon we arrived at Northwest Orient Airlines to embark the propeller plane. My first flight!

Before takeoff the stewardesses gave us thin, rectangular strips. *What is this?* I wondered. I didn't recognize it, but I observed the other passengers bite down on the strip and chew so I did too. I figured this had to be good for something.

As we ascended, the plane immediately encountered rain and began shuttering and bouncing around. When signs above flashed red words, I feared great danger, and since the warnings appeared in English I remained clueless. The other passengers didn't look exactly worried, so I decided *I'm just going to do what everyone else is doing. They must know what's going on.*

Many years later when I flew again, I realized that those worrisome signs read, "No Smoking, Fasten Seat Belt." But I didn't know that then!

Many folks vomited into the bags which came with each seat. I felt especially sorry for little children who got sick. The rough ride didn't bother me, but I sure didn't like the swaying and the shuddering. Flying was not as nice an experience as I had imagined.

But then as we traveled farther and farther west, the weather cleared and you could see the ground. Soon we left a white sea of cotton clouds behind, and my enthusiasm for flying suddenly soared.

"Innumerous little lights shine up at us, cars creep along like caterpillars and the houses look like toys. I have the impression we're standing still because the same view remains in my window, yet it is not so. Such a flight is really something grand. Though it is twilight, the sun travels with us for a long time while she has already disappeared from view for those below. Now we are climbing very high to fly over tall mountains. We are heading to the stars!"

We landed once in Detroit and the second time in Minneapolis, St. Paul without disembarking. The entire trip from New York to Portland took fifteen hours, and we arrived four hours late. *Will Flori be there?*

REUNION WITH FLORI

October 3,1955. As the plane landed in Portland I worried that Flori would have trouble finding me. What would I do if he wasn't there? I felt so vulnerable not being able to speak the language.

But my fears remained unfounded. There stood a smiling Onkel Uli with my fiancé beside him holding a colorful bouquet of chrysthanthymums. Flori didn't seem to know if he should give me the flowers or hug me first. I took the flowers to free up his arms. We both felt a bit strange since we didn't know each other well, but I was very happy to see him.

Onkel Uli was Flori's uncle on his mother's side. Unfortunately, I couldn't converse very well with his American wife, Ivy, but we both tried hard to communicate and laughed at our comical attempts. Ivy was very sweet to me and let me sleep in her bed, and Flori took the living room sofa.

I found their house and primitive lifestyle disappointing. The bathroom had no sink—you washed up in the kitchen. The upstairs rooms held old beds with sagging mattresses. They obviously didn't value nice furniture. However, the house sat on a hill with a magnificent view of Mt. Hood.

The next day as Flori and I continued our journey to Coquille, we drove along the coast. I was enthralled with the beauty of the Pacific Ocean. Every so often we stopped at a viewpoint—this drive was one of my favorite parts of the whole trip.

When we arrived in Coquille he brought me to Tante Esther and Onkel Henry, Danish German-speaking immigrant farmers. Their daughter was away at college, so they gave me her bedroom. I was glad they spoke German, or I'm sure I would have gotten terribly homesick.

Flori lived in town but visited me every day on the farm. I will never forget how sorry I felt for him when he showed me his apartment one day. In the drawers I found many socks that needed darning. He needed me, and I determined to make him a cozy home.

We set the wedding date for November 12th. Before we could apply for the marriage license, however, we both had to see a doctor. Such exams were not required in Germany or Switzerland. At that point in my life I had only seen a doctor twice. I was shocked what the exam entailed, but despite my surprise, I felt safe with the nurse in the room.

I longed to wear a beautiful wedding dress, but we had no money. At the Lutheran church we attended, I met Elizabeth, another German immigrant. She went out of her way to make my day special. One of her girlfriends who had just married agreed to loan me her dress.

In the meantime, I moved to our newly rented apartment in town. Elizabeth brought the dress over and I tried it on. It fit and only needed hemming! A small veil came with it. It was such a beautiful dress, I was sad that none of my friends from home would get to see me.

But I still needed white shoes. Tante Esther said, "Try mine on."

And these fit too! Now I was prepared for the special day.

Then Tante Esther announced, "All the ladies want to come and get to know you. We're going to give you a shower." I didn't know what that meant.

"Rain," she translated. "A shower is like an initiation." She winked, "You might get wet!"

I remained puzzled. Tante Esther just laughed and said, "Oh that is just the custom here."

I had absolutely no idea what to expect. Would I need an extra set of clothes? I decided Tante Esther would let me know.

To my amazement, about fifty women from church attended to "shower" me with wedding gifts. I was overwhelmed at their kindness. This was certainly a new custom—they didn't throw showers in Europe! One lady made three beautiful cakes, one with a bride on top and the other two with a bridesmaid doll. Today, after fifty-three years of marriage I still have some presents I received.

Flori planned to wear his best suit, a brown one given him by a church member. This suit, as well as an old, black one hung in my closet. The night before the wedding he came to pick it up. It was gone! Simply disappeared. Stolen. What now? We hurriedly got out the black one, I darned a few moth-eaten holes in the jacket sleeve, and that was the best we could do. Despite the darned holes, I have to say that the wedding pictures turned out well thanks to a fantastic photographer!

After we returned from our honeymoon, we found the brown suit in the closet again. Our landlord was the only one with a key to our apartment and must have helped the intruder. When we asked him about it, he just smiled. Either someone wanted to play a prank on Flori or decided to borrow the suit briefly. We never solved the mystery.

MY WEDDING DAY

The morning of November 12th, snow shimmered in the distant hills and the air carried a biting chill. Flori and Tante Esther left to pick up flowers for the wedding. A feeling of desolate loneliness came over me. This was going to be my wedding day? With no loved ones, no dear friends, and in a foreign country where I didn't know the language? I thought about all the weddings I had attended in Europe, where I helped entertain with poems, songs and skits to make that day special for the couple. Homesick for all the loved ones left behind, I cried and cried.

But then I pulled myself together and prayed asking the Lord for strength. Above all, I wanted to belong to Him and follow His leading. Had I not left Switzerland because I was convinced it was His will?

By 2:00 p.m. the guests had all arrived at the church and were waiting for the ceremony to begin. Most were members of the church and still strangers to me. Then as the organ played, Flori and I walked arm in arm down the aisle together, which is the German custom. The best man and matron of honor followed and stood to the right and left. They were friends of Flori, a husband and wife couple.

The ceremony was short, and I missed having special music. However, the pastor spoke German, performing the vows in our language so I could understand. I wanted to know what I was promising!

The next thing I knew we stood at the church door and everyone filed by to shake hands and offer

congratulations.

I learned later that at the last minute, some of Flori's German friends had asked to sing, but the church wouldn't allow a spontaneous addition to the service. I wish they had sung outside as we exited; no one could have sent them away there. How much that would have meant to me.

Afterwards we drove to a photographer in Coquille to sit for a formal photo. Then we celebrated at Tante Esther and Onkel Henry's. Tante Esther made the wedding cake and was forced to decorate it by candlelight the night before because a storm had knocked out electricity (as so often in those days). I ate a piece of cake and then changed my clothes. We climbed in our car, and surrounded by well-wishers, drove away.

As a young girl I had dreamed of a wedding far different than this. But so many things in my life had gone differently than I expected. I often did not get what I wanted, but the Lord gave what was needed. I knew that I was in His will, and this brought me comfort.

Oftentimes I receive things I've wanted only after they become less important to me. We must hold the things of this world loosely. This brings to mind the song, "Nothing here on this earth is forever. Everything in life will someday pass away. Only what is done for Jesus will last."

At our engagement, Flori and I decided our life's motto would be, "Serving the Lord together." As I look back over the years, this was the most beautiful part of our marriage. We both loved the Lord and knew that He loved us. In Him we always found our way back to one another after occasional disagreements or hurt feelings.

We were married nearly 62 years and took our vows "until death do us part" seriously. That is why it meant so much at the end, that I could be at Opa's side and hold his hand until he took his last breath. Since losing your Opa, I have missed him so much. Flori truly was my best and dearest friend.

Our wedding verse: ***All this also comes from the Lord Almighty,***
whose plan is wonderful, whose wisdom is magnificent (Isaiah 28:29).


Throckmorton
COQUILLE

HONEYMOON

We drove south and spent our first night in Port Orford in a motel directly on the ocean. I still know exactly what we ate at the restaurant. Flori ordered potatoes, corn and large steaks that hung over our plates. I'd never seen anything like that! Nor had I ever eaten corn before—we used it only as feed for cows. I didn't care for the meal at all. Nothing had any flavor, but I choked down some of the food anyway and tried not to show how I felt. After all, I didn't want to disappoint my new husband since he had ordered and meant so well. He enjoyed his food.

The place was quiet with only the soothing sound of the waves. Before we went to bed, we kneeled and asked God to bless our marriage and guide our future. From then on, prayer and Bible reading became a daily routine. These precious times together are what I miss most now that your Opa is gone.

The following morning we drove to the Redwoods. I couldn't get over my amazement at those giant trees. Next we stayed in San Francisco two days, went sightseeing, and bought a few knick knacks. I loved this city with its beautiful Golden Gate Park, the Golden Gate Bridge, the Fisherman's Wharf, and the Chinese quarter where we ate dinner. We even saw a movie, something about flying, and apparently it was the first color film projected onto a large screen. Impressive!

During long car drives we entertained ourselves by singing. I taught Flori many songs I had learned in Switzerland at the Free Evangelical Church such as "Moechtest Du Freud": W*ould you like joy, true joy, real joy? Let Jesus come into your heart . . .*

In Yosemite Park snow covered the ground beneath trees still arrayed in red, orange, and gold foliage. The peaceful landscape was so beautiful. Tame deer would approach our car hoping for food. One tried to take an apple from my mouth.

We found a cabin to spend the night. It was very rustic with no indoor toilet and furnished only with a bed, a chair, a wash bowl and a bucket. An electric heater warmed the room. Despite the primitive arrangement, the cabin was very cozy. Since it was November, many places were closed already such as the lodge stores, but we delighted in the majestic scenery, the fall colors, and the tame deer.

It rained torrents on the final leg home. Then it grew dark and the seventy miles of curvy road before reaching Coquille seemed endless. Landslides often occurred. Flori mentioned there was a turbulent river down the left side of the road. He would have to tell me that! The drive felt eerie enough without that information. In my entire life, I'd never been on such a winding, isolated road.

We arrived in Coquille just before the streets flooded. With the rising waters, Georgia-Pacific Lumber mill closed, and Flori could not return to work. Despite the loss of income, he was thrilled to have an extra week of vacation.

We rented a small, furnished apartment that only cost $5.00 a year for oil heat. I liked being able to keep our home nice and warm. The apartment included a cramped kitchen with a small table and two chairs, a sink with running hot and cold water, an old refrigerator, and an old cooking range. Not all the burners worked, but the oven performed great. In front of our kitchen window stood a large cherry tree where we watched robins feed their young.

The small bathroom came with a bathtub, sink and mirror. Often, when Flori took a bath, I brought him a glass of orange juice. I spoiled him and he liked that.

Then there was the living room with a sleeping niche. An old bed stood in the corner around which you could pull a curtain for privacy. A red light bulb in the lamp on our nightstand gave the room a romantic glow. Beyond the foot of the bed, a door led to a small closet where we hung our clothes. The living room was furnished with a sofa, an armchair, a desk and chair, and a small cabinet.

A storage room tucked under the roof was also attached. Flori decided to build a little shoe cabinet for it and fired up the saw in our living room. Suddenly our landlord arrived, visibly upset.

"What are you doing?" he demanded. But it was too late. Flori had already sawed all the pieces and was busy nailing the contraption together. The landlord gave him a warning, and Flori

promised never to do it again, just to finish this small shoe cabinet. The man left shaking his head in disbelief—he'd never seen anything like that before!

14

ADAPTING

Settling in this new country meant learning the language, so I started listening to the radio. One day I was drawn to a program and felt intuitively, *That must be a sermon*. It made me so happy inside. Later I learned that I'd been listening to *The Haven of Rest*. The Holy Spirit communicated despite the language barrier, and I was refreshed.

We attended the Lutheran Church and sang in the choir. Not speaking English very well yet, I often felt lonely and isolated. Flori would not tell me much about the sermons. When asked he'd say, "Oh, it was nothing important." Terribly frustrating. He'd been single so long, I guess he was not used to talking.

People in the congregation invited us to dinner and turned up their TVs for me. They meant well, but that did not help me understand. Yet folks were really nice, and I appreciated all their efforts.

I did not know what to make of certain social situations in the beginning. The first time we were invited to dinner, our hosts thrust an apron at me and had me peel the potatoes. Then they wanted me to feed the baby. Confused and embarrassed, I thought surely we had gotten the wrong time or arrived too early, but after dinner I had to help with the dishes too!

I was rather shocked. This was not how we treated guests in Europe. Later I learned it's the American way, but I didn't like it. In my opinion, if I have to work, I might as well stay home and cook myself. In Germany, guests were to be served and highly honored. Only if you stayed for many days might there be expectations to help.

So there were many new things to learn and many adjustments. For example, getting used to the new currency and new ways of measuring. I only knew the metric system. European cordiality meant shaking hands in greeting, something people rarely did here. People also wore their wedding bands on the left hand instead of the right. At first I thought, *There are a lot of engaged people here!*

We lived in town and rarely needed the car. I walked everywhere. Flori even walked to work and usually came home for dinner to break up the swing shift (3:00-11:00pm). One day we opened the back car door and discovered a whole crop of fungi sprouting from the floor. Apparently rain had seeped in to water the beginnings of a mushroom farm!

***

As any foreign language speaker knows, bloopers are inevitable, and I have to share a couple of mine.

One day as a new bride, I bravely ventured to JC Penney to buy Flori a belt, in German known as "Guertel." Figuring the English word might resemble the German, I found the men's department and approached the salesman, "Do you have any girdles?"

Certain facial muscles twitched, but the salesman kept a straight face. "Excuse me?"

"You know, ein girdle, what men wear." He shook his head still confused. Finally I motioned around my waist and pretended to buckle.

"Ah," he smiled, relieved, "you mean a belt. Now *that* I can help you with!"

Worst blooper? Imagine my children's reaction one day at the dinner table when I referred to the teachers at their school as the "fuckulty."

OUR FIRST HOUSE

Our apartment was affordable and suited us well, but children were not allowed. When I became pregnant with Ruth, we started looking for a house. We found several in town for sale, but they were too expensive and included no property.

Finally we found THE house where you still come visit me today. It sat on about a third of an acre and was about three miles from town out in the country. We bought it for $8,500. After making a down payment of $1,400, we paid $60 a month until the house was paid off.

Our new home had two bedrooms, a small living room, a bathroom, and a kitchen with dining nook. We made do with an old, used sofa and armchair in the living room. My overseas trunk, covered with a table cloth, served as a coffee table. Flowers from our yard in a drinking glass spruced things up. Everything was simple, but cozy, and it belonged to us. We didn't want to go into debt, so we lived within our means.

A friend gave us a card table which served as our kitchen table, and another friend gave us two old chairs. The shoe cabinet Flori constructed at the apartment now housed the dishes. We bought a kitchen stove. We didn't own a refrigerator at first but kept one bedroom cool for a pantry of sorts, storing food on an old table.

Bedroom furniture consisted of a chair and an iron frame bed. In the work shop we found an old wooden cabinet. This became our clothes closet.

Gas heat supplied the kitchen and living room, but you could only heat one room at a time, and we were never warm enough. The walls began to mold. The second year we lived there, Flori tore out this heating system and installed a wood stove. Building a chimney was very hard work, but he did it all by himself. An open porch graced the front of the house. A rickety back porch served as my laundry room. We bought an old washing machine with a wringer for $5.00. When

I did laundry, the whole porch shook as if it was having a nervous breakdown, alerting the neighbors to the fact that it was wash day at the Gantenbeins.

I hung the wash to dry on a clothesline outside. When Christoph was born in winter, we finally bought a dryer, a blessing because we used cloth diapers. Life was certainly filled with time-consuming hard work, but we made a go of it.

Behind the house stood a dilapidated shop where I hung clothes to dry in the winter. You can be sure I first knocked on the walls to drive away any rats. Then there was an old chicken coop, and we later raised chickens for a while. I loved hearing their kick-kick-erie in the mornings because it reminded me of home. Unfortunately, the feed to keep them was too expensive, so we donated the whole "chicken caboodle" to friends.

Next to the chicken coop stood an old wood shed which we still use today. An outhouse also came with the property but was no longer in use. In hindsight, I think we should have never torn it down. It would have been useful for outside emergencies or as a back-up in case of indoor plumbing disasters.

Two apple trees stood on the north side of the property and the place was overgrown with blackberries and poison ivy. Flori spent years clearing the land enduring numerous outbreaks of poison ivy.

The kitchen water simply drained outside, so Flori laid proper drainage pipes and then built the patio over them. Two large tree stumps needed to burn for weeks before Flori was able to remove them with an old hoe. We didn't own an axe, but found a few rusty tools in the shed. Not having the proper tools made taming the property difficult.

Flori could do just about anything. When our car needed repair, he would fix it himself. While it was out of commission, however, he had to hitch a ride to work with a co-worker. All this was wearisome, but we were content. Life was certainly never boring.

Flori earned $4,400 a year, making about $1.87 an hour. It was a struggle to manage our household on $60 a month, and I scrimped and saved throughout the year so that we'd be able to buy a few Christmas presents.

When the mill went on strike, which was often, we had no income. A collection area provided butter, flour and milk powder for free. That did help. During my pregnancy with Ruth I often ate only a small can of green beans for lunch. I missed European bread. You can imagine my delight when I discovered Knaeckebrot, a multi grain crispbread. I ate and ate. Later I figured out how to bake my own bread recreating what we had at home.

We started building an addition to the house before Rosmarie was born. When she was six weeks old, the Columbus Day storm hit, October 12, 1962, bringing wind gusts up to 130 mph. I took the children into the kitchen, away from the windows, made Ruth and Christoph get under the table and secured Rosmarie in the bassinet. Fortunately no windows blew out and we were only out of electricity for three days.

In those early years we only drove to town for groceries once a week because that was all we could afford to spend on gas. Twice a year, on Christmas and Easter, we made a special trip to Coos Bay, though it's only a twenty mile drive. What fun to show the children the town and stores all lit and festive with decorations.

Until right before Ruth was born, we did not have a phone. Our party line shared service with six other homes, so when the telephone rang for any of these families, it rang in every house. Our signal was three short rings. Sometimes all that phone ringing drove me crazy; of course, the family with the five-ring signal received the most phone calls.

If you wanted to, you could lift the receiver and listen in on any conversation. Two lovers were often on the line. They didn't speak much, just breathed into the phone. That was beyond me!

At first, I was very lonely and felt somewhat like a prisoner living out in the country. We had no phone, hardly anyone came to see us, and I couldn't go visiting because I did not drive. In such situations you have the choice to either whine and complain or endure and be thankful. At least I had German books and magazines which dear friends from Germany and Switzerland sent me.

In Switzerland I had built a life around church and friends and enjoyed a certain status. Here I couldn't communicate and had no money. I felt like a Nobody, stripped bare, humbled. However, in this quiet time, the Lord showed me things that had become too important to me when I lived in Europe where I was appreciated and admired by so many.

After Ruth was born I learned how to drive. I had been listening to the radio and studied the newspaper to learn the language and passed the written test the first time. However, it took two attempts to pass the road test. But having a driver's license now meant regained freedom.

***

Mice in our new house? You can well imagine how I felt about that! We set up three traps one evening and had barely gone to bed when, click, click, click and three lay dead. Flori, brave man, cleaned out the traps to reset them, but they quickly filled again. That night we caught nine mice. I feared we'd get nibbled in bed.

We couldn't figure out where they came from. One morning Flori set the traps before leaving for work. There, click, another mouse. But oh fright, only one leg got caught and she was dragging the trap around the room. I screamed and nearly fainted.

I dressed quickly and raced to the neighbor lady to ask for help. I was not going back into that house with a live mouse scampering about, even if it was hampered by a trap! I gestured frantically, trying to explain. The lady laughed, grabbed her broom and came with me. With one stroke she killed the mouse and removed it from the trap. She was a heroine in my eyes! I thanked her profusely.

One evening we heard scrabbling over the outside door post, and when Flori explored, he discovered rats. My stomach turned. We set up traps on the porch and caught two immediately. Later we discovered a hole behind the hot water heater under the house and blocked it with steel wool. Then we got a cat who finally kept the riff raff in line.

BETWEEN THEN AND NOW

Ours was a life of simplicity that revolved around family, church, neighbors and friends. We had no TV and didn't miss it. Someone tried to give us one but I said no. I did not want television's influence on our family, nor have it rob us of precious time together. We entertained ourselves—played games, read books, debated topics, and sang together. The children played outdoors, and as in my day, the neighborhood children frequently congregated in our yard.

Staying connected to family and friends in the "old country" was really important to me, so I wrote frequently because I liked getting a lot of mail! I never forget a birthday. To this day, I write personal, handwritten letters to everyone at Christmas. I don't care much for newsletters as they seem too impersonal—I prefer to engage people with specific questions about their lives. I used to send about 70 handwritten letters every Christmas, but it's less now.

International phone calls have only in recent years become affordable, and this has made it easier to talk with old friends. Airfare was out of our price range. We did not visit Switzerland until seventeen years after getting married. In 1984 and one other time we went behind the iron curtain to visit Kaete and her family.

Overall I find Americans very kind and helpful. Unlike Germans, they don't make you feel like a fool when you make a mistake. I like this about the people here—they tend to be patient, accepting and forgiving. In 1973 I decided to become an American citizen.

And so the years passed. I raised my children, sewed, baked, gardened, canned, taught Sunday School, served as room mother and hosted many guests. As a stay-at-home mom, the Lord gave me a mission that meant faithfulness in small things, being willing to go unnoticed, and serving behind the scenes. In this place I found fulfillment, peace and joy.

UNDER HIS WINGS

As a child I saw that my parents would not live long. Once I said, “Oh Mama, I will be so young someday and without parents. What then?” She answered, “The One who guides the clouds and the wind, will also make a way for you.” And He has.

I will soon celebrate my 90th birthday. As I reflect on the years, gratitude overwhelms me. The Lord gave me a new country, a new home, my own family, and dear Christian friends. Through great loss, He taught me what really mattered— having peace with Him. Until I leave this earth, above all I want to honor him.

And now a final note to you, my dear grandchildren. You will each face your own personal challenges in life. There may be unprecedented upheavals still to come in the world. But remember, regardless of what you may be called to endure, the Lord will be with you.

As you know, from the day of your birth, Opa and I prayed for you every single day—you are loved so very much. My most fervent prayer is that you stay true to the Lord, for He alone is the sure foundation on which to build a life.

Keep us faithful Lord Jesus,

Oma

APPENDIX

This is your great, great grandmother, Christiane Johanna Becke, maiden name Stammwitz, my mother's mother. I never knew her as she died at age 64 of a heart attack before I was born.

The necklace she is wearing in the picture is a ducat. Ducats are known as historical gold coins issued in various parts of Europe. This is the necklace we buried before the Russians came. Kaete later gave it to her girls.

FIELDS OF OWIESNO/HABENDORF

HABENDORF CASTLE NOW IN RUINS.

Castle Drawing from 1260
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2010-oWIESNO-HABENDORF.jpg

Online resource for research and photos
See http://www.kreis-reichenbach.de/habendorf/