

THE RAINBOW NEVER SETS



An autobiography by
Dieter Tieman

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D.T.

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PART ONE

FIFTEEN YEARS IN A
CHILDHOOD PARADISE

CHAPTER ONE

Under the shade of a linden tree

A linden tree in German songs and poems inspires you to dream. Inhaling the sweet perfume of linden blossom in spring, they say, makes you drowsy and sends you off into dream-land. Many romantic poems and songs have been written about it. We had several linden trees in our park in Sapowice, Poland, where I grew up, but only one to which I had a special relationship. It was here where my brother and I did our dreaming, our playing, where fantasy mixed with reality. Its wide branches shaded the path from our villa to the driveway which led to our grandparents' manor house. Its flowers in spring were collected, dried and used as a herbal tea, which was served to us when we were sick.

My brother Günter, 14 months older and wiser than I, would often sit with me under the shade of this linden tree and we would dream or just chat, or climb its lower branches. One branch was reaching out so far that it formed a natural archway. At the centre of the arch two steel rings were fastened from which a swing hung. One of us would sit on the branch and rock it like a see-saw, while the other was trying to swing. When our cousins Horst and Bernd came to visit us from the neighbouring estate just over three kilometers away, this was our favourite spot to meet. Then the tree was used as a base for hide and seek, whilst we were hiding behind a dense patch of shrubs.

On a warm and sunny afternoon towards the end of July 1939 our two cousins, Günter and I came again together under the shade of the linden tree.

"What are you going to do?" asked Günter his older cousin, when we knew we were alone and no-one could hear us.

"I'm going to stay with my parents," was the definite answer of the almost fifteen year-old Horst.

Bernd, his younger brother, who was usually quiet, raised an anxious voice: "But wouldn't it be too dangerous? Haven't our parents just told us that the Poles are already digging trenches in the Borowy? Sapowice and our Strykowo, with the lake on one side, is going to be turned into a battle field. The Poles are planning to fight the biggest battle with the German army right here where we are, and the Poles are going to win it."

“That’s what they think,” I threw in for what it was worth.

Our ‘war cabinet’ was in full swing. For the first time in our young lives we had been drawn into a secret plan of our parents. They had told us that a war between Poland and Germany was inevitable, and that our homes and land, until then idyllic and peaceful, could be turned into a battle-field. Our family had been here since before the first World War. In 1919 the province of Posen had become part of Poland, when our family became Polish citizens, but remained ethnic Germans.

We were still rather stunned and could not work out all the implications.

After a thoughtful pause I ventured to say: “You are lucky Horst, you can stay here, you have a choice, but we haven’t”.

It was true. Our parents had just told us that as Günter and I and our cousin Bernd were too young to stay, Günter would be 12 in October, Bernd 11 in August and I would be 11 in December. So we were to leave our homes in Sapowice and in Strykowo together with our Grandparents and go somewhere to the Free State of Danzig, near the Baltic Sea, close to the East Prussian border. Our parents hoped that the Germans would take over that part immediately, without fighting.

Günter, who was always thoughtful and wise for his age, said: “We must be very careful that we don’t tell anyone of this plan, not even Klärchen.”

“Isn’t Klärchen coming with us to cook and look after us?” I asked.

“Yes, she is,” said Horst, “but leave it to your parents to tell her. We must not say anything to anyone.”

Until that time our secrets had been small and insignificant, but this one seemed to us a matter of life and death. Suddenly our childhood became a thing of the past, that glorious, carefree and innocent childhood of our paradise on two neighbouring country estates in Poland, near Poznan (German: Posen). The linden tree took on another dimension for our life, one of danger and foreboding.

Before my mind flashed by the many times we had played together here around this tree, also with our Polish friends. There were Stefan, Józiu, Franek, (all sons of our coach-man Franz Kempa), Czesiu, Kubala and some other sons and daughters of our Polish workers on the farm, through whom we had learnt to speak Polish soon after we had learnt German from our parents. Many times they had joined our hide and seek games around the old linden tree.

“Why on earth would Germany want to make war with Poland?” I asked innocently. “There is nothing wrong with the Poles? We play together, they are our good friends. And look at our workers, so loyal to Vater (my father), there is never any trouble! I can’t understand it.”

“Hold on,” said Horst, “you don’t go to a German school in Poznan as I do. I know that some of the Poles hate us. At the beginning of this year, all the windows of our school on the ground floor were smashed by Polish students. And I can tell you, we were attacked many times by the kids

from the Polish schools, but we gave them a thrashing. Only twice I got hurt, remember when I had to stay home for a few days with my arm in a sling? That's when they got me when I was on my own. Four of them against me. The other time I got hit by a stone, but that only gave me a bad bruise."

"But who started it all?" I said defensively. "If Germany had not threatened Poland, those kids would have left you alone."

"Oh yeah?"

"And besides, in Poznan you come up against the Poles who live in the city. They don't have any German friends like us. You go to a special German school, they go to their own school, and you never mix. I like my friends here, and I don't want the Germans to fight the Poles."

Günter tried to stop our argument: "There is nothing we can do about it. If there is going to be a war, there is going to be a war. Horst is older than I and much older than you. He has gone to school in Poznan for three years. He should know."

"This year we too have to go to Poznan to start school," I said stubbornly. "What will happen to us? Will we be bashed up as you, Horst? I don't like it. I'm really scared."

"Don't be a frightened owl," said Günter. "We will be staying at the Siebenbürger boarding house. Don't you remember we met a number of the other boarders only a few weeks ago when they came to stay a night here from their bike-ride? You romped with them on the straw where they slept. They are all big, strong boys, so you really needn't worry too much, you know."

I had enough of this. I wanted to go to a place where I was free from worry. Not far from where we were talking was our beloved climbing tree which had three stems, one had been claimed by Günter, one by Bernd, and one was mine.

"Let's go on our climbing tree, Bernd," I said. He too had enough of all that talking. Horst of course, considered himself too old for such childish games.

Although I was the youngest, in size I came right after Horst. Two years earlier Günter and I were much the same size. We looked like twins then. But since then I had shot up and left Günter behind. Bernd had always been wiry but small, smaller than Günter. Horst and Günter were still talking when we came back. I didn't want to listen to them. I'd rather do a bit of dreaming by myself.



I was only one and a half-years old, I could hardly walk, but already Günter and I played 'horses' together. I was in the harness and he held the reigns firmly in his hands: "giddyup", he called, and he wanted me to trot

— but I couldn't; just a feeble attempt going up and down on my knees, just to please Günter.

We also played with a little hay cart, which had a long handle. I loved to sit in it and Günter would pull me. One day he turned the corner too fast and tipped me out. A few tears, but we continued to play. From early on we were inseparable friends. Horst and Bernd had come to us to play regularly, or we went over to their place. We grew up together almost like brothers.



But there was no point trying to hang on to the past.

"What's going to happen to all our things here?" I heard Günter say.

"I don't know whether they're safe," said Horst. "They're probably going to lock and bar the big house of Oma and Opa (my grandma and grandpa), but your father is going to stay here, so there will be someone staying to keep watch."

"But what if all is going to be destroyed?" persisted Günter.

"I think you need to do something about your valuables, though, like the silver and jewellery," was Horst's advice.

"Surely the jewellery could go with us, but the silver would be more difficult," said Bernd.

Horst had read many detective stories, and he loved especially the books by Karl May on the Red Indians, like 'Winnnetou' and perhaps twenty other titles. Our parents always thought they were a waste of time to read, but what Horst said now came straight out of the pages of 'that trash': "You and we will have to bury our silver at some secret place where no one will be able to find it. We will have to remember exactly the place where we dig, and when the war is over we'll be able to dig it out again."

That sounded most exciting to us. We all agreed, and with that our war cabinet meeting was over.



We lived in the 'small house', a suburban style 'villa' about 150 meters from the manor house which my grandparents owned. Our villa had been built for my parents before their wedding, and they had moved into it after their honeymoon. The ground floor had three rooms: the lounge, the 'Damen Zimmer' or ladies lounge and the dining room. There was a small toilet and ante-room as one entered the house from the front steps. Upstairs were three bedrooms, one for my parents, one for my sister Gerda, and one for Günter and me. There was also a family bathroom

with running cold water and a flush toilet with a septic tank in the ground. A bath water heater was near the bath tub, which was fired once or twice a week with wood or coal for a bath. There was a staircase to the attic. In the cellar was the kitchen, the laundry, pantry and coal storage room and two rooms where Klärchen, our cook, and the maid lived.

Our parents were still sitting around the table in the lounge, in deep discussions with Onkel Werner (my father's brother), and Tante Margaret, Horst and Bernd's parents. We went straight to them to tell them about our resolution regarding the silver.

"Good thinking, Horst," was the general praise. "You will have to help us when we are ready to bury it."

"Mutter is not going with you to Danzig, where you will be going with Oma and Opa," said Vater. "She will take Gerda to Tante Alice in Bronikowo. This is near the German/Polish border, and we hope the German army will get there on the first day of the war."

Gerda was then only one and a half.

"Does that mean that you are going to stay here all on your own," asked Günter?

"Yes," said Vater, "Onkel Werner, Tante Margaret and Horst will be staying in Strykowo. It's not far if I need some help. Also, don't forget, Sapowice is away from the main road and the railway. So it should be even a little safer here than to stay in Strykowo."

"I don't like that," Bernd said to his parents. "You can't stay in our house. You have to go into hiding somewhere."

"We've thought of that," Tante Margaret replied. "The three of us will stay in a little hideaway on a small island in the lake which is surrounded by bulrushes. We should be safe there. And Lumpie is going to come with us. He won't bark if he is close to us, and he can help us keep watch."

These were worrying times. In July 1939 everyone we knew was talking about the war that seemed to be inevitable. In fact, as we later heard, it was welcomed by the German minority in Poland. Since the beginning of 1939 some Germans in Poland were persecuted, because Hitler had invaded Czechoslovakia earlier and now started to threaten Poland with the same. There was also the possibility that the landowning families like us would lose at the next 'dispossession' most of their land, which the Polish government intended to give to poor farmers or landless workers. Our estate would have been drastically reduced from 2400 morgen, approximately 800 hectares, to about 800 morgen. However, the next 'dispossession' never came.

After the Strykowsers had left us, I went back to my linden tree. It had all been too much for me. I longed to go back to the past, to my early childhood, to draw some strength from it.





Manor house of my grandparents. We moved there in 1943



'Villa', where I grew up

The rainbow never sets

It was Christmas Eve 1928. Mutter was in Poznan, 32 kilometers from us, in a private maternity clinic, expecting me. She had been rather anaemic throughout the pregnancy, and the obstetrician wanted to keep her under close observation. Vater had permission to take her home by car over Christmas. She spent Christmas Eve together with Vater and Günter, but on Christmas Day she felt she had to go back to the clinic. I was born in the morning of 26 December 1928 in Poznan. Mutter put me in the bassinet under the Christmas tree.

January and February 1929 had been the coldest months on record. Most fruit trees in the garden had died because of frost. On the morning of my baptism, 8 February 1929, which was also Mutter's birthday, the milk in our kitchen froze. So had all the water pipes in the house. Nothing of the plumbing works functioned. My baptism was held in the Manor house, conducted by Pastor Schwerdfeger, our protestant minister.

I was breast-fed by Mutter for three months and grew up with Günter as my constant companion. I could hardly walk, when Günter taught me to ride his lovely hobby horse.



Our family 21/6/30, the 40th Wedding Anniversary of my grandparents.
From l.to r. Oma, I, Vater standing, Tante Margaret, Bernd, Onkel Werner, Mutter,
Horst, Opa, Günter sitting.



In the donkey cart

A great deal of the magic of my childhood is connected with Christmas. Christmas 1931 we received a beautiful rocking horse. Günter was riding it, and I was trying to hold it by its leather reigns. As it reared up, I lost the grip, and I cried. But then it came back down. Its face looked like a real miniature pony. There was a bit in its half-open mouth, real hair all over its body, and a long mane and tail made from horse hair. On its back was a saddle. For us it looked like Vater's saddle. We would spend hours riding on it, for many years, sometimes both of us sitting on it, sometimes we shared the time willingly, sometimes we fought for it, and Irene had to mediate.

Irene Lucht was the only German girl in our village, the daughter of a machinist in our starch factory. She came regularly to look after us. She was about ten years older than we, had beautiful long plaits, and we loved playing with her. Later on she was to become Vater's secretary.

In 1932 Father Christmas brought us a rather unusual gift. Vater told us: "I couldn't leave your main gift here in this room. It's too big, and we left it in the yard. I'll take you there tomorrow morning in daylight."

We wondered all night what it might be. We had no idea. When morning came, we put on our winter clothes and went with Vater and Mutter to the stables where our coach horses were. There in a stall was a donkey.

Vater said: "This is your big Christmas present."

We were quite beside ourselves with joy.

"Can we ride it?" we both asked together.

“Of course. It will take both of you at the same time, because you are still small boys. You can also harness it to that cart and drive with it in the park.”

We had a lovely time with our donkey. Franz Kempa was Opa’s driver, coachman and valet. His eldest son, Franek, or Irene, had to be with us though, for as Vater said: “With a donkey you never know.”

One day we were all sitting in the cart, with Irene, Franek and Stefan, his brother, going around the oval drive way. Suddenly the donkey must have thought he had enough, it was time for him to get to his stable for his meal, for he first trotted, than galloped as fast as he could. Irene jumped off the cart, so did Stefan. Franek was trying desperately to pull in the reigns, but the donkey was stubborn. He didn’t stop. He raced through the gate of the Park, then through the gate of the yard, jolting us three as the small iron-clad wheels were jumping from one cobble stone to the next, heading straight towards the stable door. I screamed and yelled and hid behind Günter under the front seat, for I was scared. Suddenly the cart stopped. I looked up and could see that Franz had grabbed the donkey just before it reached the door. Phew, that was a narrow escape. From then on we made sure that we closed the park gate whenever we rode the donkey or drove in the cart with him.

Another Christmas we received a threshing machine and a steam engine — both made by our carpenter. There were lots of wheels that would turn, and a leather belt that connected the steam engine to the thresher. We played hours with it, slowly preparing ourselves mentally to become farmers, when we would grow up.

Both of us also had a tricycle. Most of the time we rode them outside, only when the weather was bad, were we allowed to ride them on the brick floor of the kitchen. One day I was turning a corner too sharply and came off the bike, hitting my head on the screw of the bell, which had lost its top. I bled profusely. It was not so easy then to get two or three stitches and for everything to be forgotten there. The doctor was far away and so this accident left a scar above my right eye, which is still visible. I was fortunate, though, that I did not lose my eye.

I remember from early days, that Mutter would gather us around her and read to us some story from the Bible, or some other religious book with pictures. We were encouraged to ask questions, but we were not allowed to be ‘silly’ or misbehave. This was to be a special time and we noticed that Mutter behaved differently. She held her arms around us and we cuddled to her, feeling warm and sheltered. Mutter’s concern was that we should learn the stories in the Bible so that we could come to a strong faith in later life, the same as hers. Whether we learnt something from her or not, these times with her meant a lot to me, and it always made me feel good inside. She would also see to it that we regularly said our prayers at night, before going to sleep, and before lunch and supper it was Mutter who would say the grace, before she had taught us to say it.

Unfortunately, Mutter could not sing, so we never sang songs with her, but with others we loved to sing, either Christmas carols or nursery songs.

We also went to church whenever my parents went, to the German protestant church in Stęszew, six kilometers towards Poznan on an unsealed road, only passable by horse-drawn coach. There was no Sunday school nor any segment for children, that is probably why Mutter took it on herself to teach us some of the Bible stories. She certainly taught us respect for other people, an awareness of right and wrong, and tolerance towards other religions, as we lived in a predominantly Catholic area.

I loved wandering around in our big park, about 20 acres of garden with tall trees and lawns ever since I was very small. It was all fenced in, and our parents must have thought it was safe. Our sand-pit was a long distance from the house, in the south-eastern corner of the park. Usually Irene came with us when we wanted to play there. One day I needed to go to the toilet quickly. Irene said: "Just run home, you'll get there in time."

But I didn't. I came screaming to Klärchen with my pants full and it was all running down my legs. She had to clean me up and change my clothes.

In the summer of 1934 our parents took us and Bernd to Zoppot, a sea-side resort on the Baltic Sea, in the Free State of Danzig. We rented a house there and Klärchen cooked for us. We loved to climb in and out of the window, but many times we got into trouble for that with the landlady. It turned out, that she was a real dragon, as she constantly interfered with Klärchen in the kitchen. It was in Zoppot that I saw the sea for the first time — water as far as the eye could see. What an enormous stretch of water! The magic of the sea had me completely enthralled.

During 1936 I grew faster than Günter, and for a time he and I were the same height. Mutter would often dress us the same so people thought we were twins. She was always so proud of us and never tired of showing us off. A year later I passed Günter in height, and he never caught up with me.

We had some Spanish relatives who stayed with us for some time during the Spanish civil war in 1936. They were Beyme's. Mutter's cousin, who had died earlier, had married a Spanish lady, Tina. She came with her three grown-up children, two daughters, one of them Alice, and one son Franz. Alice would insist calling us 'the twins'.

Tante Tina would always complain about the cold. One day she walked with us to the garden. Entering one of our greenhouses, with the hot sun blazing on its glass roof, she exclaimed, "Oh, this is nice, like at home, like in Spain." At that time we had no idea of how much refugees missed their home.

For Christmas 1936 Günter and I both received a red-indian tent with the appropriate clothing and head gear. It was great when the weather became warmer and we could play outside. The tent became our head quarters, from which we waged imaginary war with all and sundry.

The following summer Günter, Bernd and I wanted to sleep outside in

our tent. We would take turns to keep watch for two hours while the others slept, just as we had read it in our books about red indians.

We got some blankets and pillows, and some food that needed heating up over an open fire.

It felt like the real thing, especially when my turn came to keep watch.

"Wake up, Dieter," said Günter, "for the next two hours you must walk up and down, and don't let anyone see that our tent is hidden here under the tree. Wake Bernd when it is his turn to take over from you."

It was eerie to be up at night all by yourself. The owls were calling in the distance, the moon shone its silver light over the park and over the manor house, which was nearby. It was good to think that someone friendly lived so close. I imagined all kinds of foes hiding behind the tall trees, and from the lake came strange noises. It was altogether spooky and not as nice as I had imagined it. I was glad when my time was over, and I could wake Bernd.

"It's your turn now," I said, and crawled under my blanket where I felt secure again.

That was the last watch I did. Bernd tried to wake Günter at 4 am, but couldn't. None of us minded, as we all had a turn at watching, and we slept wonderfully, till the sun was up. Then we heard a strange noise.

"What was that?" asked Günter.

We each got our tomahawk and crawled out to see. The noise came from the footpath. Could it be some foe imitating a bird call as a signal to attack us? We were glad it was daylight.

There, from behind a bush came a turkey hen with her 25 or so pheasant chicks. Our turkeys were used to finish breeding pheasant eggs that were found in a nest on the ground when the grass was cut. Our workers had instructions to leave the grass cutter immediately and bring the still warm eggs to where the clucky turkeys were sitting. Once they hatched the turkey mother would lead her pheasant chicks and shelter them under her wings. When they were bigger, they were released in the park, where the turkey hen guided them, until one day they all would fly away and leave her on her own.

We began to laugh with relief. No enemy after all so early in the morning. It had been a wonderful night, we all agreed, and we should do it again.

Not until 1938 did we repeat a night out. This time it was going to be in Strykowo, and Horst was going to be in it too. That gave us lots of confidence, and anyhow, we were much older then. The tent was made of tarpaulin. They didn't have such a nice park as we did, so we went into their woods instead, which was quite a distance from their home. We were taken there by Onkel Werner by car, and left to fend for ourselves. We had to cook dinner properly, none of that warming up business.

"Thick pea soup," I said, "we all like it, especially with some ham or bacon."

It was not easy to get the fire started, as we had forgotten the paper. When it was burning, we put the pot with the soup on three large stones, and in no time it began to boil.

"It must cook for at least half an hour," was Günter's comment, "but mind it doesn't burn at the bottom."

"I'm not stupid. Don't worry." I was quick to reply. By now it was clear that the youngest, that was me, had to do the cooking. I was glad that I had been helping Klärchen in the kitchen many times, and to make sure the porridge didn't get burnt at the bottom I had stirred it many times.

With a long-handled ladle I kept stirring vigorously. Soon it began to smell of lovely pea soup, and the others were coming over, as they were getting hungry.

There was one big problem, though: "How am I going to get the heavy pot off the fire?" I wanted to know.

"Easy, get a pot holder on either side of the handle, and then just lift it."

"But we haven't got any pot holders!"

After a bit of head-scratching, Günter proposed: "We have to get the fire away from under the stones, then we just ladle the soup into our bowls."

After the others helped with that, and the soup was evenly divided, I burnt my tongue, of course, too eager to taste my own cooking. It was delicious, and the others said so too, which pleased me greatly.

Cleaning up was no problem, as we just stuffed the dirty dishes together with the pot into a cardboard box.

"Frania will do it," said Bernd confidently, and we all agreed.

As we had been busy eating our meal, dark clouds had blown in without us noticing it. Suddenly there was lightning and thunder and we all looked up noticing a black thunder cloud right above our heads.

"This looks ominous," said Horst, "we had better secure our tent, so that the wind won't blow it over."

Before he had even finished saying that, a gust of wind blew over us, taking with it dried leaves and dust and the ashes from our fire, swirling it around us and giving us all a real fright. We huddled together in the tent, holding on to the rope that secured the door flap. Then all hell seemed to have broken loose, crashing of thunder and continuous lightning. I seemed to be feeling safe in the midst of my cousins, maybe feeling just a little uncomfortable. One clap of thunder came almost simultaneously with the lightening.

"That was close," said Günter.

"Would anyone like to go and see where it struck?" Horst asked wryly.

No one volunteered.

"Then I'll have to go and see for myself," he said, and he left the three of us wondering what we would have to do.

It was not long before he came back again.

"A whole wheat stack is on fire, just a couple of hundred meters from here. Come and see."

We rushed out and there it was, a blazing inferno. Quite awesome against the black clouds.

"It looks like fire-works," I said when I saw the sparks flying, fanned by the strong wind.

Suddenly the rain came down. Not as usually starting with a few big drops. This was an instantaneous deluge. We needed to run only about ten meters to our tent, but by the time we reached it we were all completely drenched.

We lit a kerosene lamp to give us some light, but our mood was still gloomy as night. All the joy of camping had gone. We were all damp and couldn't get comfortable. Outside the storm was still raging, and we were wondering if our make-shift tent would hold. Then we heard voices over the thunder and tumult: "Where are you? Hallo! Horst, Bernd ..."

Our faces lit up: "Here in the tent," answered Horst, and he held out the lantern.

We could see a torchlight approaching. By now it was pitch dark. We recognised the voices of Onkel Werner and Tante Margaret. They stepped inside our tent, shaking the rain from their coats. It was still pouring.

"As soon as we saw the storm approaching we got into our car. We thought you might like to come back with us."

We nodded silently.

Then Horst began to tell his parents about the lightening, how it had struck the wheat stack and how we saw it go up in flames. On our way to the car we looked to where we had seen the fire. There was nothing to be seen, all was black. Next day we heard that the deluge had put out the fire. Only the top of the stack had burnt. That was lucky!

After this experience, we never camped outside again, but Mutter made sure that we would not get bored at home. Her family lived in Germany, and so during the summer holidays of 1938 we travelled by car to her mother, who lived on an estate in Hulm, Silesia. At the border our car was searched, I didn't know what for. Eventually the border guards let us go. We were very impressed with the beautifully sealed roads in Germany, so different to our pot-holed gravel roads. The villages looked neat and tidy with trees and flowers in the gardens which surrounded the homes.

Onkel Helmut, Mutter's brother who had had polio as a 16-year old, which left him rather physically handicapped, managed the property, and Oma Hulm, as we called her, looked after him. From Hulm we made several excursions: Once to Beckern, where Mutter's sister, Tante Alice with her family Mackensen lived on a small farm. To Förstchen, where Onkel Wilhelm, Mutter's eldest brother farmed, and to several historical ruins and castles. Only the dungeons made a big impression on us, with their torture chambers. Quite horrible, and all so dank and no daylight!



The summer of 1939 had started with a special treat for us. It was almost like a prelude to the events that brewed up on the political horizon.

"We are going to Zoppot, just the four of us. We are leaving Gerda with Schwester Anni," said Vater one morning at the breakfast table. (Sister Anni was Mutter's maternity nurse),

We didn't seem to be bubbling over with joy, or was it that our home was so nice that we didn't really want to go anywhere?

Noticing our obvious lack of enthusiasm, Vater continued, "we are going to stay in a hotel, one of the best in Zoppot."

That put a smile on our faces. The first time we had been in Zoppot in 1934, we had stayed in a rented home, with Klärchen cooking for us. But this promised to be different.

"Will we be eating in the hotel restaurant?" inquired Günter.

"And will we be able to order ice-cream for sweets?" was my most pressing concern.

"The answer to both your questions is yes. We will pack our luggage in our Hansa (a convertible), and drive there. It shouldn't take us too long, maybe four hours. The roads have improved in some places."

When we left the following Monday soon after breakfast, it turned out that the roads were still as bad as they had been before. Potholes everywhere, and Vater had to steer the low-lying Hansa around them. I got car-sick in Bromberg, in the middle of the market place. The rest of the journey seemed to take ages. We arrived six hours later, and we were all worn out. When we saw the hotel, our spirits lifted.

"That looks really great," said Günter, "and it is so close to the jetty."

The jetty was broad, almost like a street, and about 500 meters long. There was always pedestrian traffic on it. In the evening, the lamps looked like fairy lights, reflected in the water on both sides of the long jetty.

Mutter and Vater's hotel room had the most beautiful view of the jetty and the sea, ours didn't.

Next morning Günter whispered to me: "Let's go down to the jetty, we might see some ships."

We crept silently out of our room, down the stairs, and through the main entrance. Nobody stopped us. Outside we continued towards the jetty, where we saw an enormous white passenger liner moored along the jetty. We sprinted right to the end of the jetty.

"Isn't she a beautiful ship", I said. I couldn't take my eyes off her.

Smartly dressed passengers walked down the gang way. This was a world we had never seen before. A hustle and bustle, so different to our quiet Sapowice.

"Look, Günter, there is the cook!" I yelled. He must have heard me, as he turned towards me and with a broad grin waved to me. "Oh, what a fortunate man, to be the cook on this ship. I wish I could be him!"

From that moment on I wanted to become a cook. When we came back

to the hotel for breakfast, I told this to my parents.

"Well, let's wait and see", was their less than enthusiastic reply.

Günter and I found out that a ship like the one we had seen, would moore every morning along the jetty. We made sure we wouldn't miss a day. It was always exciting, especially when I saw the cook again on another day.

During our week in Zoppot, we once went to the Wald Oper, a famous out-door opera theatre in the midst of the woods, where only works by Wagner were performed. Or we would walk along the promenade lined with flowers and greens, where several fountains gave the plaza in front of the casino a special note of grandeur. But more than anything, we enjoyed being given the freedom of adolescents, no longer tied to mother's apron strings.



"Dieter!" I heard Mutter calling, "Come in for supper, and stop your dreaming under that tree."

I hurried inside, glad that the afternoon discussion with our cousins had not changed the routine of daily living — yet. One job still lay ahead of us. We had to bury our silver in the park.

"Where should we dig?" I asked Günter next day in the evening, as we collected a spade from the shed.

"Behind the big house, about 20 meters from the South/West corner, and ten meters from the trunk of that plane tree there. This way we will always be able to find the spot."

That evening no one was around. Günter and I dug the hole, while Mutter was wrapping up the silver (large spoons, and small ones, large forks and small, knives, a coffee set and a tea set, platters of varying sizes) all in soft cloth bags and Vater placed them in a large box. The box was lined with waxed paper and the lid was sealed with lots of nails. The hole we had dug was about one meter deep, and when the box was in, there would have been about 40 cm of soil above it.

"Make sure that the soil is thoroughly firmed on top," said Vater. "It usually sinks in after heavy rain. We don't want that to happen, for that would give it away."

"Scatter the spare soil around and put some dry leaves and twigs on top. This way nobody will see that there is a treasure buried here," said Mutter, after we had finished.

"Hopefully, before too long, we'll be able to come and dig it out again, all safe and well," I said.

The next day Vater and Tante Margaret went by car to Danzig to find a place where Opa and Oma, Günter, Bernd and I, with Klärchen to look after us, could stay until the war broke out and until it was safe again for

us to return. They found two holiday homes to rent in Steegen, an old fishing village only about 10 kilometers from the East Prussian border, within the Free State of Danzig.

“When do we have to go?” asked Günter with obvious indignation, when Vater and Tante Margaret came back. None of us really wanted to go.

“Tomorrow,” Vater said sternly, “we can’t lose any more time.”

And that was that.

Packing had to be done quickly, and very thoughtfully, as we did not want to raise suspicions at the Polish border. We had to travel as if we were going on a holiday by the sea. In a way that was what we were doing, but we felt more like being refugees or exiles, escaping the approaching war.

The farewell from Mutter and Gerda was hard. Vater would take us to Steegen. When would we see them again? What would the war bring? All uncertainties.

That foreboding sensed under the shade of the linden tree had come over us again. For the last time I went to the tree to hug it.

There the anxiety of the last days vanished.

The watershed of our life, until then only vaguely perceived, had become a reality. On the one side lay the dream land of our sheltered life with the period of a slow awakening, on the other lay our unknown future of more mature years, beckoning with tempting adventures, requiring decisions of us. All this against a backdrop of predominantly dark and gloomy colours of an all-consuming war.

For a short while we would experience what life was like without the secure feeling of the linden tree, away from parents, from the familiarity of a childhood paradise. Would that experience strengthen us for the years ahead, or would it leave scars which only time could heal?

CHAPTER TWO

Shelter from the war

It was the 20th of August 1939. After we had left Sapowice with a heavy heart, the adventure before us made us forget the past. We were all sitting in the train, which clickety-clacked steadily towards the Polish-Free State of Danzig border. Vater came with us to deliver us safely to Steegen, only to go back again.

“Klärchen, why are you getting up and down from your seat all the time?” I asked her, for she was obviously not her usual calm self.

“Never mind”, she answered; “but look at Opa, he is walking up and down the corridor of the train like a wounded hare. I wish he would sit down.”

I looked at Oma. She was as calm as always, nothing seemed to be able to ruffle her. Günter, Bernd and I tried to pass the time with some games, but our hearts were not in it. We too were feeling tense. What if they didn't let us through the border? They might put us in jail straight away? A child's imagination has no limits, but something similar must have gone through the minds of the adults too.

Looking out of the window I noticed the train slowing down. It came to stop at a station called ‘Tczew’. In German we called it Dirschau. This was the border town.

“Everybody must get out here — Border control,” came over the loudspeakers in Polish.

We followed Vater who knew the way.

“Men to the left, women to the right!”

Facing the border guards fearlessly, we were asked: “And where are you off to?”

“We are going on our summer vacations to Steegen,” was our rehearsed reply in fluent Polish.

“Well, then, have a nice holiday,” and we were through in no time. They searched nervous Opa, who much rather would have travelled on a Belgian passport. He and Oma were both born in Antwerp, Belgium. Opa had bought the estate in 1888, when it was part of Germany. After the first World War he had to become a Polish citizen, in order to keep the estate. But he was never comfortable with his Polish passport. His Polish was atrocious, and at every opportunity he would say that he was Belgian. At home he even had a Belgian flag, and he and Oma would usually converse in French. But poor Opa couldn't do that here at the border, because here

only the passports counted, and he had a Polish passport, the same we all had. But he too was soon through and joined us. Vater was already waiting with us. But where were Oma and Klärchen? What was delaying them?

The whole train seemed to be finished, as people were going back into their compartments, but Oma and Klärchen were still missing. Now we got nervous. Dear Oma, of all people, she had been the calmest, and she seemed to have the most trouble. At long last we saw them coming. No sooner were we inside, the train left. In the fading light we could see the train crossing the border. We were safely in the Free State of Danzig. Free indeed, I thought. Would we find shelter here from the encroaching war? For the moment you could hear a deep sigh of relief from all of us.

Then we heard Oma say: "They made me take off my dress and then they searched all over my body. I don't know what they were looking for."

"The same happened to me," said Klärchen, "I was so embarrassed."

"Probably just their way of being spiteful," Vater drew the conclusion.

All the tensions of the last few days were lifted and we could chatter freely without worrying who would listen. From the station at Danzig, Vater hired two taxis which took us to Steegen, about 30 kilometers east along the bay of Danzig. Very tired, with hardly the energy to eat our supper, we dropped into our beds and went off to sleep.

Home seemed such a long way. It was unreal, like a dream, from which you fear to awake. For it had vanished as quickly as that, with a threatening border between us and home. But I do not think that any of us dreamed that night, we were all too exhausted.

A week went by with much the same routine. We would go to the beach each day in the morning, and in the afternoons we played games, either outside or indoors. We would always see Oma and Opa for meals, and would often talk to them about home. I don't think we realised then, how home-sick we really were. We were cut off from any communication with home. We had no news from Vater or Mutter, and didn't even know what was happening on the political scene.

Early one morning, it was Friday, 1 September 1939, we kids were woken up by a loud chatter outside our bedroom window. I thought 'how rude to wake us so early', but then I listened closely to what they were actually saying: "Hitler had declared war on Poland this morning!"

We were up in an instant. Leaning out of the window, Günter asked: "Is it true that war has broken out?"

"Yes, German troops are marching into Poland this very minute. Soon your country will be German."

That's what we had come here for, and now it had happened. A strange feeling came over me.

"What would Vater be doing? And how were Mutter and Gerda? Did everything go according to plan? Had Vater arrived safely home after delivering us here? How soon would the troops be in Sapowice and

Strykowo? Would there be a decisive battle fought in our area, as had been planned by the Poles? When would we be able to go home?"

There were no answers to these questions.

The only source of information was the radio. So we switched on an old set that stood near the dining table. We all sat around the table and heard familiar march music. Then the announcer came over: "In a minute our Führer will be making a broadcast to all Germany. Please stay tuned in."

There were anxious moments. What would he be saying? Would he tell us something about Poznan?

Then came Hitler's speech over the radio: "Since five o'clock this morning German troops have been marching into Poland ..." A rather long and involved speech followed, saying that the Poles would be defeated in a short, but fierce battle and that all oppressed and persecuted Germans in Poland would now be freed. He gave all sorts of reasons for starting the war. The main thrust, though, was that the injustices of the treaty of Versailles would now be righted and that all Germans would again be united. There was no mention of Poznan or our province. We were rather disappointed.

His voice sounded harsh and rasping. He said that the Free State of Danzig of this morning, was incorporated into the German Reich.

We started to listen eagerly to news bulletins to learn about the progress of the war. Our ears were longing to hear names that were familiar to us, but so far we had not heard one mentioned. From now on, our holiday spirit was gone. The beach had lost its attraction. All our thoughts were centred on home and what we could do about getting back there again.

There was no resistance in Danzig, as the population was almost 100% German. After we had eaten breakfast, a newsflash came over the radio: "The Poles of the shipyard in the town of Danzig, called 'Westerplatte', had resisted German take-over and they are prepared to fight it out. A German battle ship is ready with heavy guns to respond to the challenge."

Soon we heard heavy gunfire in the distance.

"Can we go to the beach and see what these explosions are?" we asked Klärchen. "We can hear the sound, it clearly comes from beyond the beach."

"Would it be safe?"

"Oh, yes, it's far away, we won't go near it!"

Our curiosity got the better of us. We trundled off to the beach with Klärchen, who was not at all sure whether she should have let us go there in the first place. But we wanted to see what was going on.

On the last sand dune we stood mesmerised.

"Look at that huge battle ship," Günter said.

"Yes, I can see it," and rather timidly I added: "But it is far away from us, and it is shooting to the left."

There it was before our eyes, facing Danzig. Each time we saw puffs of black smoke a few seconds before we heard the heavy guns firing.

"They are certainly shooting at something," observed Klärchen.

"I think they are shooting at the Westerplatte. We heard it this morning in the news. I'm sure that's what it is." Günter always knew everything!

This was to be the closest that the war would come to us for a long time. For three days we heard the guns, then there was calm. Again through the news we heard that the Poles on the Westerplatte had capitulated.

We also heard that the German troops were advancing in Poland very fast, but Poznan was never mentioned.

"I don't know what it means," said Opa, "but I think they have not taken Poznan yet. Maybe the great battle along our lake is being fought right now."

"Oh, why be so pessimistic, Arnold," said Oma. "You always see the worst happening. You just wait and see what really happens before you start worrying."

It seemed to us an endless time before we heard in the news that Poznan had been taken. It was more than a week since the war had started. Opa was not at all sure that all was going well. He said: "Children, I have been through the first war. It never works out the way you think it will. I don't like this war, and I don't like Hitler. He brags too much. You wait and see."

But we thought, let him talk. All we wanted is to get back home again.

Nearly three weeks later, actually on 18 September, the war against Poland had ended. The rest of the Polish army had surrendered, and many German nationals, whom the Poles had taken as prisoners, had been released, and they were allowed to return to their homes. In the news they called the war a Blitzkrieg — a lightning war. It may have been as quick as lightning for them, but not for us.

Nothing could stop us now from returning home. "Please Klärchen, can't we all go home now?" said Günter, and Bernd and I nodded eagerly.

"Let me make some enquiries."

A day later she came back from town, waving a piece of paper in the air.

"We've got it," she called from afar. "There is a bus which will take refugees like us back to Poznan. Isn't that wonderful!"

And we all joined hands and danced around the kitchen, when suddenly Opa and Oma appeared.

"What is all this merriment about?" Opa wanted to know.

"We can go home, we can go home. There is a bus leaving for Poznan." It came out from all of us like one voice.

"I don't know about that," said Opa, "What sort of bus is this, Klara?"

"I picked this leaflet up at the baker's," she said. "It says here: 'Any Germans wishing to return to their home in the Province of Poznan can do so on Sunday, 24 September 1939. You must buy your ticket by Friday', and then it gives an address here where you can buy the tickets."

"Friday, that's tomorrow! Well, we'll have to make a decision very quickly then."

"Yes, please, Opa, we all want to go," we urged again.

Then Opa, Oma and Klärchen withdrew into the lounge, and we waited anxiously for the verdict.

After what seemed an eternity, the door opened and Klärchen called us in.

"You can go on that bus," announced Opa, "but Oma and I won't be going with you. We will stay here till it is safer. Maybe Vater or Mutter can come and pick us up."

We were jubilant and nearly strangled Klärchen in the process.

Next day the tickets were bought and all our things packed.

Early on Sunday morning we were standing outside the post office, waiting for the bus to pick us up. Oma and Opa did not get up so early, we had said our good-byes the night before. We had promised to tell our parents that they would be waiting for them in Steegen after things were back to normal again. No one knew how long that would be.

"There is the bus," Klärchen declared, as a large 44-seater bus turned into the street where we were waiting. There were already some people seated, but we dashed for the closest seats to the front.

"I don't like sitting too far back, as I always get car-sick," I said in a matter-of-fact way.

"Come, sit next to me," said Klärchen, "Günter and Bernd can sit behind us." I had the sneaking suspicion that Klärchen was also afraid of being car sick, but she would never admit it.

Our bus picked up many more passengers, some young children like us, some families, and only two or three elderly people. The bus was almost full, when the driver announced: "We now have all the passengers who are coming with us to Posen on board. The trip will not be an easy one, as we will come past some places which were badly damaged during the fighting early this months. Some bridges are still down, and we will have to ford the small streams. There is a pontoon bridge over the Brahe, near Bromberg, and of course, there are some bomb craters which we have to go around. But cheer up, you are all going to be home tonight."

"Hooray!" came the reply from everyone, together with a general applause. I noticed, for the first time our provincial capital was called Posen, instead of Poznan, the Polish name. What a change in such a short time!

The feeling on the bus was one of great joy, mixed with anxiety. How would we find our home? We had not heard from our parents at all — were they still alive? How did they fare during the fighting? Had our home been destroyed, like some of the places our bus took us through? or would we find everything as we had left it, oh so long ago!

Slowly but steadily our bus took us towards Posen. The pontoon bridge was very exciting for us, as some water was lapping over the boards, as the heavy bus was crossing it. But we made it without any trouble. The fording of some of the streams seemed more difficult, as the banks were

steep in places and the earth was wet from all the vehicles driving through. But again, our bus seemed strong and managed very well. Nearer Posen we didn't see too much damage, only the occasional burnt-out barn, or bomb craters near the road.

By the time we arrived in Posen, it was already dark. Klärchen hired a taxi which whisked us to Sapowice in half an hour.

I remember vividly Günter and I standing in the hallway of our home in Sapowice embracing Vater and Mutter and wee Gerda, and a feeling of utter joy and relief, that our family once again was united.

"Strykowo was not as lucky as we," said Vater as he greeted us. "Their barn was bombed, and the carpenter's shop went up in flames."

Bernd looked up anxiously.

"But your family is all well, Bernd."

"And Horst, how did he get through all those difficult days?"

"He was a real hero."

"Can I go home straight away?"

"Of course, the taxi is still waiting for you."

We waived good-bye to Bernd. This had been the longest time we had been together.

Günter and I were quite jealous of Horst, but we were really glad that nothing had happened to him and his parents. We were also glad that nothing was destroyed in Sapowice.

After a good night's rest, we all sat around the breakfast table and heard from Vater, what had happened during our absence:

"Once Mutter and Gerda had left for Bronikowo, I moved downstairs into the cellar into Klärchen's room. There I blocked out the window with boards and blankets. I took the radio down with me and listened daily to the news from Germany, making sure that the volume was low, as I was afraid someone might hear it from outside. So I knew where the troops were, and I could see from the way the army was moving, that the Germans were trying to encircle the Polish army in the region of Poznan. The Poles must have got wind of this, however, and so withdrew their troops right at the beginning of the war.

"This area here was virtually no-mans-land for almost a week, with bandits and hooligans roaming around, causing great fear among the population. Our workers were guarding both our villa and the manor house, but especially ours here, as they knew I was hiding here. Armed with scythes, sickles, hammers and clubs, they would not let anyone near. They were really a fearsome-looking lot, but effective. Bandits tried several times to get me, but thanks to the loyal protection of our workers, I was saved."

He paused a moment to gain back his composure. Needless to say, Vater must have gone through tremendous pressure and emotional strain. He

would never forget the loyalty of these men throughout his life, especially later when the Nazis tried to move some of them into the General Gouvernement, a special zone designated for Poles only, a buffer zone between Germany and Russia. Their loyalty in guarding him became Vater's strength to stand up to some of the Nazi officials, who accused him of siding with 'those Polish swine'.

Then Vater continued:

"Other people were not as fortunate as I. As you know, since Hitler's tirade against Poland, the Poles themselves had begun a propaganda of hate against the Germans. This came to a pitch when German troops invaded Poland. Thousands of German nationals, but Polish citizens like we, were driven from their homes and forced to walk in long columns without food and water in great heat for days on end. Many collapsed from sheer exhaustion. They were either shot dead by the guards, or left on the road to die. Those who arrived at Brest-Litovsk, their final destination, were freed by the German troops. Had it not been for our men here, I could have gone the same way."

He stopped again, tears running down his cheeks. We did not dare to interrupt him.

"Here in Sapowice, a motorised unit of the German army, under the command of Erich Schulz, a cousin of Mutter's, came through on 8 September. He announced that the troops were not far. However, it took them four more days before they eventually appeared. When they did, I was greatly relieved, as Mutter and Gerda had already come back soon after the 8th. I was really scared then, but everything turned out all right. And now, that you are back again, I feel really wonderful."

Günter and I gave him a big hug. "It is great to be back home again. We missed you very much, both of you."

"The only ones that are missing now are Oma and Opa," I said. "I hope they will be able to come soon."

"That may still be a couple of weeks or so," replied Mutter. "Things will have to go back to normal first, like trains and busses running on a normal schedule. I tell you what, as soon as the trains go I will fetch them myself."

We were very happy to find that the war had not touched our estate at all. We quickly unearthed our family silver from its hiding place, very glad that the fears we had about battle and destruction did not come true.

A couple of weeks later, Mutter caught the first train to Berlin, and from there to Danzig, to fetch Oma and Opa. When they were all back, healthy and well, we all were happy and thanked God for their safe arrival. Travelling was still fraught with danger so soon after the fighting.

CHAPTER 3

School life in Posen

For ethnic Germans life returned to normal in what used to be Poland. Poland had once again been carved up, this time between the USSR and Germany. Our province was occupied by Germany and we became automatically German citizens. For the Poles in our region, life would change slowly for the worse. The official line was that they were not allowed to forget that they were the enemy. For us who had never seen them as anything else but as other human beings, with whom we played and were friends, this caused a conflict within us, which was only solved at a later stage.

When our parents heard that schools would start again, they checked with the school and boarding house in Posen, whether we could go there as arranged before the war in Poland. Günter and I had sat for and passed our entrance examinations to a public school before the war broke out. Günter has had five years of private tuition, the first year from Mutter herself. When I needed schooling, a teacher was engaged to teach both of us. From September 1935 to June 1937 our teacher was Fräulein Müller. She was a warm-hearted, and fun loving person who taught us the usual three R's and also the Polish language, for which we needed to learn the latin script (German was taught in Gothic script), music and singing, craft work, and the appreciation of God's beautiful nature. I had always shown interest in flowers, but she helped me to see so much more in them, also in trees, birds and animals.

From September 1937 to June 1939 Fräulein Parr was our teacher. Both teachers came from German-speaking families who lived in Poland. Both had to teach us also Polish, but for proper pronunciation (we tended to speak the local dialect, which was not acceptable in well educated circles) the local primary school teacher was hired for a couple of sessions a week. We thought it was a great joke, as this teacher came from an area where Polish was spoken with a Russian accent. Our Polish can't have been too bad, though, for at the entrance examinations to enter public schools, our results were better than those of other Polish children, who also had received private tuition at home and wanted to go to public school during the new term in 1939. All subjects had examinations that had to be done in Polish.

Our school in Posen was the only German school, the Schiller Schule. Its Primary School was at a different location from the High School. The

Polish system of six years in Primary and six in High School was maintained at first. This meant that both Günter and I started at the same school, he in year six, I in year five.

Our boarding house was called the 'Pension Siebenbürger'. At that time the students came exclusively from German land owners of the province of Posen, both boys and girls. The head was Frau Siebenbürger, whom we all called Tante Else. She herself was the daughter of a land owner near Posen and had a son in the boarding house. There were about 14 boys and girls including us, but at this stage neither Horst nor Bernd were there. Their parents had chosen a family who took in boarders, but they didn't like it as much as we did, and a year or so later they joined us at Tante Else's. In the first year Günter and I shared a room with two other boys, about two or three years our seniors.

"Come quickly, the Wyczinski's are having a fight," we heard through the corridor of the boarding house. Everyone seemed to be rushing to their room, but by the time we arrived we could see only two red faces, their long plaited hair very ruffled, and rather sheepish looking. Then we were ordered out. Erika and Rosel did not like to be caught fighting by the boys.

"You should take an example from them," said Harro, who never fought with his sister. "I'm talking to you, Günter and Dieter, you seem to get at each other rather often."

It was true. As brothers do, we often had rows, but we really loved each other, and if one of us was attacked by someone else, the other would come to help.

For lunch and dinner all boarders sat together at table, boys on one side, girls on the other. Tante Else sat at the head, having everyone in sight. At times the conversation was quite noisy, other times it could be very quiet. At one of those quiet moments, one of the older boys would say: "Jutta, why are you blushing? Come on, tell us the story."

As everyone looked at Jutta, she would promptly turn into a red beacon, for no apparent reason. We all burst out laughing. Sometimes tales from school were told, specially if they were amusing, or Tante Else wanted to know, how we had done at our exams. At times this was rather embarrassing, and it was then time for the boys to get red faces. This helped to put group pressure on us in order to perform better. Overall, there was a good atmosphere in the boarding house, and we liked it.

Our cook was Berta, and we called her 'Dachs', the badger. No one remembered why, she seemed to have come with the furniture of the boarding house. Her cooking was rather mediocre, and especially a few years later on, when food was pretty scarce, it was quite bad. But she had to make sandwiches for everyone for school, and as they were placed on each one's assigned place at table, one would be wise not to spoil relations with her.

At school settling in took a little longer. Having never been used to a

class-room situation, I had discipline problems. Günter seemed to adapt better than I. Also, I found it harder to make friends. Before I woke up to myself, I got into trouble. There was one particular boy in my class who was tiny compared to me, but wiry and very aggressive. He seemed to be picking on me.

One day I had enough. "If you pick on me again, I'll fight you," I said. I had hardly time to take a deep breath, when he was already at me, punching me with short, hard hits. Immediately the whole class was grouping around us, forming a kind of boxing ring, and encouraging us to fight. The blows were hard and hurt. I got angry, and with my longer arms I caught him in an arm tackle, gripping him tightly around his neck, and squeezing as hard as I could. We both fell on the floor, but I didn't let go. Eventually he managed to say: "Enough", and I let him go. It seems strange, but from that moment on we became friends. His name was Helmut Herke, and he was to come home with us quite often for the weekend, and in class we would sit together.

Towards the end of the school year of 1940, late May or early June, the two seniors of our Pension, one of them Tante Else's son, were sitting for their final exams. In some ways we all shared their tension, and we were pleased when all was over.

We also realised then, that both of them had to go straight from school to the army, to fight in the war.

"I won't be going to the war," I said, "by the time my age comes up, the war will be over."

"Don't be too sure about that," Tante Else's son replied.

"I wish I could go, then I wouldn't have to go to school."

"But that is stupid. Don't say a thing like that."

He put me to shame. And everyone was quiet around the table.

In September 1940 the school system changed. Instead of doing another year at primary school, I was put with the rest of the class into form two of high school. This meant that we had to go to the Schiller High School, a much longer journey by tram than to the primary school. But all four Tieman's were now together at the same school.

At High School I started learning English as a foreign language. Unfortunately, my teacher and I did not see eye to eye. She was a big, fat woman, who made learning English a real chore, instead of fun. Her name was Frau Vogee. Right from the start I hit it off wrongly with her. I hated learning vocabularies, and she always sprung tests on us, and invariably I would earn a 'six' — the bottom mark.

"Tieman," she would say, drawing out the first syllable twice as long as anybody else, "You will never learn English. Look at this paper here, full of red marks. You should be ashamed."

Ashamed I was not, only when I had to get the paper signed by Vater did I stand there with my head down.

"What is wrong with you? Why don't you want to learn English?"

"I just can't."

"Well, we'll see about that. Next weekend you'll stay in Posen and you will learn your vocabularies, and do a lot of English home work."

I was devastated and burst out into tears. Not to be able to go home for the weekend was just about the hardest punishment I could get. But Vater could be very hard. Nothing would move him from that verdict. I felt like a condemned prisoner. My brother and cousins could go home, and I had to stay!

Yet, as hard as I tried, I could not make myself learn English. The motivation was simply not there. Instead of learning English, I went to the swimming pool in the river Warthe, or to the pictures. The latter called for some ingenuity on my part, as Vater would require us to write down regularly detailed accounts of what we had spent during that week, as he gave us 'spending money' not 'pocket money'. I think I must have been using then what is called 'creative book keeping'. There seemed to be a lot of money spent on copybooks and ink, and pencils, and tram journeys, and I imagined that Vater would not notice. Whether he did, is another question, but he never let on.

It happened several times that I was not allowed to come home. Eventually Vater told Tante Else, and she kept an eye on me, but I am not sure that my English improved. I must have felt destined to fulfil Frau Vogee's prophecy: that I would never learn English.

The following year our class had another English teacher. I can't remember his name, but we called him 'The Englishman'. He was of small stature, very wiry and lively, and he made English an interesting subject. He taught us all sorts of English ditties and songs, and surprise, surprise, my English improved considerably. Instead of sixes I brought home threes and twos.

Unfortunately for me, this joy didn't last very long. I think before the year was over, 'The Englishman' was transferred and Vogee was back with us. Tough luck. But I do believe that from then on Vater knew that it had something to do with the teacher, and not solely with me.

In mathematics I came top of the class with another student. We seemed to alternate in coming first. Our teacher was excellent and we got on very well. I also liked our teacher of Biology and Geography, so these subjects became favourites of mine. I think I needed a challenge, and these teachers were able to make the subjects interesting. Latin was introduced in third year and I did not have any problems with that either.

One day during Latin, it was the last period of the day and a lot of classes had already gone home, we suddenly heard 'bump, bump', outside our classroom window. All eyes turned to the window, including Mr. Müller's, and as we were watching, slowly the shape of a leather suitcase appeared, let down on a rope from the classroom above. Mr. Müller was rather annoyed about the disturbance. He opened the window, hauled the suitcase inside, untied the rope, and put the suitcase under his desk. About

three minutes later there was a knock at the door.

“Come in,” shouted Mr. Müller, this time even more annoyed.

“Mr. Müller,” Hermann from the senior class stuttered ...

“Raus!” Mr. Müller angrily interrupted, “Out you go”!

The lesson continued, but our attention was gone. Soon the bell went. Mr. Müller packed his things and walked out of the class room with the leather suitcase under his arm.

A couple of minutes later Hermann came back and asked for his suitcase.

“He’s taken it with him,” we said.

He couldn’t believe it. Then Karl shouted from the back of the class: “Look, there he goes. He’s got the suitcase with him.”

Still not believing, Hermann rushed to the window only to see his suitcase disappearing around the corner attached to Mr. Müllers arm.

“It’s Ernst’s fault. He tied it to the rope and let it down. They were teasing me, but I need it for the weekend.”

“Sorry amigus (friend in latin), we can’t help you.” We packed our things and went home, forgetting the whole episode.

But meanwhile some mischievous students from the senior class were continuing their dark and cunning business. In the paper the following Saturday, an astute detective would have found the following advertisement under the ‘for sale’ column:

Well maintained
LEATHER SUITCASE
RM.15
Sunday morning
6 am.
18 Stein Str.

We had no idea of what was happening, but coming back to school the following Monday, everybody was talking about the suitcase affair, including the teachers.

At the first opportunity we asked our teacher in class:

“Is it true? Did that ad really appear in the paper? And did anybody turn up?”

“In their tens! Masses of people. Just imagine, a leather suitcase in these hard times! Where could you buy anything like that, and so cheap! Even the police arrived to calm the people down, as it was still so early on Sunday morning.”

Well, Hermann had his revenge, but unfortunately schools do not seem

to have a sense of humour. As Hermann was responsible for putting the ad in the paper, he had to leave the school. Our class was very proud to have witnessed the best prank of my school years.

Our sports teacher was Mr. Korn. He came from Riga, one of the Baltic States. He was tiny. Most of the pupils were much taller than he, but he was quite wiry and strong. He took us out to the stadium for athletics, or in bad weather we used the well-equipped indoor sports hall. After sports we usually had a hot shower (ours was a progressive school!). Mr. Korn felt he had to supervise us there too, which we didn't like. So we sang a ditty to annoy him:

“All corns grow, all corns grow,
only the Korn from Riga not”

“Who has started this ditty?” he wanted to know.

Being all naked, we lined up in front of him and replied with one voice: “I did.”

So poor Korn couldn't do a thing, but he always tried desperately to catch the one who started it, much to our amusement.

Relationship between the German authorities and the Polish population deteriorated constantly. Early in 1940, a law was introduced which prohibited Poles to travel in the same tram cars or train compartments as the Germans. They encouraged Germans to do in those Poles, who tried to ignore this law. We students felt it was our duty to police this law from time to time. Most of the time we could tell by the face who was Polish and who was German. We would then go to the conductor and tell them to check their I.D. cards. If they were Poles, they had to go into the car at the rear.

We, as Germans, were allowed to travel anywhere in the trams, but very rarely did we want to go to the rear as it usually was full of smoke and we didn't like it. In the trains, there were also compartments for Poles and compartments for Germans. Initially this meant that we always had far more space than the Poles had. But as the German population increased, Poles were gradually 'evacuated', i.e. they were thrown out of their flats and put into a special buffer Zone between the USSR and Germany, called the General Gouvernement.

Günter, Bernd and I were asleep one night in the large front room of the Siebenbürger boarding house. The row of narrow windows was facing the road. One of them was open.

“What was that?” asked Günter in the middle of the night. Günter, Bernd and I were rudely disturbed from our deep sleep, waking up at the same time. All three of us raced to the windows and saw a large number of uniformed men standing around several delivery trucks. What had woken us up was the scream of a woman who was dragged by the uniformed men into one of those trucks. The uniforms were all black.

Günter remarked quietly: "They must be from the SS."

"Now he is beating her," I heard Bernd whispering, as the screaming continued. More people were dragged from the house next door, most of them had only the barest of personal belongings with them.

"Look, they are even taking children into that truck," I found out to my horror. Meanwhile, Bernd and I opened another window so that we could see better. The SS were dragging people from the house next door, and from further on. These were all large blocks of flats, about 7 storeys high. The trucks were slowly filled with people. Suddenly one of the SS men shouted at us: "Hey, you, shut those windows at once!"

We were rather scared about having witnessed this whole episode, and shut the windows immediately.

"Next thing they will be after us," I said.

"No, don't worry. They are after the Poles," Günter said somewhat reassuringly.

"But where are they taking them? And why in the middle of the night?"

There was no answer to that question. Bewildered we stood behind the curtains, our eyes still fixed on the ugly scene before us. Could this possibly also happen to us, or were we safe from such violence? After the trucks were filled they left and all was quiet again, but it was hard to go back to sleep after seeing such cruelty and violence. We were really scared.

A few days later the house next door was taken over by the SS and one floor became the Headquarters of the Hitler Youth in Posen.



Until that time, life in Posen had been pretty peaceful, especially compared with other parts of Germany, where they had constant air raids and destruction and many deaths; particularly in places like Hamburg and Berlin. It seemed the war was passing us by. But it was not to be.

One night in May 1941 we were all fast asleep, when a tremendous explosion shattered the peace. Bernd was so fast asleep that he said in his sleep: "pick it up again", before he was fully awake. Glass was shattering and falling on to the pavements, and in a few minutes there was utter chaos on the street outside. Ambulance and fire engine sirens went, and people were coming out of their homes to see what had happened. Tante Else came into each room to calm us down and said: "It was probably a bomb. Now go back to bed, all of you, there is nothing we can do."

It was hard to go back to sleep after that crash, particularly as we didn't really know what it was. But sleep came eventually.

Next morning the explanation came over the radio: There had been a single mega bomb, which fell just a few streets from our block of flats, destroying three large blocks of flats. It was assumed that it was a single American plane that had tried to destroy the very important railway

station of Posen, not far from the impact.

After that bomb Posen received its first air raid sirens. They were installed on top of the blocks of flats at strategic corners. Cellars had to be cleared and fortified with sand bags and places prepared for people to sit. From then on we too knew that there was a war on. Many times the wailing of the sirens woke us, and we had to go into the cellar. Sometimes we would stay there for an hour or longer, until the 'all clear' came, a continuous high sound. Next day at school we would be bleary eyed and rather tired, but school always went on as if nothing had happened.

CHAPTER 4

Weekends at home

School was all right, but to be able to go home for the weekend was bliss. It was a return to one's roots, where one belonged, where reality could, for a time, be replaced with dreaming, the dreaming of a childhood paradise. Home was removed from the hustle and bustle of city life, away from the bombs and war, and the conflict between Germans and Poles, and more recently the influence of the Nazi party. I cannot remember ever taking homework with me for the weekend. School work and home in Sapowice did not seem to go together.

On Saturday mornings we would take our weekend bags with us to school. We usually had only five periods, finishing about 12.30 pm. Our train left about 1.20 pm, which gave us ample time to catch the tram to the station. The return fare for us students was 1.30 Reichs Mark. All four Tieman's met in the train, almost filling one compartment. The train was pulled by a steam locomotive and its carriages had an outside board to connect the compartments, where the conductor walked along to check tickets. Some carriages had two compartments with an isle connecting the two. This was the compartment which we usually selected for ourselves. There were about five or six carriages pulled by the train, two were reserved for Germans only. It took one hour to go the distance of about 30 kilometers from Posen to Strykowo, where Horst and Bernd lived, and which was also our station.

The train had to pass through seven stations before it reached Strykowo. The stop before it was Stęszew, a small market town, where apart from our butcher and chemist, there was also our German protestant church.

After Stęszew, when we were in a competitive mood, we would get ready for a race between our cousins and us.

"You will see, Horst, this time we will beat you to the corner of the highway," said Günter .

"No way," came the reply, "our horses are faster, and anyway with Walek and me, I think we can drive faster than your Franz."

"Well, we shall see. Make sure, Dieter, that you don't dilly-dally. Stay here behind me, and let Horst and Bernd go to the other door. When we come near the station, I'll open the door and go out on the runner board, then you come straight after me and then we can jump off the train at the same time."



Clutching my bag in one hand, and the door rail with the other, I wanted to make sure that this time it was not my fault that Horst and Bernd's coach won again.

The breaks squeaked, Günter opened the door.

"Don't kill yourself" shouted Günter, when I followed him on to the runner board.

I couldn't see where Horst and Bernd were, as I had to hang on to the rail. The platform was still a few meters away, but it was approaching fast. I knew I couldn't jump out at the speed we were still travelling. The breaks were squeaking louder, then I jumped. Günter was there too, and we both ran as fast as we could to where Franz was waiting with the two horses and the coach.



Our coach waiting at the station

"Quick, Franz, today we must win," shouted Günter, and off we went. "Whip the horses, come on!"

They went straight into a gallop. We looked back and saw the Strykowo coach hard on our heels. Their horses were better than ours, but this time we had the advantage of being off first. They tried to pass us, but suddenly there was an ox-cart on the road, and Horst, who by now had taken over the reigns from Walek, had to pull in the reins whilst we went full speed ahead. We had to turn to the right at the highway. There was no traffic coming and we were around the corner before Horst.

"Hurray, we won!" we both shouted and threw our arms up in victory.

Horst and Bernd's coach had to go straight, which led to their farm yard. We still had another three kilometers to go until we reached our home. We waved to them until their coach disappeared behind the houses. We were happy to know that Franz with our horses and our coach could beat the others, even if only once. But now the horses were allowed to trot. They did not let us down this time.

For special occasions we were allowed to come home on Fridays, and once we even had special dispensation from the Principal to come home on a Thursday. This was a day before the golden wedding anniversary of my grandparents. On the morning of Friday, 21 June 1940 I went with Vater and Günter to congratulate them. We met Opa in the servery.

"Happy anniversary, dear Opa. May you still have many more happy years together," we said to him.

"Thank you, thank you, so nice of you to come over."

"And where is Oma?"

"Oh, I have killed her this morning."

"Come on, Opa, that's a bad joke," Günter replied.

His face looked most mischievous, and then he began to laugh heartily. That was a typical Opa joke.

In the afternoon we had a huge party, with relatives and friends coming from all over the place, and our cousin Jetty Oboussier from Hamburg, who was the grand-daughter of Opa's sister, was also there.

Mutter had a wonderful gift for rhyming and poetry. She had put together a verse play for Günter, Bernd and me to perform in the afternoon. As the weather was warm and beautiful, the performance took place outside on the front lawn, with trees as a back drop. We were dressed up as dwarfs, and recounting some episodes of Opa and Oma's life, some serious, and some very funny ones. We had the audience in stitches. As Opa could not hear so well, he read the manuscript, instead of watching us, and of course he laughed at the wrong place. That increased the general merriment, and the whole day was a huge success. Dinner was a white tie affair and all ladies in long dresses. It was a fabulous dinner, produced by Fräulein Lina, Oma's cook and housekeeper, and everyone enjoyed it.

After this event it was not long before our long summer holidays began. Mutter was always very hospitable. She encouraged us to invite our friends home for the weekend. Günter had asked his friend Hans Zipper, who had been with us for several weekends already, to spend the 1940 summer holidays with us. We all liked him, and he joined our activities with great enthusiasm. After the holidays I wanted my own friend Helmut Herke to come. He was the friend I had gained after fighting him during the first week of school. He came eventually for a weekend in autumn of 1940. I was quite excited about this, as there was so much I wanted to show him. I was going to explain everything in detail to him, for I wanted him to like our home.

He came with us in the train and I told him about our races with the coaches. Helmut met Franz, our coachman, and also had to admire the horses, though he probably had never seen what we would call proper horses. They looked better than the horses you could see in Posen pulling the taxi-coaches there. They had to be able to run and be strong enough to run for at least half an hour at a time.

"Is it dangerous to race with a coach?"

"No, I don't think so, but it is probably not so good for the horses, nor for the coach on these rough roads."

When we passed the road sign with 'SAPOWICE' on it, I explained: "This is the road leading to our estate. You can see the lake there on our left. This lake is about 12 kilometers long, and goes from beyond Strykowo way past us. But on average it is only about 300 meters wide. It's more like a broad river, meandering through the fields here and further down our way through forest."

After about ten minutes we came to a forest.

"This is our border here. From here, as far as you can see, is our property. The land here is not as fertile as the rest, so our Opa planted the forest here on our right already in 1894."

"I can see a path going into the forest. Could we go in there by coach?"

"Of course. But we won't do it today. Those tall pine trees, the silver birches, and the odd fir trees, they are all about 50 years old. If you follow this drive way, you come to a place which is fenced in. There is a vault with the coffin of my father's brother Walter there. There is also a grave inside the fence where a sister of Horst and Bernd is buried. She died as an infant. I will show you the place one day."

Our coach went past the forest, and in the distance we could already see the park and the tall chestnut trees that lined the road which led into Sapowice.

"What is this monument under those trees?" Helmut wanted to know.

"That's a monument to a catholic saint called Święty Jan — Saint John. Our Poles here are mostly catholics and they will always show respect in some way to it, either by lifting their cap, or making the sign of the cross. We must not poke fun at their religion. They are serious about it."

"Why does the sign here say 'Schönsee'? I thought your place is called Sapowice?"

"Since we have become part of Germany, the administration would not allow the old Polish names. Why, they wouldn't even know how to pronounce them! Anyway, they wanted to give this area a German character, but when they came up with Schönsee, (meaning 'beautiful lake'), we were not very impressed. But there was nothing we could do."

When Franz stopped the horses, I said proudly: "This is our villa."

We jumped out, waved good bye to Franz, and instead of going up the front steps, we went through the side-door. Only Vater had a key to the front door, which he regularly used.

“Hello Mutter, this is Helmut. What’s for lunch?”

She greeted Helmut warmly and said: “You must be starving. Just go into the dining room. Olga has left you something nice. See for yourself.”

Klärchen, our cook, had left us soon after the German occupation. She had bought a shop in Rackwitz, her home town, where she was selling haberdashery and materials. A large slice from our childhood went with her. We visited her in Rackwitz several times. Later on she got married, and she stayed in contact with Mutter until just before she died.



Starch Factory, with workers' house in foreground

After lunch I said to Günter:

“I’ll take Helmut around the starch factory first, and then around the yard and tell him a bit about our farm.”

“You do that. I’m going to the yard to talk to the foremen. They usually tell me what went on during the past week.”

Helmut and I strolled off, past the yard and through the gate that lead to our starch factory.

“Let’s start where the potatoes are stored. This huge pit can store tons and tons of potatoes. Can you see the drain there running along the bottom of the pit?”

“It’s all covered by pieces of timber, except that one segment over there.”

“Yes, that’s where the potatoes are shoved in and a strong jet of water flushes them forward to the washer. Come, I’ll show you.”

“Does this factory operate all year round?”

“No, it only works seasonally, from now till early spring.”

Then I told him how Vater had been modernising the factory each year. At first only the potatoes grown on the farm were used in the factory, but recently that large pit had been added and farmers from the surrounding area would be delivering their potatoes and fill it shortly with potatoes. As this factory used a lot of water, we were fortunate to be able to use water from the lake.

We entered the factory through a side door. I showed Helmut where the washed potatoes came into the graters, and I warned him to keep his fingers out of there, as the teeth were terribly sharp and were spinning at enormous speed. From there the pulp was pumped into large settling channels, where the starch was separated from the pulp. As the starch was heavier than the pulp, it settled on the bottom of several trenches, and was then flushed out with a strong jet of water. This starch milk was then piped into a centrifuge which separated the water from the starch. The pulp without the starch was used as fodder for our cattle.

“Come, I’ll show you how the centrifuge works. This here is one of my favourite spots.”

“But there is no one working here?”

He was a bit uneasy as it seemed a dangerous place with lots of driving belts crossing overhead, and pipes going in all directions.

“Oh, yes, there is. There is only one woman here now. Before this new machine came, two women had to work here, and the work was very hard. They had to put their sharp instruments against the wall of the centrifuge, and get the starch out all by hand. The machine does it all automatically. Watch out, here comes Maria. Can I show my friend Helmut how this works?”

“Hallo, Master, we are home for the weekend again, hey? And you want to show your friend? Go ahead then.”

I pressed the knob and a very sharp vertical cutting edge moved slowly towards the edge of the centrifuge, where all the starch had clung to, like after a spin of a washing machine. As it touched the crust of the starch it began to force it along a pipe which led to an elevator belt. More and more starch was pushed into the pipe, and the elevator seemed to work overtime, but it managed to carry all the starch up, through the ceiling. Then the centrifuge was empty. Another pushbutton moved the cutting edge back to its former position.

“Thank you, Maria. See you again. Come on Helmut, we have to go upstairs now, to where the elevator belt has carried the starch.”

We walked to the top floor, and again a narrow staircase to the top of the huge drier. This area was always warm, and I would sometimes spend hours there. The workers in the factory were already saying, that one day I would inherit the factory, and Günter the land.

“Here, this container stores all the starch from the centrifuge, and the auger distributes it evenly over the drier. Be careful that you don’t put

your fingers into this auger, or they can be cut off in no time!”

We peeped through a window of the drier. There, on about 20 meters long and two meters broad sheets of canvas the starch was travelling slowly from one layer to the next, about 15 layers in all. By the time it had travelled to the bottom layer, it was dry. Then the starch was sifted through a fine silk screen and bagged into 100 kg bags, sealed and stored, ready for shipment.

“That was interesting, for sure,” said Helmut. “I liked the machine room best with all those moving parts.”

“Oh, I forgot to show you, that is also where the generator is housed. We make our own electricity. There is a column of batteries which are storing electricity, and when we or Opa and Oma are putting our lights on, the power comes from here, even when the machines are not going.”

“How can that be?” he wanted to know. “Didn’t our teacher tell us that to produce a current, a turbine must constantly be turning?”

“Yes, that’s correct, but we are producing D.C., not A.C. This is a much cheaper way of producing electricity.”



Farm Yard, Cowshed on left, horses stables next.
In centre the Forge and Carpenter's shop.

Then I took Helmut through our farm yard, starting with the cow shed on our left. I told him that we had about 100 milking cows, that they were milked twice a day by a team of about 15 women, mostly the wives of the workers, and that milking time was usually from 4 to 5 in the afternoon, and then again 4 to 5 in the morning.

“That’s very early. Isn’t it still dark then.”

“Of course, but that’s why we also need electricity here. After the women have milked a cow, they bring the full bucket here into the cool room where the milk filter stands. They pour it there into that container at the top. Then it runs through the filter and the cooler and is collected

in those big milk cans of about 20 litres. These are then carted into a cellar on the other side of the yard. That place is cooled in summer by ice."

"Where do you get ice from in this village?"

"I thought you would ask that. It comes from our lake."

Then I explained how each winter, when the ice was about 20 cm to 30 cm thick, our workers had to go on the lake with axes, picks and hooks and had to cut slabs of ice while they were standing on the edge. This was quite a tricky job, as it was very slippery, and they had to be careful not to slip into the ice cold water. The ice was then pulled out of the water with hooks, loaded onto carts, taken to a place near the factory, and stacked high, making a mound with a radius of about 15 meters and about five meters high. When the mound was finished, it was covered with water and left to freeze over night into a solid block, before it was covered with lots of layers of straw and earth. That heap provided the ice in summer for cooling the milk, a slab at a time.

"It sounds very complicated to me," said Helmut.

"Maybe, but what else can we do. And you know what? For special birthdays, particularly Opa's on the 29th of July, this ice is used to make the most delicious ice cream you can imagine. Usually strawberry or raspberry with real cream and fresh fruit. Yum. So you see, it's not all wasted on just cooling the milk."

"How can you make ice cream with ice from the lake?"

"There is a special machine. You place the ice cream mixture into a metal container which has a mixer attached to it. This container is then placed into what looks like a wooden bucket with plenty of space on all sides. A handle on the outside turns the mixer in the ice cream mix. Then you crush the ice from that heap into small pieces and place it around into the space between the container and the bucket and sprinkle occasionally salt into it."

"Why salt?"

"It melts the ice slowly, and as it melts it gives off cold. This helps to freeze the ice cream mixture."

"How long would it take to freeze the ice cream?"

"We need someone with a lot of patience and energy to turn the handle, as it takes more than one hour, usually two. But I tell you the ice cream that comes out is one of the most delicious things you can eat. Just out of this world!"

"You reckon it is better than the one we can buy in the ice cream parlour in Posen?"

"Much, much better. But let's come back to our milk here. The evening milk needs the cooling, not the morning milk, as that is put straight onto the milk-cart. We have a special driver with two horses, who goes every day to the milk factory in Posen. It takes him about three hours one way. The fresh milk you buy in the shops probably comes from us here."

"I never thought of where it might come from."

“Well, now you know.”

Helmut was intrigued to hear that the milk driver had to do errands for Mutter or Oma occasionally. For him, shopping was just round the corner. We had to get our cheese and butter from the factory.

“One day we received a large piece of ‘blue cheese’. The manager of the factory told us, a customer of theirs had returned the cheese complaining it had gone mouldy already. Well, I tell you, we didn’t mind. I love ‘blue cheese’, don’t you, Helmut?”

“No, I don’t like it.”

“We all do, especially now that cheese is rationed, to get an extra portion was really good. I must tell you another story which is linked with the milk cart going daily to Posen. When my sister Gerda was born in December 1937, I couldn’t understand why it took so long for her to get home. I suggested that she could be picked up by the milk-driver and brought home on the milk-cart. I was very disappointed when she wasn’t among the other parcels.”

“That was rather dumb.”

“I was only nine then.”

After the cow-shed we came to the horse stables. We had over fifty work horses. Each horseman or fomal in Polish, had to look after four horses, feed them, clean them, and then work with them (depending on the season, either ploughing, pulling the harvesters, or pulling the carts). When they worked with just two horses, someone else ‘borrowed’ the other two.

When Helmut saw some name plaques above the mangers, he wanted to know if that meant anything. I told him that Günter and I had given each horse a name. Günter had worked out a system whereby we could tell the age of each horse. The oldest horses got a name starting with the letter ‘A’, then ‘B’ and so on. The youngest were now starting with the letter ‘P’, like the three-year-old ‘Pollux’. Then I had to explain to him how the fornals were good at telling the age of a horse, by just looking at their teeth. The older they are, the shorter they get.

“But what’s the point of all this?”

“When harvest time comes, we help in the field and earn ourselves some pocket money. The foreman tells us the name of the horse which we are to take. It usually is an old one, very docile. We wouldn’t be allowed to take a young one.”

Then I showed him how we harnessed a horse to a rake in the shed. Just one horse per rake. There were usually two or three rakes required at harvest time. Günter would take one, I would take another, and if Hans was around, (Günter’s school friend), he would take the third. The rakes were about three meters wide, so when we sat on one going to a field we had to be careful not to bump into anything. In the field, the corn had been cut and the bundles were all put into neat rows of stacks. We had to rake between these stacks. Whenever the rake was full, the driver had to

step on a lever which hooked into a notch on both wheels. This lifted the rake and released the straw, which still had to be thrashed. We had to make sure that the bits we raked together were all placed in one row, so that when the corn was brought in it was easier to load on the carts.

I told him that at times it was quite tiring work. We had to get up at five in the morning, and didn't come home much before 7 pm. Although the hours were long it was not boring to sit all day long on these rakes.

"I like it very much. The whole field is yours, perhaps 30 or up to 50 hectares. I can listen to the larks singing in the sky, or watch perhaps a doe jumping across the field, or a hare, or very occasionally a trappe, a large grey bird. There is also plenty of time for day-dreaming. When the warm sun is higher in the sky we take off our shirts and sing or talk to ourselves. Mutter always packs us something for breakfast or afternoon tea, nice things, you know. We have to come home for lunch, as the horses need to be fed and watered. That is also part of our job. Horses always come first, then we can go home for lunch."

"Have you been doing this for long?"

"No, we only started this year."

"And for how long does this last?"

"Practically throughout the school holidays, starting with barley early July, then rye, wheat, and the last is oats. We finished last month. When my parents asked us if we wanted to go somewhere for our holidays, we just said 'no'. Even to come to Opa's birthday, they had to persuade us first. I guess we look at it as our job, for which we get paid, so we can't just run away from it any time it suits us. On our way home in the evening, we are really tired. Then we just sing to ourselves, or listen to the Polish women singing on top of the fully laden harvesting carts."

"I don't know whether I would like it."

"You might get used to it?"

"Maybe."

"What else is there to see in this yard?"

"Come, I'll show you."

We crossed a cobbled area, and I showed him the pigs. They were just for our own use, as we didn't sell any. Then I had to explain to Helmut, how Mutter had become well known for her recipes for liverwurst and salami, and how a couple of workers had to do the killing near our house. One of the men took a big wooden hammer and hit the pig between the eyes. One hit stunned the pig. It just slumped down. Only if he missed, the pig would give a loud squeak. Then an artery was cut in the neck with a sharp knife, and the other man had to catch the blood in a large bowl. The blood had to be stirred vigorously by hand to stop it from coagulating. Later it was used for blutwurst (black pudding). Then the pig's carcass was heaved into a trough and boiling hot water poured over it, to remove the bristles and to clean it properly everywhere.

"Are you allowed to watch all this?"

"Of course, otherwise I couldn't tell you this. The girls always make a terrible fuss about looking away when the gory parts happen, but we don't mind. After it is clean, they expose the sinews of the hind legs and put a strong wooden bar through it, and a hook. It had to be hung up with its back on a ladder, which was leaning against a tree, head down. Then the stomach is slit open carefully, so that nothing inside is damaged. All the intestines and internal organs are then inspected to see whether they are healthy or not, and a piece of meat is sent in to the meat inspector, who tests for trichinosis. The intestines are cut and thoroughly cleaned, as they are filled with sausage meat the next day. Then the carcass is quartered and hung in the cellar also for the next day. That's when the real meat processing starts."

And I told him how the following day everyone in the household was busy. The liver, kidneys, lungs and some fat was boiled, finely minced and made into liverwurst. The legs were sent off to the smoking chamber to be cured as ham. Much of the other meat was minced and made into salami, which also had to be smoked. Weiss-wurst is really white bread soaked in fatty broth with some meat, and black pudding is white bread soaked in blood and again some meat. All these were pressed through a sausage machine, filling all the available guts. Sometimes additional guts had to be bought. Except for the salamis, all other sausages were boiled in the large copper. If one or two sausages burst in the process, we had a better and more substantial wurst soup that evening for supper.

"That's quite a lot of work, then?"

"Yes, but it is well worth it. There is nothing like home made liverwurst or home made salami! You'll see for yourself at supper time."

"I'm already looking forward to it."

"Are you getting hungry? What do you think, can we finish our tour first before we turn in, or do you want to go home straight away?"

"Oh, let's finish first, there can't be much left."

"Actually, there still is quite a lot to see."

I showed him quickly the chicken house, which had chickens, turkeys, geese and ducks, all again for our own use. Then came a building for the calves and heifers and at the far end were the stalls for the bullocks, which were used as draft animals. Around the corner was a long barn. Some steps led to the cellar where our fresh milk was stored before it went to Posen. The door in the middle of the barn was an entrance to the grain store, and behind that was another barn.

"Before we come to the last building, I want to show you our forge and carpenter shop. They stand here in the middle of the yard. Let's see the forge first."

As we entered the forge I said: "I would like you to meet our master smith Kowalski, and these are his two assistants."

"Good afternoon, what can we do for you?"

"I just want to show my friend here the bellows. If you pull this lever, it

blows and the coals get red hot.”

“I have to shoe this horse here, master, so I can show your friend.”

“Oh, great, thanks.”

Sparks were flying as Kowalski put his iron into the flames. A minute or so in the fire, and the iron was red hot. The smith held it with a long tongue on the anvil and hammered on it, until it had the desired shape. Then he dipped it into cold water and went over to the horse to see if it would fit. A little blow on one side, and it was ready to be nailed to the horses hooves. A smell of burnt hoof came into our nostrils.

“It smells like burnt hair,” said Helmut.

It did. I just nodded.

“Kowalski is really a master smith. He can repair most of our farm tools and machinery. He is very good.”

A broad grin appeared on Kowalski’s blackened face. He knew he was a good tradesman, but he also liked to be appreciated.

“We must be off again, see you later.”

“Now to the Carpenters around the corner.”

We entered a large workshop and as we walked towards the work bench, a lot of wood shavings curled around our legs.

“This place always looks untidy, full of saw dust and wood shavings, but the work done here is again excellent. Master Novak has helped to build our house, and he made us a lot of toys. I sometimes call it Father Christmas’ work shop. He can do practically anything.”

Master Novak was working the chain saw again and because of the noise it made, he had not seen us coming in. I pointed to his missing finger and said: “He lost it working this saw, not so long ago. I’m glad I wasn’t here when it happened. He said that there was a lot of blood. I probably would have fainted.”

After a brief exchange of greetings we left the workshop again. Novak was too busy. We went straight to the coach house which contained about ten coaches plus our two cars: a black Chevrolet belonging to Opa and Oma, and a Hansa sports cabriolet, which was ours.

Helmut remarked about the large number of coaches and wanted to know what they were needed for.

“The biggest coach here can carry nine passengers. We use it when we take the whole family for an outing on Sundays into the forest, or for a drive around the fields. The six-seater or the four-seater usually takes us to the station. We arrived with the sixer this afternoon. The coach with a folding roof is used mainly by my grand-parents, and the completely closed-in coach standing in the corner is for bad weather, rain or snow, and it is usually used by Oma.”

“And the two little ones?”

“They are buggies, handy for just one passenger and the driver. We only need one horse for these.”

“And this looks like a sleigh?”

"It is. It will seat six. It is drawn by two horses. Come into this side room here. Inside that cupboard, there are two splendid bell arrangements, one for each horse."

"That really looks like it is out of a fairy tale. The tuft of horse hair on top of all the bells, it is all so colourful and looks really beautiful. But — do you really use it?"

"You can be sure of that. If you come to visit during winter, you will see it in use. The sleigh glides so quietly over the snow, that no one would hear it without the bells. All sleighs have some type of bells. This here is just a little more elaborate. At every step of the horse the bells jingle. It's very practical. Come through this door. It leads straight to the stables."

Then I showed him our two pairs of coach horses. They always went together in pairs, as they had to get used to one another to work as a team. In a separate pen was Vater's riding horse, a full-blood Arab.

"That looks mighty strong, and quite tall. Can you ride it too?"

"Not as a rule. It is strictly Vater's. But once he told me that I could ride it, as he had to stay all day in Posen, and it is not good for the horse to stay inside all day. I rode to the woods, which we passed on the way, and on the way back I let him run as fast as he wanted to go. I tell you, it was fast, like on a racing track. A bit scary at first, but I had him in control, and the feeling was great. It was the most exciting ride I ever had."

"What about the other horses here, can they be ridden?"

"Yes, we learned to ride on them. They are much slower, of course, but still good riding horses. Our saddles are kept in this ante-room. Vater gave us our first riding lessons in the park on the grass. He held the horse on a long line and it could go around in a circle. He taught us to sit straight, to have proper leg-contact with the horse, and how to use the reins. When we had mastered that we were allowed to go out into the fields on horse-back. Sometimes we arranged to meet up with Horst and Bernd, perhaps also with Vater and Onkel Werner, and then we had a great time all together riding in a group around the fields, or along the lake. It is such a good atmosphere, especially early in the mornings."

"Do you think I could go on one of those riding trips?"

"I'm not sure. You need to be able to control the horse first, but we'll see."

We walked through the door into the yard again. On our left was the wing that closed the rectangle of the big yard. It consisted of the house of the administrator, a grain store upstairs, and the nursery for our calves.

"The female calves come here as soon as their mother has licked them dry after birth. They are given their mother's milk mixed with some eggs, to make them strong and healthy. The male calves are sold to the Słeszew butcher. Do you want to let a calf suck your finger? Watch this."

I held my finger through the barrier and the calf began immediately to suck vigorously on my finger.

"Let me try," said Helmut. "Oh, it tickles. The calf has such a rough tongue."

“Yes. It misses its mother.”

We left the calf standing there, giving off a pathetic bleat. Then we walked through the main gate.

“This is locked during the night, so no strangers can come in. That completes our tour through the yard. Can you see the pump there on the outside wall?”

Helmut nodded.

“That is our village pump. The whole village comes here to fetch water. They don’t have running water in their homes, of course. When you lift the handle it usually makes a squeaky noise, like this.”

I pumped, and sure enough there was the squeak, and beautifully clear water came through the spout.

“The water from this well is the best drinking water in the whole district. Even from Strykowo they come with big milk-cans to fetch drinking water from our pump. Inside the house we have a motor pump, which pumps water about twice a day into a large water container under the roof. This gives enough pressure to have running water everywhere, but the water is not the same quality. Our girls still come here to get the drinking water. Before we had the electric pump, a man came once a day from the village to pump with a hand pump till the tank was full.”

“That sure beats carting or carrying it from here.”

From the corner of the cowshed I showed Helmut the village street. There were about eight to ten houses which belonged to our estate, where our workers lived. They had all been built after the first World War and were in good condition, each housing at least two families. The total workforce on the farm was more than 100, counting the women who did the milking and helped with harvesting on a part-time basis. Beyond our buildings stretched the village with about twenty peasants with their modest homes and farmyards. The village school was also in that area.

“Gee, it’s getting dark. Let’s go home. Supper should be on soon. Tomorrow I’ll show you the garden. That’s also quite interesting.”

“Sehr gut,” said Helmut, as we washed our hands for supper.

The maid brought in two steaming platters, one with mashed potatoes, one with fried eggs. After that we had bread with salami and cheese, which had been nicely arranged by the cook. To finish off we were served with stewed fruit and starch custard.

“The starch for this custard came from our starch factory, Helmut. I think that’s the best way to use starch, but it is also used in the proper custard powders, starch for washing and in many other food products.”

Our family loved it, but I was not too sure whether Helmut did, as it didn’t taste the same as shop custard.

The next day was one of those brilliant autumn days which we were blessed to have in Poland quite frequently. After breakfast Helmut and I roamed around the park.

“You were going to show me your garden,” said Helmut.

“Oh yes, I forgot. Let’s go then.”

We walked past Oma and Opa’s house, over a bridge, past the cat house with its cage, (in spring and summer Oma’s black angora cat was banished to it so it wouldn’t catch any birds), until we came to a large wooden gate, which led to the fruit and vegetable garden. Right next to the gate was a hot house.

“Come and have a look at those grapes, Helmut.”

“They look enormous. Gee, I wish we could eat some of these,” he said as he handled the padlock which held the chain in the clamp. It was firmly locked. Our eyes were caressing the fully grown and ripe dark red grapes hanging from the vines.

“No problem,” I said. “They are actually the prized possession of Opa, and he won’t let anyone near them. That’s why he keeps the door locked. But watch this.”

There were strong hinges on the door, but no guard over them. I just lifted the hinge side of the door, and we could open it.

“Let’s go in”, I said.

At that moment, the garden gate opened. Nellie, Opa’s little pincher dog, appeared first, and behind her the tall dark figure of Opa emerged.

We had just enough time to lean the wire door to the hinges, and stood there bedraggled, caught in the act, as it were, guilt written all over our faces.

“Ah, you naughty boys, want to steal my grapes,” he said as he came to the door and checked the lock. “But you can’t. See, it’s locked.”

With a feeling of deep satisfaction he left us standing there, while we blessed our lucky stars.

“Well, this taught us to be more careful next time,” I laughed, and as it was safe by this time, we both entered the green house and took our time to pick the biggest and ripest bunch of grapes.

We made sure the door was back on its hinges, as we left. “Now let’s get out of here before anyone else comes.”

We took our loot to a big fir tree, which hid us completely from the view of any passers-by. We didn’t want any more surprises.

“They are absolutely delicious,” said Helmut. “I have never tasted anything like it before.”

“Well, you know the proverb about stolen fruit tasting the best. It’s true, isn’t it?”

“It sure is.”

“Now let’s go into the garden again and have a look around. There may be more to eat, but this time it is all legitimate.”

Coming through the gate, we turned left. About thirty meters along the fence was another green house. This too had delicious grapes hanging, just waiting to be picked, but we had enough with the bunch we had eaten, and besides, we could not have opened that door anyway.

“The trees you see here have all been planted this year. Last winter was

so severe that we lost most of our fruit trees. Beyond the hawthorn hedge is our vegetable garden. We also have our strawberries and raspberries there, but, of course, they only come in early summer.”

“I love strawberries.”

“Well, you just have to come again here often, then you will get as many strawberries as you can eat.”

“That sounds terrific.”

We walked through the gate in the hedge and came to a long path lined with beautiful flowers.

“This looks pretty,” commented Helmut.

“Opa also likes flowers, so there are always plenty of them. But Mutter can’t plant what she wants here. Opa is still in charge, and he won’t let anyone meddle in it.”

We came to a patch of tomatoes and picked a couple of ripe ones. They were delicious. Further down was Jadwiga, who worked the garden under Opa’s instructions.

“Hello, Jadwiga, what else is there to eat. We have already tried the tomatoes, they are very nice.”

“There are some nice rock melons. I’m not supposed to give you any of those, but seeing you have brought your friend along, see if you like them.”

“They are very juicy. Thanks, Jadwiga.” And we moved on, through another gate in the hedge, which brought us back to the first part, where the young fruit trees were growing.

“Once they have grown, we’ll have plenty of fruit here,” I said to Helmut. Then I showed him large shrubs of hazelnuts on the side of the lake, but they were not quite ripe yet. Usually the squirrels harvested them, unless we can outsmart them.

“How about going to the lake now?”

“Yes, we can do that, on our way to the tennis court.”

“You also have a tennis court here?”

“Yes, Helmut, but my parents don’t play any more, and they say that we are too young, so it is a bit neglected.”

“What a pity. I would like to learn to play tennis.”

“So would I. Horst is playing in Strykowo, but then he is four years older than I.”

“We have also a vertical climbing bar there, and a parallel bar to do your push-ups.”

“Let’s go there then.”

We had a lovely time on the bars, climbing over the whole structure, and jumping about. Soon it was lunch time.

In the afternoon we went by coach around our estate, to show Helmut all the land that we owned. Franz was sitting on the driver’s seat, but Helmut and I were allowed to sit next to him. I was lucky to have my friend with me, for usually we had to take our turns.

"All this belongs to us," I said, pointing to the horizon.

"It's really big," Helmut said, "As far as the eye can see, hey?"

"These buildings which you can see over there under the trees also belong to us. That is called 'Antonin'. Opa bought it, because some excellent land came with it. We are now using it as an out station, and the sheds are used for some more young cattle. The worker responsible for this, lives in the farm house."

"Well, you sure have plenty of land."

When we arrived back home, it was time to pack our bags. Supper was served, and after a walk with the whole family through the park, we went to bed.

Next morning Vater got us up at 5. He was already dressed and ready to start his day. We said good-bye to him, had a quick breakfast, a drink from a thermos, and there was Franz already waiting with the six-seater coach. Günter went straight to the front seat next to Franz, and we settled in the back.

No one spoke much. It was too early.

Helmut was deep in thought.

"It's been really a prima weekend," he said, "Thanks for inviting me."

"You must come again."

"That's for sure."

The train was on time. A new week awaited us in Posen.

Winter in Sapowice

Winter in Sapowice had a special attraction for us. Living in Poland, so far away from the influence of the Gulf Stream, our climate was far more extreme than in Germany. Our winters were much colder, and if Vater called it a good winter, we would have plenty of snow. This snow cover protected the winter crops and provided the most essential moisture for the soil in spring, in an otherwise very dry climate. For us children there was always something to do, either skating on the lake, or skiing on the few slopes we had, or going hunting. But best of all, of course, was Christmas, which for us children was pure magic.

Our linden tree had lost all its leaves in winter. Where could I go for my dreaming? It had to be somewhere inside, where I felt safe and inconspicuous. In Günter's and my room stood our rocking horse pony. I loved it, and would often sit on it, stroking its fur or its mane, and gently rocking myself into dreamland. I had been doing it for years, and now that I was twelve, I felt I could mount it as always, and slip back in time to the dim past of my memory, where reality and dreaming mingled into a sweet sensation of coziness, security and happiness. I knew, nothing in the world would ever be able to take that feeling away from me.



It was the Advent season of 1933. For us it was, in the truest sense of the word, a preparation time for Christmas. It was laced with secrets and magic.

On the evening before the first Sunday in Advent Mutter said to us: "Children, tomorrow is the first Sunday in Advent. Father Christmas is working already, and one never knows, he may pass by your window tonight. If he sees little slippers behind the curtain on the window sill, he might leave a sign behind, that Christmas is near."

"What could that be?" we both wanted to know.

"Maybe some Christmas biscuits or something nice to eat."

"Oh, can I put out one of Günter's slippers? It is slightly bigger than mine, perhaps I might get a wee bit more from Father Christmas that way?"

"You never know," Mutter said, "you may not get anything at all if you are too greedy."

But I thought it was worth the risk. I put Günter's slipper on the second window sill, whilst Günter put his other slipper on the window sill nearest our beds.

"Tomorrow we shall see what we'll get," I said with my usual optimism.

Next morning, at first day light, we sneaked to the windows and looked behind the curtain.

"Look, Günter, I've got something in your slipper."

"Why, that's also mine," he teased me, "but you can have the biscuits in my slipper this time. I've got some of my own here."

"Oh, they smell so delicious. Dear Father Christmas hasn't forgotten us. But I didn't get any more than you."

This practice went on for all four Sundays in Advent. Also, on the first of December, we received an Advent Calendar on a piece of cardboard with little doors to open each day until the 24th. The excitement grew from day to day.

One evening, Klärchen came to our dining room, where we were sitting around the table, cutting out, pasting, and occupying ourselves for Christmas. She said: "Irene asked me if you are going to buy anything for Vater or Mutter for Christmas this year, but I told her, 'where could they buy anything here?' You always make something for them, don't you?"

"Yes, Klärchen, but what can I make this year?" I asked her, "I never know what to do."

"How about a bookmark. I'll cut it out for you and you can take a needle and some wool and sew a nice border around it."

"Yes, Klärchen, make it in the shape of a pussy cat please."

Klärchen sat down at the table to start work, when Mutter came in. Günter pushed his work under the table cloth, but when he saw it was Mutter, he got it out again.

"I thought it was Vater coming in."

"No, he is out somewhere."

"What, so late? It is already pitch dark outside."

"Yes, poor Vater, he is always working."

Suddenly there was a loud knock at the veranda door. It was always locked and barred in winter, and no one had ever knocked there before. It seemed strange to us. Mutter said: "Don't you boys want to open the door and see who it is?"

"No," we both said at the same time. It seemed a bit spooky to us. I jumped on Klärchen's knee, where I felt more secure.

So Mutter had to open the door, after it had knocked a second time, this time much louder and more urgent.

In came an old man. He looked enormous to us. He had a large fur cap on his head, and a long white beard, and heavy boots. On his back was an old potato bag, stuffed with things.

Mutter exclaimed: "Oh, Father Christmas, how nice of you to call in."

Could this really be Father Christmas, I thought? He certainly looked like him with his long white beard, and large fur cap. But I wasn't too sure. I hung on to Klärchen with a firm grip.

Then I heard this deep voice asking us: "Have you been good boys, Günter and Dieter? Are you always obedient to your parents, to Klärchen and to the others?"

I couldn't say anything because I was far too frightened. All I managed was a very tentative nod. But then I remembered all my misdeeds in the past, there seemed to be so many. So I began to shake my head violently.

"No?" he looked me in the eye, "You have been naughty?"

I said very hesitatingly: "Yes, Father Christmas."

He took off his big sack from his back and pulled out a small broom made from thin willow twigs.

"I think I'll leave that here, just in case you need to be punished," and he handed it to Klärchen.

By then we were even more frightened, but Father Christmas continued: "Have you learnt some Christmas carols, boys?"

"Yes" we said both together, hoping that that would make him more friendly.

"Well, then you had better sing one for me."

And so we plucked up all our courage and sang, at first haltingly, but then with more confidence, a song that Klärchen had taught us:

"Morgen Kinder, wirds was geben,
morgen werden wir uns freun,
welch ein Jubel, welch ein Segen
wird in unserem Hause sein.
Einmal werden wir noch wach
heissa, dann ist's Weihnachtsnacht."

Tomorrow children you'll get something,
tomorrow we shall all be glad,
Oh what joy, and oh what blessing
there shall be in our home.
Only once shall we awake
yippee, then is Christmas Eve.

By then Günter plucked up some more courage and said to Father Christmas: "Look, what I am making for Vater for Christmas! It's a letter opener."

Dutifully Father Christmas inspected his handiwork. He seemed to nod with approval: "That is good work, Günter."

Then he turned to me: "And what are you doing for Christmas?"

I pointed to Klärchen and to the outline of a pussy cat for a book mark

on the table and whispered: "That's for Mutter."

"Oh, good. So you are good boys, after all. In that case I can leave a little gift for you here."

He delved into his bag again and brought out two little parcels and put them on the table.

"Here, this one is for you," he gave one to Günter, "and this one is for you." I received a little red parcel with a green ribbon.

"You can open it later, and if you are good, I'll bring some more on Christmas eve."

"Thank you, Father Christmas," we said together.

"Well, I had better be off again. There are many more children to visit. Be good and behave yourselves."

A cold draft came in as he opened the door. We heard a few heavy stomps from his boots outside, and then he was gone. For a moment we were all silent. What could one say after such a visit? It had been, to say the least, awe-inspiring.

Soon after this, Vater appeared.

"Vater, Vater, you missed him?"

"Missed whom?"

"Father Christmas was here. Yes, he came to visit us, and look what he has left for us."

"Well, that is very nice of him. Aren't you going to open your presents?"

When I unwrapped mine, I saw a little tin soldier in his sentry box emerging from the paper. Günter had a soldier in a shooting position.

"We can add these to our soldier collection," I said. "Isn't that nice of Father Christmas."



The rocking horse stopped for a moment. I thought, how stupid we were then, believing in Father Christmas, and showing him the presents we were making for Vater, when hidden under the furside-turned-out-footwarmer, and behind the white beard was Vater himself. We had given away our Christmas secret.

This practice of Vater turning up as Father Christmas stopped when we were about six or seven. By then Günter was already suspicious, as Vater was never present during those visits, and I think he might have also recognised his voice.

As I began rocking again, my mind went back only a couple of years.



Christmas 1938. Fräulein Parr had taught us to work with ply-wood, and also how to carve wood. We were again sitting in our dining room and thinking, what we could make for Christmas for our parents and grandparents.

“What are you going to make for Vater and Mutter this year?” I asked Günter while I was still wondering whether I should make a little jewellery box out of ply wood or a calendar mount.

“A holder for note paper to put on his desk for Vater and a candle holder for Mutter.”

Günter was always sure, whilst I liked to do something more challenging, but then lacked the courage. To make a jewellery box required a lot of patience, and needed detailed work. The pattern had to be drawn onto the ply wood and then with the jig saw the lines had to be carefully cut out, then smoothed with sand paper, the wood stained and finally lined with a contrasting colour felt.

“I’m going to make the jewellery box,” I decided. “Do you think the green felt will look nice as a lining?”

“Depends on what colour you are going to stain the wood.”

“Dark brown, I thought.”

“Yes, that will look nice.”

The first panel went all right, but with the second a leaf in the pattern broke off and left an ugly gap. I couldn’t repair it, so I had to start again. Eventually I finished it, after working at it for several nights.

“Doesn’t this look beautiful,” I admired my own work.

“Yes, Dieter, it does look very nice. Mutter should be pleased with that,” said Günter.

His approval was very important to me.



Christmas is so full of wonderful memories. I was rocking again on my horse. It was so nice to dream of the time when I still believed in Father Christmas.

A couple of days before Christmas Mutter called us: “Get me some moss, and some stones, children. Make sure the stones are not too small. Like my fist, or double that size.”

We were pleased to be useful, for we knew that this too was part of the Christmas preparations.

We never saw the christmas tree brought into the house. We firmly believed that Father Christmas did all that. About two days before Christmas Eve the doors to Mutters lounge were locked, all three of them. Sometimes we would call out through one of the closed door: “Father Christmas, sound the bells please!”

After a some intense waiting, we heard the tone of a small, high pitched bell, ringing vigorously for a brief time, and then there was silence again.

Sometimes, to heighten our expectations, if that was possible, Mutter or Vater would open one door to the christmas room when all was dark and we were allowed to take a deep breath and smell all those delicious smells of Christmas: the fir tree, the candle wax, christmas biscuits and chocolates and all the rest.

Finally, Christmas Eve arrived. It was 3 pm.

"Children, are you all ready for church? We are going in five minutes. Have a look if Franz is already standing outside with the sleigh. And put your fur coats on, it will be cold."

As usual, we were ready before our parents, all wrapped up and eager to go into the cold winter afternoon. Franz was waiting, both horses were harnessed with their jingle bells, and I saw he also had the lanterns ready with the candles, for our homeward journey.

When we were all wrapped up in sheepskin blankets, Franz made a sound with his whip and the sleigh moved silently through the snow. Had it not been for the bells, no one would have known that there was a vehicle on the road. It took us half an hour to get to Stęszew.

The church was decorated with a christmas tree, on which lots of candles had been lit. By then it was already getting dark, but there were so many candles that it seemed like daylight to us.

We sang lots of carols. The familiar christmas story from Luke's Gospel was read. Some brief words addressed to all, us children included. Another carol was sung, and we were on our way home. A few stars appeared in the slowly darkening sky. I was wondering, which one it had been, that had pointed the way to the manger.

Back at home we could hardly contain our excitement. We assembled in the lounge with Mutter. We were sitting in the dark. Vater had mysteriously disappeared. Through the key hole we could see some light. Then we heard the gramophone play: "Ihr Kinderlein kommet" (Come, all ye children).

The double door opened. There, before our eyes, was the most wonderful christmas tree, brightly lit with lots and lots of flickering candles, lametta (tinsel), some coloured glass balls, and the branches laden heavily with what looked like snow. Under one of them was a low table with the nativity scene. There we saw the moss and stones we had brought in a couple of days earlier, the moss as grass for the sheep, and the stones as rocks, surrounding a pool of water. On top of one of them stood an angel, who announced to the shepherds the birth of the Saviour. Above this angel, hanging on the branch of the tree, was the 'great army of heaven's angels'. Under another branch was the stable with Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus lying in a manger, together with the ox and donkey. More shepherds, but no wise men, it was strictly according to Luke's Gospel.

We stood there, full of wonder and amazement, and sang:

Ihr Kinderlein kommet, oh kommet doch all,
zur Krippe her kommet, in Bethlehems Stall,
und seht was in dieser hoch heiligen Nacht
der Vater im Himmel für Freude uns macht.

Oh come all ye children, oh come one and all,
come near to the manger, in Bethlehem's stall,
and see what the Father in heaven has done,
on this holy night he brings joy to every one.

After singing all three verses, and looking at the nativity scene, and having been to church before, we knew why we were celebrating Christmas. Then we were allowed to turn our eyes towards the table where our presents lay, all unwrapped and beautifully arranged, Günter's on the left, mine on the right, and in the middle was the most beautiful gingerbread house, straight from the fairy tale of Hänsel and Gretel.

"This shirt is from Tante Margaret and Onkel Werner, and this teddy from Oma Hulm. Dieter, this book is for you from Tante Joni. It tells the story of the Ugly Duckling. And this wooden threshing machine is for both of you from us. You can put the engine in front of it, connect the wheels with the driving belt, and then all the wheels inside will also move."

"Can we play with it now?"

"No, just wait a few more minutes, till we have seen our own presents, and those of Klärchen and Irene. Come over to our table now."

We had to wait, rather impatiently, till Vater and Mutter had seen all their presents. Then Klärchen and Irene were called, and after singing a carol again together, they were shown to their table. Only after every body had seen their gifts were we allowed to play with our presents. It was all so exciting!

We played till about 6.30 pm. Then Vater and Mutter called out: "Come on, we are going to Oma and Opa's now. You may take your favourite toy, but don't lose it."

We slipped into our overcoats and made for the manor house. The snow was reflecting the star light and we could see the way clearly, even without the moon.

At Oma and Opa's the Strykowoers were already there waiting for us. Their Christmas celebration had been held the day before, on the 23rd, as that was Onkel Werner's birthday. Then we all sat down for Christmas dinner. That year the main course was goose, the year before it had been fish, it could also be venison, if Vater had shot a deer. Fräulein Lina, Oma's cook, always prepared a wonderful meal, and to finish off, a lovely fruit trifle with meringues.

After the meal there was another presentation of gifts, another Christmas tree, and singing in front of the piano. Tante Margaret was a good pianist.

We spent most of our time playing together, either with our new toys, but mostly we boys played some games together, while the grown-ups sat and talked. The four of us were like brothers, sometimes we fought, but mostly we got on very well together.

Opa and Onkel Werner interrupted our games.

Onkel Werner said: "Can I have one of your balloons, which you had for Christmas, please?"

"Sure, here is one," I said. "A nice red balloon. What do you want it for?"

"I'll show you," said Onkel Werner. He sent Horst to Fräulein Lina to get some dried peas from the kitchen. Then he put a couple of them into the balloon and blew it up.

"Have you got some string?"

"Yes, here is a ribbon which was wrapped around my parcel."

"That'll do."

When the balloon was tied up, and Onkel Werner shook it, it rattled.

"Who is that rattle for?" I wanted to know.

"Come, let's go into the servery."

We all followed Onkel Werner and Opa, somehow mystified. In the servery, there was a special settee, which Dinkie, Oma's black angora tomcat, had adopted as his own. Onkel Werner made straight for the settee and stroked the cat.

"Ah, a Christmas present for Dinkie," I shouted.

Opa chuckled: "Yes, Dinkie should also have a christmas present. Werner, why don't you tie it to his beautiful long tail."

That was quickly done.

I thought, how pretty the black cat looked with the red balloon, but no sooner had I thought that, Dinkie took off. He went berserk, up the long curtain, across to the other window curtain, down again, across the table, over chairs, like a whirl wind. At every leap the peas in the balloon rattled and frightened Dinkie even more. We all shrieked with laughter. In the general merriment, we had not heard Oma entering the room. In utter disgust she could only exclaim: "That poor animal!"

Oma was such a gentle person. I have never seen her getting angry, even then, though we knew that she was not amused!

Christmas was the only time when we could stay up as long as we liked, but when Onkel Werner, Tante Margaret, Horst and Bernd had left, our parents went home, and so did we. By then it wasn't even midnight yet.

Christmas day was spent playing mainly with our threshing machine. The belt fitted over the driving wheel of the steam engine and the main wheel of the thresher. I had to twiddle the steam engine wheel, and this turned many wheels inside the thresher. It was great fun, and we played

with it for a long time. Every now and again we nibbled from the gingerbread house and from the plate of delicious home-made sweets or biscuits. Then we tried to lick the 'snow' off the christmas tree. To our astonishment, it did not taste sweet but salty. Later, much later, we found out, that Father Christmas did not decorate the tree at all, but Mutter and Vater. After that initiation, we were allowed to do it, and we were very proud to play Father Christmas ourselves. To put the salt on the tree, we had to moisten it first with water and then rub it into the fir needles against the way they were growing. When it dried, it went hard and stayed on the tree. It really looked like snow, as the branches bent down with the weight of the salt, just like snow does too.

The second day of Christmas was a very special day for me. My parents told me that I was born on that day. That was my day, my birthday, and I was someone special on that day. It was hard to live with that for a whole day!

"Come, Dieter, and see what you have here for your birthday," Mutter called, and she rang a little hand bell.

To have some more presents so shortly after Christmas was perhaps a bit much, but there would always be a small birthday cake with candles, some small gifts from Vater and Mutter, and there was always a present from Tante Joni von Treskow, the owner of Strykowo. She was my Godmother. Mutter had decided from early on that it would not be fair for me to have all my birthday presents so close to Christmas. I should celebrate it rather on 26 June, when I was three and a half, or four and a half and so on. In this way I had two special days in the year. Looking back, it may perhaps have been a bit unfair to my siblings, but that did not enter my mind then.

"Let's play some special games with our 'birthday boy'," Mutter said.

I jumped on a chair next to her, and when Günter, Vater and Klärchen had taken their seat, Mutter said: "Let the 'birthday boy' start throwing the dice."

I liked to play board games, as long as I was winning. Today, it was not my day. I didn't throw a six, and Günter and Vater were ahead of me. I began to cry: "I don't want to play any more."

"Come now, it's your turn," said Vater.

"Don't be a spoil sport," I heard Günter saying.

"But I don't want to play," and with that I gave the board a shove with my elbow, and all the counters fell over and got mixed up.

"Now look what you have done," said Vater angrily, and he was just about to send me out, when Mutter said: "Leave him, Alfred, it's his birthday today. Let's play blind man's buff instead."

We did for a while, but when I got caught and I had to be blindfolded, I yelled again: "I don't want to play this game."

It became obvious, that this 'privileged' status of a birthday boy didn't agree with me. I ended up screaming and kicking and was out of control.

“Go with Klärchen, Dieter, she will put you to bed,” said Vater, “you are far too tired. Too many late nights are no good for you. Or have you been eating too many sweets?”

I knew subconsciously then, that I could not cope with this ‘special’ treatment on my birthday, for I usually came ‘second’, after Günter, and I was not used to being first. But then I was just far too tired, so I just cried and cried, until I was tucked in by Klärchen. She seemed to understand me.

The Christmas tree stayed well into the New Year. Our new toys, together with our most favourite old ones, were able to stay in the ‘Christmas room’. Vater, too, was able to spend more time with us.



The thought of Vater brought me back from my dreaming. I stopped the rocking horse and went downstairs. During the weeks after Christmas, Vater read to us from one of the books we had received. Its title was: “Soll und Haben” (Debtors and Creditors). It dealt with a family, not unlike our own, which had land property and other businesses. The head of the family got into financial difficulties, some of his own making, others were beyond his control. There was a lot of intrigue and wheeling and dealing, of mortgages and failures. It was a fascinating book, and as Vater read it to us we could always ask when we didn’t quite understand. I’ve learnt from it a great deal of business terminology and concepts, and it probably influenced my thinking about business practices more than I knew then. The fear of ever going broke and loosing our home and property as a result of mismanagement stayed always with me. As we were able to discuss these things, Vater taught me his business attitudes and ethics, which I adopted unconsciously.

Only too soon, our lovely Christmas holidays were over. On Monday, 6 January 1941 we had to be back in Posen. But there was one special event, which Günter and I could look forward to: The Hunt on the Friday of that week. Vater had written a letter to our school principal, asking to give us the day off. When that was granted, we went home early on Thursday afternoon.

Günter was up early on Friday morning. The hunt was to start at 9 am. We both had a shot gun, and this year we were allowed to go as hunters for the first time. After breakfast, Günter went outside, with his coat on, but no gloves.

“Why are you standing there and getting cold?” I wanted to know.

He pointed to his head and said: “I’m not stupid, you know. Once my fingers are all cold, I’ll go inside and get them warm again. After that, I can use them for shooting, and they won’t get cold again.”

“I thought of putting these gloves on, but maybe you are right, it’s not

easy to pull the trigger accurately with them on. I'll do the same, thanks for that tip."

Meanwhile, the first hunting guests arrived. They were: Onkel Werner, Onkel Wilhelm Forstmann from Porthof, Mutter's cousin, Mr. Czapski, a Polish property owner from the neighbourhood, Herr and Frau Iffland, also neighbours, and five others, among them another woman hunter. They all came with their own coaches.

After a quick welcome, Vater divided the shooters, including us, into three groups. We were all driven to a different starting point, where about 20 men and older boys, all workers from our farm, had been assembled. Our game keeper was in charge of the total operation. He assigned a foreman to each group. When I arrived with the group of four other shooters, the foreman looked on his watch. At a pre-arranged time he said to two of our workers: "Start walking, you in this direction," and pointing to the opposite side, "and you walk there."

After each of these men had reached a little marker, about 100 meters away, he told the next two men: "You follow these."

At this point, Herr Iffland, whom I had accompanied many times before, said to me: "Now remember, when we all turn towards the centre, which is going to be this direction, you never shoot to your side. That's where the beaters and the shooters are. You shoot only towards the centre, or behind you. And when you see people coming from the opposite direction, you only shoot behind you. We don't want to shoot any people, do we?"

He needn't have told me that again, as I had been with him before, but I didn't say anything, just nodded that I had understood him.

It was his turn now to follow the two beaters. Then came four more beaters, before the foreman nodded to me:

"Your turn now. Good luck!"

I marched behind the fellow in front of me, aware that I must not walk too fast or too slowly, as the distance between us had to be maintained. The bag with the ammunition hung over one shoulder, the shot gun over the other. My fingers were as warm as toast. I could see clearly the man in front of me, but the second man was already hidden by fog, which had come over from the lake.

After walking for a while I heard shouting from the front: "Stop!" That meant the first man from our group had met up with the first man from the other group, and the circle was complete. Now we only had to wait for the signal to walk towards the centre. I had plenty of time to load the gun, always pointing it downwards, as I had learnt. Looking around me I could see some rabbit holes not far from where I was standing. I shouted to my neighbour: "Do you think we'll get some rabbits here?"

"Wait, till we get the signal to start, then I'll make a noise. You just get your gun ready to shoot."

The signal came sooner than I expected. From right and left I heard the

beaters making noises with their sticks and whistles, often shouting, as if they had seen something in the young trees.

I had hardly started to walk, when a rabbit came out of a hole, right in front of me. I shot once, but missed. Then I re-loaded and walked slowly forward. Suddenly a shout came from my left: "There is a hare coming straight at you." I had seen it too late. It came racing past me. I let it go through the line, aimed and shot. The hare catapulted in the air and lay still.

"You've done it! Good shot, master. I'll get it, you just keep walking."

I was very proud, my first hare. No sooner had I re-loaded, when another rabbit jumped up in front of me, heading towards its burrow. I shot once, missed. Another shot, this time I remembered to aim about two length in front of it, and I scored another hit.

As we were walking we came past some tall trees that grew along a creek. I heard the beaters beat the tree trunks with their sticks, when unexpectedly, a pheasant flew out. I saw that it was a male, aimed and shot. It came tumbling down, feathers flying.

I was grinning from ear to ear. Not bad, for the first part of the first hunt.

Meanwhile the fog had lifted. The men from either side of me were coming closer, as we were moving nearer the centre of the giant circle. In the distance were a couple of un-threshed rye stacks, and beyond I could see the people from the opposite side moving towards us. Then I heard shots. The man on my right shouted: "A fox, a fox!" I looked closer, and indeed there was something reddish-brown moving smoothly past one stack and hiding behind the other. It was the fox, there was no doubt. Would they be able to out-smart it? After a while, having come closer to one another, I pointed in the direction of the corn stack. One of the beaters got the message. He ran around the stack, beat his stick on the straw, and then we saw the fox running out, to his death. A hunter from the opposite side shot him.

As we all came together at the centre, I saw Günter. I waved to him and held three fingers up.

"I've only got two, two hares," he said. "Congratulations. You did well, but then you would have got more game your way, near the forest."

"Thanks," I said proudly, "I've used only six bullets."

"You're a good shot. Remember when you shot the cat in our park with only one bullet in your gun?"

I smiled. I remembered during the last summer we were about to go for a swim, when suddenly a cat appeared from under the shrubs. As cats were absolutely not allowed in our park, because of the birds, I went straight back into the house, got my shotgun, and with one bang, it was dead.

But there was no cat here. The total bag of all the hunters was lined up, hares first, then rabbits, pheasants, and the fox. It looked quite an impressive line up.

Meanwhile, the coaches had arrived. After a small refreshment, we all went off again to start on the next circle, in a different area. I only shot one hare this time, and wasted quite a few bullets on those that got away. When we met again, sandwiches were handed around and drinks for everyone. The third and last circle finished about 4 p.m. By then it was getting dark, and I had very sore legs from all the walking. But it had been a great day. I had always loved to go on a hunt, accompanying other shooters, but this time I was on my own with a gun. I almost felt a grown-up.

In good old tradition, the evening meal was a great social occasion. All the ladies, who had not participated in the hunt, had arrived. The hunters had time to change into formal dress, and in no time the meal was in full swing. The table extended several leaves on either side and could seat 24 comfortably.

Franz was the drink waiter. He wore white gloves, and in his livery he looked very smart. Our house maid and a woman from the village were dressed in black with white aprons. They served at table. A toast was proposed to my parents. The speaker stressed, that as usual, the wine had been excellent: "It must be, because you don't drink that stuff everyday, that's why you can afford to keep such a good wine cellar. And what a tremendous day it's been. Well organised, plenty of game, and wonderful food. Three cheers."

When the sweets came around, Franz whispered into my ear: "Take plenty, there is enough even for seconds."

"Just make sure you come around the second time," I whispered back. It was good to know that someone was looking after us.

The party moved over to the living quarters. The men lit up a cigar and enjoyed a cognac, while the ladies had some coffee. By then we had had enough. We were full to bursting, and very tired. We said 'good-night' to everyone and retired to bed, without needing to be prompted.

It was wonderful to go to bed, thinking: tomorrow is Saturday, and we don't have to go to school, and then it will be Sunday, another day off. How great it was to be at home. As we dropped off to sleep, we had no idea, that we wouldn't be going back to school for another six weeks.

Saturday started with a severe frost. It had snowed already late in the evening, getting heavier after midnight, and a strong easterly was blowing. Our road to Strykowo was blocked. Snow drifts had covered the low-lying parts of the road completely. The temperature had dropped to below -20°C . On Sunday the weather turned even worse. More snow and cold temperatures. We heard on the news, that the roads were blocked and railways were not running.

On Monday my parents phoned our school in Posen: "This is Tieman, from Schönsee. Our children Günter and Dieter are stranded here. We can't get them to Posen, as no trains are running, because of the frost and snow. What? No school? All closed until further notice? Okay. I'll tell them."

“Yippee,” we cheered together. We needed no further explanation.

“Extra holidays — until further notice — that’ll suit us fine,” and we danced around the dining table.

“Don’t think you will be idle here,” said Mutter. “Help here with this dining table. It needs to be shifted to next door. We’ll close up the dining room here, as we can’t keep up with the heating. It’s too cold.”

We shifted the table and some chairs into Mutter’s room. It was much easier to heat just the two adjoining rooms. In the morning the tiled stoves, which stood from floor to almost ceiling in both rooms, were fired with wood and then anthracite coal for quite some time, until the tiles felt too hot to touch. Then two briquettes were put on the glowing coals and the door of the stove was tightly closed. That evening, three more briquettes were put on the glowing embers, as it had been an exceptionally cold day.

Next morning Vater came to breakfast with the following news: “This morning the outside temperature was -32°C . Remember, children, when you go outside, to really wrap up. Your nose or ears can freeze in no time with this temperature. So do be careful.”

What a challenge!

“Let’s go out, Günter, I have never experienced -32° before.”

We put our ski boots on, layers of warm clothing plus overcoat, and a woollen cap which covered our ears.

Walking on the snow was quite eerie. Each step I took screeched so loudly, that it seemed to go right through my bones. The snow was so dry, that it would not stick together. There was not much we could do. We soon got cold and went back inside. Inside our house there was turmoil. Mutter had just found out that the toilets had frozen, and could not be used. A commode was quickly put up in the upstairs bathroom. Mutter locked up the front-door and toilet downstairs. They were not to be used, to protect the house from getting even colder from the east wind. But it was too late. The water pipes had also frozen. One had already burst, and our whole plumbing system had to be turned off. For the rest of the freeze, which lasted until early March, we had no bath, no plumbing, and only a minimum of water, as it had to be carried from the village pump.

Our bedroom upstairs had also a tiled stove, which that winter was heated daily. During a normal winter it was heated only every second day.

The following morning was warmer, only -20°C , but brilliant sunshine. We took our skates to the lake, cleared snow from a patch, and went figure skating, and chasing each other on ice. I was lucky, as I could wear Mutter’s shoes with the hole in the heel, for special skates. Mutter had taught me how to figure skate, because she was very good at it. Our skates had to be screwed on to the heels, as well as to the front of the shoes, and sometimes they came off, just at a crucial moment. But Mutter’s skates fitted firmly. As we moved about, we didn’t feel the cold.

“Pity there is so much snow,” said Günter,” otherwise we could have

gone over to Strykowo to visit Horst and Bernd."

"Do you remember the other day?" I said, "before the snow fell, and the ice was as smooth as a mirror? I just opened my coat and let the wind push me, like a sail. I went ever so fast. Would have been nice to see how they got over the cold day yesterday."

"Probably much the same as we did, stayed in all day."

"Hey, look there! What's the snow plough doing here on the ice?"

"May be sweeping a path for us to skate on?"

We skated to the end of our patch and Günter called over: "Hey, Jerzy, are you going to clear a path for us to skate on?"

"No, master. The road is completely snowed under, and your father told me to clear a path up to Strykowo. This is going to be the road now for everyone."

"What? if we have to go to the station with the sleigh, we have to come this way?"

"Yes, even the big steam engine, which they need in Strykowo, has to go here over the lake."

"But that's impossible, Jerzy. How thick do you think is the ice then?"

"Your father said, it is at least 75 cm thick. So no matter how heavy a vehicle is, the ice will hold it."

"And what about the fish holes?" I wanted to know, "Will they keep them open as well, right next to the road here?"

"More so now than before. The fish need some holes to get air."

There was a hole of about 25-40 cm in diameter every 50 meters in the ice to allow the fish to breathe, as they said. It had to be stirred several times during the day so that it would not freeze over. We children had to watch out that we did not fall into those holes.

As we went back to our skating, Günter said: "Do you remember, Vater telling us the story about the man going over to Slupia to church when the new ice was still very thin?"

"Do you mean, the man walking across here last December?"

Günter nodded.

"He was only half way over, when he suddenly realised that he was walking up a slight hill."

"Yes, it was all new ice, which holds much better together, than old ice. As he walked he prayed all the way to church, and he reckons that God saved him that day."

"But he didn't go back the same way, did he. He was just too scared."

"Wouldn't you be?"

"Well, we're not allowed on fresh ice anyway."

That night we heard several big bangs from the lake which sounded like gun shots. We had just gone to bed, and I was a bit scared.

"Don't worry, it is only the ice expanding which makes the noise," explained Vater. "When it gets very cold, ice expands and gives off those terrific bangs. Tomorrow you will see long rifts in the ice. You will have to

be careful when you go skating again, so that you don't get into those ruts, otherwise you will fall and hurt yourselves."

"Maybe we won't go skating tomorrow," said Günter, "There is so much snow now, we should really be skiing."

"That's a very good idea," said Vater, "now go to sleep. Good night."

I thought of skiing, that most wonderful feeling of sliding down the hill, with the wind biting my face as I gain speed. I remembered the time when first I learnt to ski.



It was January 1938, before the war. Gerda was born on 10 December 1937. Mutter was still feeding her and needed a rest from us boisterous boys. A couple of weeks earlier, we had received a pair of skis each for Christmas and a track suit. The gift came with a note, on which we read:

THREE WEEKS HOLIDAY IN ZAKOPANE

Zakopane was a ski resort in the Karpatian Mountains in the south of Poland. We couldn't wait for the day when we would leave on these special holidays.

We went there by train in second class, which had soft, green upholstery, as we had to sit up all night on the train. Günter and I had a window seat each, sitting opposite each other. By the time the train left Poznan, our compartment was full. The door was closed and inside it felt quite cosy.

When it was getting dark we heard Vater say: "Let's have something to eat now."

He got out a packet of sandwiches each, which Mutter had carefully cut. We munched these happily, as we were speeding through the countryside.

"Shut the curtains," someone in the compartment said. "It will keep us warmer".

The steam of the engine was heating the whole train. Each car was divided into single compartments, all connected by a long corridor. Under each seat was a pipe running parallel to the seat. It was frequently used as a foot rest, but actually, it was the only heating for our compartment. The pipes were quite hot, and at that time of the evening it was almost too hot for us, but we didn't say anything.

When the other people in the compartment were getting tired, someone suggested: "Please, everybody, stand up from your seats. Each seat can be pulled towards the middle! It will leave only a narrow gap between and everybody can put their legs on the opposite side, shoes off,

of course.” Part of the back rest had come down to give us all enough room to recline comfortably for the night. I tucked my feet next to Günter’s seat. We thought that was marvellous, and when Vater got our rugs out and tucked us up, we thought we would go to sleep. But sleep would not come. We were far too excited.

“I can see some snow, Günter,” I whispered excitedly, peeping behind the curtain as we were heading south with the steam engine chuffing and puffing and belching black clouds of smoke.

“We must be getting near Katowice,” said Günter, showing that he had learnt his geography.

The next stop was Katowice, the lights were reflected in the snow. Lots more people joined the train, and some tried to get into our compartment, but as we were lying there like herrings, no one could come in. They had to make themselves comfortable in the cold corridor, and when I had to go to the toilet, I had to walk over many bodies. In the morning we saw that some people had sneaked into the red plush seats of the first class compartment. Well, some people were lucky. After a while the train stopped at Kraków. There were more people, all seemed to be heading for Zakopane. Meanwhile the weather was getting colder and colder. We pulled our rugs tightly over us, and peeping through the curtains, we could see that the windows were freezing up. If we wanted to see anything we had to blow and make a peep-hole in the ice. Eventually we must have dozed off, for we suddenly woke from a big commotion on the train. Outside, the frosted windows were showing daylight. People were getting their things together. We must be close to Zakopane. And then the train stopped with a loud swishing noise. We had arrived.

Very much awake now, we scrambled to the exit door. Vater was first. He was leading us to a cab-stand. They were all sleighs drawn by a single horse, which had a bell around its neck. All three of us could sit on the seat facing the front, behind the driver. The scenery was like in fairyland. It had been a very cold morning (about -30°C) and hoar-frost was on all the bare branches of the deciduous trees, and also on the fir trees. Steam was puffed into the air through the horse’s nostrils and the sound of the single bell was all one could hear. Houses swished by, until the driver stopped the horse in front of a large hotel. Not far from it we could see some gentle ski-slopes. There was no stopping us.

“Quickly, Vater, let’s get into our room and then we want to go skiing,” we both said in unison.

“First you need some breakfast,” he answered, “and then you should have a bit of sleep. You didn’t sleep much in the train.”

“No, we don’t want to sleep,” was Günter’s quick reply, and I nodded agreement. “We are not tired.”

We had our breakfast, changed quickly into our ski-gear, and went down to the ante room where our skis had been placed. Vater booked us straight into a ski-class for beginners. He didn’t need to learn, as he could

ski quite well. So he went off on his own skis, while we were busy all morning to learn to bend the knees, as we were sliding down the gentle slope, learning to do a snow-plough, and to make a turn. It was all most exciting and we did very well for the first day, we thought.



Vater, Günter and I in Zakopane

Then came lunch. After lunch — well, the lack of sleep during the night had caught up with us and we slept firmly for three hours. Vater had to wake us.

“Come, we will go for a walk through Zakopane,” he suggested, and we, half in a dream, followed wherever he led us. The hoar-frost had disappeared after a whole day of sunshine, but we thought Zakopane was still a very nice place. It was surrounded by high mountains and everything seemed so quite in the place. Every now and again a sleigh, pulled by a jingling horse, passed by, but that made no sound!

At the evening meal we were introduced to a family Bardt. They had two daughters, both just a bit younger than we. One was Ingrid, the other Daudi. Ingrid, some 15 years later, was to marry our cousin Bernd. If we were not on the ski-slopes, we would play with them. It was good to have someone our own age there. Each day we took our lessons in the morning, and went skiing with Vater in the afternoon.

Our skiing improved quickly and soon the teacher took the whole group on an excursion. This meant we had to climb up a slope first before we could enjoy the down-hill run. It was rather strenuous for us with our short legs, and I think Vater eventually took us cross-country on his own — but never very far. After two weeks, Vater had to return home. He had

arranged for Fräulein Müller to come and look after us. By then Fräulein Parr was our teacher, as Fräulein Müller had married. So she came with her husband. It so happened, that she had married a Herr Müller, and we should have called her really 'Frau Müller', but we kept calling her 'Fräulein Müller', much to the amusement of others, when her husband was around. Herr Müller taught me quite a few card tricks, which came in handy later on when I wanted to impress some of my school mates. Those were happy days in Zakopane. They teased me terribly with Daudi, but I didn't mind. I think I even gave her a kiss once under the stair case. We returned home, full of all the new experiences, and very grateful, that from then on we could ski.



When I woke up next morning, I thought I was still in Zakopane. But the contours of our bedroom reminded me, that we were in our home. Suddenly I remembered why I must have dreamed of Zakopane the night before. We were going to ski this morning!

"Wake up, Günter, the sun is up. We wanted to go skiing, or have you forgotten?"

He turned around, saw the sun streaming into our window, stretched, and gave a big yawn.

"No, I haven't forgotten."

We got up, dressed in our track suits, and went down for breakfast.

"We are going on the Kiesberg this morning," announced Günter, "it's a glorious day. No wind. Skiing should be fun."

"Okay, but just watch out, on the northern side, where the trucks get their gravel from. It's very steep there and the edge can easily collapse. Just stay away from the edge."

Mutter is always warning us of any possible dangers, but we knew to stay away from that side. The Kiesberg was a large hill towards the end of our village, right next to the lake, a gravel deposit. According to legend, a glacier had pushed all the gravel in front of it during the ice age and had come to a stop at this point. When all the ice had melted, it had left the gravel hill and formed our current lake. The Kiesberg was easily reached via the lake, and it had some slopes that were pretty steep.

"Let's go up on the easy slope," Günter said, "and then down on the steep end."

"I think I will first go down the easy slope a couple of times and practice my parallel stops, before tackling the steep slope. I'm always a bit scared at first, going straight down that side."

"Okay. I'll go first, and then you can follow me."

Günter was off. I followed about ten meters behind. There were some steeper patches, as the hill undulated down to the lake. We both practiced

our ski turns, as we had learnt them in Zakopane, and came to a stop where the lake started. With all the snow about, the actual shoreline had disappeared.

We went down a couple more times, and then we faced the short side of the hill, going straight towards the lake.

"You go first, Dieter," said Günter.

I hesitated. From where we stood, we could not see the whole run down, as the slope became steeper further down. But I was challenged, and wanted to go first. Plucking up all my courage, I decided, I would go down at an angle, not straight down, turning several times. But I had to be careful not to get too close to the northern rim.

"Holidioh," I imitated some yodelling, and down I went. As there was plenty of fresh snow on the hill, the steep bit wasn't too bad. I managed the turns, and in no time I was down. I turned round and saw Günter coming down straight. He was a slightly better skier than I, and he certainly had more courage. He zoomed by me and came to a stop about 50 meters further down on the ice.

"Let's do it again!" I shouted as I was heading towards the long end of the hill. To climb up the steep end would have been too difficult. As we arrived on top again, both panting heavily, I said to Günter: "This time it is your turn to go first, and let's see who can get furthest on the lake."

Without hesitation he shot down the hill, knees bent, stocks parallel, just as our teacher had taught us in Zakopane.

I followed about half a minute later, as I wanted to use his tracks, to get me further. Going straight down there always gave me a tremendous thrill. It was easy to follow Günter's tracks, and coming down, I passed him easily on the lake.

"You are cheating, following my tracks. Of course you would get further than I that way."

"Ha, ha," I couldn't help laughing. "Let's do it again, and then see who can get further."

And so it went all morning. We forgot all about the time and coming home for lunch. It was sheer joy. Only when the sun started to come quite close to the horizon, did we realise that we had been here for too long, and we made a hasty retreat home.

At home, they were a bit worried about us.

"We nearly sent out a search party," said Mutter jokingly. We were happy that no one was really angry with us. We still got some lunch and then snuggled up with a book in our cosy lounge.

Before we went to bed that night, Günter asked Vater: "Could we have a horse for tomorrow? We want to take it to the lake and around the park and have him pull us on our skis."

"I'll tell Franz in the morning. You just go when you are ready."

Next day Günter went to fetch the horse, while I was getting the skis ready. He had to get a couple of long lines, which we fastened to the

horse's harness. The reigns had also to be lengthened. Günter put them around his neck and held on to the tow line.

"Are you ready?"

"Yes, I have got the other line."

"We are off." With that he hit the horse with the reigns over his back side, and the horse started towards the park. At first it went slowly. We needed to make sure that we would not get in each other's way. I stayed on the left, and Günter on the right. When I had steadied myself, I shouted: "Let's go a bit faster."

The horse began to trot. We were sliding along the snow covered road at first. Then Günter steered the horse towards the lake cross-country. There was a bit of a slope, and I came closer to the horse than I wanted. I had to apply the snow-plough. Then the surface became rather uneven, and I began to wobble and lost my balance.

"Wait for me," I began to shout, as Günter had not noticed my fall.

He pulled the reigns and the horse stopped.

I got up, brushed the powdery snow from my pants, and went to join Günter. It was much harder to walk without stocks, as I slid back with one ski, as I put the other forward. Then I grabbed the line again, and away we went. On the lake it was easier, as the surface was even. Our horse had studs screwed into its shoes, as all our horses had when there was ice and snow on the roads. That prevented them from slipping.

"How about going back into the park," I said, "this here is getting a bit boring."

"I think, if we continue on the lake, we could turn off the lake about half a kilometre further down. There is a slight slope. Maybe the horse can pull us up, and we slide down. How's that?"

"Agreed," I said, and we continued on the lake. When we turned off to go on to the shore, it became very bumpy again. There had been reeds along the shore. The heavy snow had flattened them all and covered them, but as we were sliding over them, our skis got entangled with the dry reeds.

"Hold on, this won't work," I said.

"We are nearly through."

The horse sank into the snow almost to its belly. It had to struggle, but it was nearly through. I had let the rope go, and I could see Günter doing a wobble and he fell. He too let the rope go, and the reigns slipped over his head. The horse felt the jerk, but it didn't take any notice. It just kept going. We shouted from behind: "Whoa, whoa," but to no avail.

"I think the horse had enough of this."

"It looks like it. That damn horse wouldn't stop. Why didn't it stop when I called out?" Günter was angry.

"I don't know. Now we have to walk all the way home and carry our skis. Without stocks it is impossible to go cross country."

And that's what we ended up doing.

Near our house, we met Vater.

"I'm glad to see that you are okay. Franz caught the horse just before it entered the stables. He still dragged the reigns and the ropes behind him."

"That stupid horse. Next time we'll take another one, one that'll stop when we call out for it to stop."

"Next time you need to be a little more careful, where you are going. Stay on the road. But I agree, perhaps the chestnut would be a better horse for skiing."

We had learnt a lesson, but we'd also had a lovely day.

All too soon our winter leisure time came to an end, that is for us. Vater had phoned once a week, to find out whether the schools would be opened again, but they remained closed throughout February. 1941 turned out to be one of the coldest winters on record.

On Monday 3 March 1941 our school finally resumed. It was terribly hard to get up at five on that morning, after such a long and wonderful break, especially as it was still pitch dark. Franz, who had to take us to the station, had also the unenviable task to wake us. He threw a snow-ball at our window. It was not easy to hear through our double glazed windows, but we were expecting it. It was lucky that the outside window didn't break. But, we were up. We then dressed quickly, a thermos flask with a hot drink stood on the dining table. We ate some bread with jam, gulping down the tea. Then, quickly, we put on our coats and the fur coats over that, grabbed our school bags, and the bags with the things we needed for the week, and stepped outside into the faintest dawn of a chilly morning. Franz was there in the sleigh, waiting patiently for us to get into it, and then we went off, jingling all the way to the station. We were thankful to be able to put our feet into the fur-lined bag to keep them warm. No part of our body was exposed. The steam of our breath was the only sign that there was a living body inside the mummy.

When we arrived at the station, it was still not daylight. Horst and Bernd were already at the station. Judging by their faces, they did not seem to be too enthusiastic about school either. We had to struggle to get a seat in the train, when it eventually arrived. It was crowded. By the time we arrived in Posen the rising sun was glistening on the snow. We had to go straight to school, as it started at 8 am and we didn't have much time to spare.

Since the previous September Horst and Bernd had also come to stay at the Siebenbürger boarding house. I had moved with Günter and Bernd to the back room, at the end of the passage, which had a balcony. There was an ante-room which was occupied by Otto Körner, a new boarder, and another younger boy. Günter and I were no longer the youngest in the boarding house, which was a great relief. Otto went into the same class as I, and we became good friends.

CHAPTER 6

Spring time

As with so many things in life, the good comes often together with the bad. The wonderful snowfall provided plenty of moisture for the ground, as the snow melted slowly, but the severe winter killed off most fruit trees in our garden and along the tree-lined roads. The same thing had also happened in the cold winter of 1929. For our fruit-loving family, this was a severe blow. New fruit trees and new varieties had to be planted in early spring in the first section of our garden and along the roads to Strykowo, Stęszew and Antonin.

There is a strong connection between the re-awakening of nature in spring with the resurrection theme of Easter in Europe. It was also the most important religious season observed by the catholic people of Poland, who were very devoted to their religion. No doubt, the theology of neighbouring Orthodox Russia must have contributed towards this emphasis. The long fasting period during Lent culminated in Good Friday, a most holy and solemn day for all.

On Good Friday of 1941, as was our custom, we went to our little Protestant Church in Stęszew. After church we walked in the park and along the lake, enjoying the early spring air with its promise of new life. All ice and snow had by now completely disappeared. There was a gentle ripple on the water's surface. Sea birds were gathering sticks and bits and pieces for their nests. The trees were still dormant, only here and there a willow tree had the slightest hue of green showing. Our boat shed had received a fresh coat of paint, and both boats were securely tied inside. The seating platform along the jetty had been restored. Everything was waiting for the warmer weather.

Easter Saturday was a busy day for all people, who had to prepare food for the great feast. Large trays of cakes were baked in the village oven. The scent of freshly baked bread and cake made everyone's mouth water.

Fasting during Lent had been taken very seriously by the Poles. They must have been looking forward to the feast even more than we. But in our household, people were also busy with preparations for Easter.

"Come on, Günter and Dieter, the eggs are ready for you to paint!" called Olga, when she saw us. Olga had replaced Klärchen as our cook, after she had left.

"Can we do the ones with the coloured paper first?"

"Of course, these here are already boiled. Now all you need to do is

wrap them into your transfers and then place them into cold water, and press a tea towel around them. Hold that for about two minutes, and your eggs come out beautifully coloured.”

I saw on the stove a saucepan with boiling water.

“What colour did you put into this saucepan, Olga?”

“Blue.”

“Can I put the eggs in here? They come out in such a rich blue colour, I always like that.”

“I thought red was your favourite colour?”

“It is, but don’t you think red goes well with the blue?”

“What you kids can do now is to grease the ready eggs slightly with this bacon rind. They will all come out shiny and the colouring will come out much brighter.”

“Let Dieter do that. I would like to use my artistic talent,” Günter said, “Maybe this year it will come out nicer than last year.”

“You can always try.”

“Do you remember,” Günter said as he used the paint brush carefully, “how Fräulein Müller had taught us to blow out eggs, and then paint them?”

“Didn’t you have to make a hole into the egg?”

“Oh, you forgot then? A small hole, top and bottom, then you had to blow the yoke and white through it.”

“Yes, now I remember, but I was never very good at it.”

“You dropped an egg because you were too hasty. Then you had to clear up the mess, ha, ha, ha.”

“But you managed all right, Günter, after Fräulein Müller pierced both ends with a sharp needle for you.”

“Yes, I did.”

“Then I coloured the egg shells, a flower on one and an animal on another.”

“Yeah, I thought you had painted a Rhino, but you said it was supposed to be a horse.”

“I know. But then Fräulein Müller put a cord of wool through each egg and fixed them to the dining room lamp.”

“It did look pretty, all six eggs hanging there.”

“Then there was the seed box which Fräulein Müller told us to sow with oats. We had put it in the green house and in about four weeks it had grown to about 10 cm. Jadwiga must have put a lot of wood into the furnace, to make it warm, because it grew so well.”

“Don’t be daft. The green house needs heating all the time, because there are many more seed boxes with young vegetable seedlings, which are later planted out into the garden.”

“I like the greenhouse with the smell of good, damp compost and the growing plants.”

“When we put the ‘Easter Lawn’, as Fräulein Müller called it, on the

dining table, it really looked like a lawn, so green and so real.”

“Then she put some of the coloured easter eggs in. Why can’t we have another Easter Lawn this year?”

“Because it takes four weeks to grow, dumbell.”

“Oh, I forgot. I wonder if we will get another chocolate easter bunny, like the one that was put in the easter lawn then? He was so tall that he looked right over the lawn.”



It was Easter Saturday 1934. We had been painting eggs just as we were doing then.

After we had finished colouring the eggs, we both rushed out, for there was still more to be done. We still believed in the easter bunny.

“Where are we going to make the nests this year?” I asked Günter.

“Where always,” was his short reply.

‘Always’ was near the low shrubs, parallel to the road which ran just beyond the fence. The shrubs we played ‘hide and seek’ around. We collected lots of soft moss (to make it more comfortable for the bunny, I suppose) and shaped two lovely nests with it. If we could find a flower, like a daisy or dandelion, we would decorate the nest with those. When we were satisfied that all was just fine, we left the place with great hopes for the morning.

After this there was not much else to do, so I meandered to the boat shed by the lake. I often walked around the park by myself, along the water, and one of my favourite spots was the boat shed. During winter the boats were put away, but in spring they came back. It was a great joy for me to see the boats again, the large black one, and the white which was sleek and easier to handle for one person. I jumped from one boat to the other and had great fun. Then I stood on top of the seat of the black boat and started rocking it. It made big waves and that was even more fun.

Suddenly Opa appeared with his dog Nellie, whom we called das Mistvieh among ourselves, a rather rude and vulgar expression. She was tiny and always yapping. Needless to say, we didn’t like her.

I stood still, as a thief caught in action.

“What are you doing there?” he asked me, and I could not see a twinkle in his eye.

“Just playing,” I said as casually as possible.

“Are you allowed to do this?”

“Hm, yes.”

“Does Vater know that you are here?”

Grateful for this suggested excuse I said quickly: “Yes, he allowed me to play here.”

With that Opa turned and left me. I wasn’t too happy with the whole

affair. All the fun had suddenly gone, so I left also. When I arrived home, Vater was already waiting for me.

“So you told Opa that I had allowed you to play on the boats! Is that correct?”

“Yes, but ... but ...” I didn’t get any further.

Vater got hold of me, bent me over his knee, and with the flexible steel ruler I got my bottom smacked, several times. Then I was taken upstairs and put into the dark cupboard where all our fur coats were hanging.

There I was, yelling and feeling sorry for myself. It was not altogether a rare occasion that I was naughty — far from it — but what made this incident so really frightening for me was, that it was the Saturday before Easter, and my greatest fear was that I would miss out on my easter eggs the following day. My mind was confused, and guilt stopped me from thinking rationally, if that is possible at five. Although still believing in the easter bunny, I also believed that my parents had a great influence over it, and since I had been naughty, I feared that this Easter I would miss out on all those lovely chocolate eggs and bunnies. So I sobbed and sobbed until Mutter came to my rescue. She didn’t belittle my great sin, she simply said: “You have had enough punishment.”

There was no hint about whether I was forgiven or not. My bad conscience would not leave me in peace. I was kept guessing until the next morning.

When morning came, we both ran down the stairs and into the garden to where we had made the nests the day before. The first nest was Günter’s, I saw some coloured easter eggs there. I was still doubtful. Then I saw four brightly coloured eggs in my nest too. What great relief! Perhaps not so much because of the eggs, but because I then knew that I was forgiven.

After breakfast we went to church, and when we came back again, we went looking for easter eggs — the chocolate variety this time.



“Do you think we will get any chocolate eggs and easter bunnies this year?” asked Günter. My thoughts came back from the past and I remembered, that I had asked the same question a while ago.

“I was just wondering myself,” I said. All my eggs were finished now, and I was happy about the way they looked.

Günter went upstairs, and I followed him.

Easter morning passed as usual. We no longer had nests for ourselves, only for Gerda. Her surprised face reminded us of our younger days. For breakfast we all had a coloured egg, and to see whose egg was the strongest, each one of us knocked their egg against our neighbour’s egg. Those eggs that were still not broken, were knocked together again and

the one whose egg lasted through all contests was declared the final winner. Then we went again to church. The weather was fine, with a promise of spring in the air.

After church my parents kept up the tradition of hiding chocolate easter eggs. On this beautiful day Mutter called us together and said: "Go looking in the back yard, not around the house, and not beyond the fir trees at the other end, and whatever you find, you will bring to me. I'll watch, and when all are found, we will divide them equally. And mind not to find the easy ones the easter bunny hid for Gerda."

It was fun to look for easter eggs, for as we had grown older, Mutter and Vater had been able to find hiding places which were harder and harder to find. The eggs for Gerda were hidden on a lower level, or were too obvious for us, so we just left them for her to find.

"I think you have got them all now," Mutter said, after we could not find any more, and she called off the hunt.

Mutter had put all our findings in a box. Gerda had found her's quite easily. She was bright for her age. When all were counted, it turned out that three eggs were still missing.

"I can't remember where I put them, Alfred, can you?"

"No idea, we will all have to look for them now."

And so everyone joined in the hunt, until all were found. The last one was right on the ground, and as Gerda was so small, she found it, and said: "I found it, I found it. No one else could."

Meanwhile, in the village, Easter was observed in the following way: After the long lenten fast, everybody thought about food. They brought the freshly baked trays of cake and bread, meat, eggs, salamis and other food items outdoors into the street and placed it on a large trestle table. A priest stood there for a brief ceremony, sprinkling holy water over the food and blessing everyone. Only then could the feasting begin.

In the afternoon we went to Strykowo to celebrate Easter with them. We had good food there and, of course, our two cousins, without whom it would not have been a real celebration.

On the afternoon of Easter Monday another treat was awaiting us in the village: an old Polish custom, which we found fascinating, if not a bit scary. It was called: 'The Easter Bear'.

A group of eight people put on some ragged costumes and blackened their faces, so that they were unrecognisable. The 'bear' was wrapped in straw, that had to be twisted into fist-thick ropes, from neck to arms and feet, over the whole body. Over his head was a pyramid-like straw cover. The whole man was totally covered in straw. One of his feet was tied to a long rope which was held by the 'bear tamer' in one hand. In the other he held a long whip, which he cracked on the bear occasionally.

The next pair was 'the man and the woman'. I had my doubts about the gender of that 'woman', as she was tall and strong, but I don't think that mattered. Her female contours, in any case, were duly over-emphasised. It

certainly looked very funny. The 'woman' carried a great big basket on her arm, in which she collected edible donations, such as cakes, eggs, chocolates, sweets etc. which later were shared among the group. The 'man' took donations of money, which was equally shared.



Group around Easter Bear

Another character was the kominiarz or chimney sweep. He looked like a real chimney sweep, with a semblance of a top hat and very black all over, with plenty of spare soot in his pockets for later use. There were two of them in that group.

The 'horse rider' was the most feared of all, because he chased all and sundry with his strong whip. Part of his costume was a simple papier-mache half-body of a horse, attached to his front and back. His cap was the square cap of the Polish Ulans, an unmistakable sign of authority and power. He had an assistant, who rode a hobby horse, with an equally feared whip in his hand.

This motley crowd moved through the village streets, the riders chasing young men and whipping them, if they got caught. The chimney sweeps chased the girls, and when they got caught, they would give them a big black kiss, leaving their sooty marks all over the clothes as well. For a special treat, they put some spare soot over their hair as well. The bear tamer, with his long whip, also aimed at worthwhile targets, but in any case, he made sure nobody, especially naughty boys, would come too close to the bear. For us children this procession was terribly exciting and

we would not have wanted to miss it for anything in the world. But we were also terribly scared of the riders and of the chimney sweeps.

As usual, I got caught again by one of the riders, but he didn't hit me very hard, and when a chimney sweep grabbed me by the arm, and put soot all over my face, it didn't matter. I felt I was just one of them, and having great fun like the rest of them.

When they came near our house, Vater gave them money which later, I am sure, was converted into liquid food at the pub.

This custom was also traditional in Strykowo and other villages around in our area.

"Vater," I asked him afterwards, "what about other parts in Poland, do they have this custom there too?"

"I don't know. And I also don't know the origin of it, and what the meaning of it is. It may go way back to ancient times and have something to do with forgotten myths. The same applies to the other custom peculiar to our area, namely the wetting of people with water at Easter. As you know, Easter Sunday is reserved for boys wetting girls, and Easter Monday is for girls wetting boys."

"Oh yeah, I got some water from a bucket today," said Günter. "I didn't watch out. I was running away from the kominiarz, the chimney sweep when, whoosh, a bucket of water came from around the corner of a house. I quickly jumped aside, but I still got some on me."

"Did you wet a girl yesterday, my boy?"

"Yes I did, it was Jadszia, and it was she who poured the bucket over me, or tried to, today."

"Well, that's what happens. If you wet a girl, you can be sure she will try everything to get you on Easter Mondays."

"But I only used a water bomb made from paper."

"That doesn't matter, you still wet her."

"And where did that custom come from?"

"It could be that it goes back to the time when people were baptised only at Easter. There may have been some children in the village, who had not been baptised yet, and people took it out on them. But I really don't know. This is only a guess."

Our easter holidays were soon over, and we had to go back to Posen.

Another custom in spring-time was to contract with another person to always have some fresh green in your pocket or on your person. I played it often with Irene Lucht, who then had become Vater's secretary in the office. It went throughout the month of May, the month when fresh leaves come out on every tree and grass was growing vigorously. It was called: Bitte Grün, which translates: 'please show me green'. Either of us could challenge the other to show some fresh green leaves on us. Whoever failed to show a fresh green leaf, or had only an old shrivelled up leaf from yesterday, had to pay a fine. Pine needles were not allowed in this game. At the end of the week the points were added up and the looser had to buy

a block of chocolates for the winner. An innocent game which added some spice to our life, and a good way to celebrate the arrival of spring after a long and cold winter.

But the spring of 1941 was not all celebration and new life. It brought some sadness into our family. Mutter had expected another baby. When I went to visit her in the clinic in Posen from the boarding house, she told me in tears, that she had given birth to a baby boy who was too weak to survive. I was the first one in the family to see her after the birth, and I tried to comfort her to the best of the ability of a twelve-year-old. This was quality time with Mutter, and it remained deep in my memory. Schwester Anni Kiwull, a nurse who had come originally from the Baltic States, came again to look after Mutter, after she was discharged from the clinic. She had become a friend of the family, and was able to nurse Mutter back to health. For Gerda this must have been a particular disappointment, although she didn't understand fully. All she heard was that the promised little brother or sister didn't come. As we boys were most of the time away in Posen at school, she grew up almost like an only child and must have looked forward to the birth of another sibling.

At that time Günter and I still had our occasional fights, mainly in the boarding house in Posen. Like in earlier days, the other boarders assembled and watched, edging us on when the fight became physical. The fight stopped, when one of us got hurt, or Tante Else intervened.

On one of those occasions, when the sparks were flying again, Günter ended up with a thick lip and I with a black eye. This happened on a Friday, just before the week-end. When we arrived home, we told everyone, that we got hurt at sports. But when we said 'hallo' to Opa, he took one look at us both and said with glee, rubbing his hands, "So you both had a good fight!" We couldn't deny it any longer, and I think from that time on we both decided that there was no point fighting each other. We had become too strong, and anyway it was much better to solve our differences by talking it out, in a peaceful way, and to stick together. In his humorous way, Opa had taught us a most valuable lesson.

As long as I can remember, Opa had been hard of hearing. He used various hearing aids with only limited success. Sometimes, though, when we whispered to one another, so that Opa wouldn't hear, he heard everything we said. When he and Oma walked together in the park, Opa always commented on the things he could see (as Oma was very short sighted), and Oma commented on the things she heard, like the singing of a nightingale, or another bird. This way they complemented each other beautifully.

Whenever they were alone together, especially at dinner table, they spoke in French. This was a remainder of their childhood and youth which they had spent in Belgium. When we were invited to share a meal with them, they also spoke in French. Their daily morning devotions were carried out in French, and they tried to teach us some French, although

not with much success. But having absorbed a lot of French during my childhood must have made it easier for me to learn French later on.

Opa had always been interested in family history. He took up correspondence with Heinrich Rolffs, a chemist in Stettin, who had married a Tiemann. He had done some family research and in 1925 sent a hand written chronicle to Opa.



Opa 1941



Oma 1941

Opa was a great one for teasing others, not so good, though, when he was at the receiving end.

"Tell me, Dieter," he said, when I came home one day from school, "what mark did you get this time in English?"

"A six."

"Oh really? Can't you learn English? Look at my school report here," and he delved deep in the drawer of his desk and produced a document. "Here are all the subjects, and it says: 'tres bon, tres bon, tres bon (very good) ... for all the subjects.'"

"Could I have a look?"

"Oh no, child, you will only make dirty marks on it. It stays here in this drawer."

Unfortunately, we never had the opportunity to see the document. So one day I asked Oma: "Does it really say 'tres bon' on all of Opa's subjects in his school report?"

“Oh no, he is only teasing you.”

He also had a safe in the cloak room, firmly cemented in the wall and hidden by a large picture. We were always fascinated by it, as it seemed difficult to unlock.

“How do you unlock this door of the safe, Opa?” I once asked.

“Oh, that is very difficult. You need to say a magic formula, and then you can open it.”

“Could you tell us this formula please Opa?”

“Well, seeing that you are now big boys, I’ll tell you. You have to make six crosses over the rim of the door, three on top, and three at the bottom, and each time you make a cross you have to say: ‘Rotototoo, rotototoo, rotototoo’.”

“Can you show us?”

He inserted the big key of the safe into the key hole, turned it over once and said: “You see, it doesn’t open. Now watch.”

He made a half turn with the key, made his three crosses at the top and three crosses at the bottom, each time, with a solemn voice chanting: “Rotototoo, rotototoo, rotototoo.”

Before our amazed eyes, he gently opened the door.

Then Günter said: “Can I try it, Opa?”

He performed the exact ritual as Opa had shown him, but he still couldn’t open the safe.

“Why doesn’t it open for me?”

“You need to be grown-ups to open this door,” he said, and he never told us his secret of the half-turn.

Rumour had it, from reliable sources of course, that when Opa came past the women near the cow shed, when they were leaning over as they were scrubbing the buckets and milk cans after milking, that sometimes he would use his walking stick to lift their skirts to see if they were wearing underpants. Maybe his rationale for doing this was, although there is no proof, that he wanted to encourage them to wear underpants. But it is just as likely, that he enjoyed this type of practical joke.

All the workers loved him. They called him *Wiele Możny* which means ‘The Mighty one’, and when they greeted him, all would kiss his hand, men and women. That was their way of showing respect.

Before I went to school in Posen, I had a bad infestation of worms. The doctor had suggested a couple of days treatment in the hospital in Poznan. I went through two days of terrible trauma, all by myself, and a wardsmen putting ointment on my anus several times a day. I was very embarrassed by the whole procedure. The following day I managed to get home on the train by myself. At the station Opa was among those meeting me. In his loud voice he asked me: “Did you get rid of all the robakis?” He said it in his poor Polish, so that everyone could understand it. Robakis means worms. What would I have given to disappear instantly from the surface of the earth!

Oma was quite different. When we visited her, each time we came from Posen, she would often sit in the lounge and play patience. This was one of her favourite past times.

On one of those occasions, I came again to her. She was in a talking mood, and we talked about the time when we were still small.

“Do you remember, one holiday time, all four of you grand-children were sitting around the table in the servery, and we were playing cards?”

“You mean, when the lightening struck your house?”

“Yes, everything seemed as bright as daylight for a second, which was followed by a tremendous crash of thunder. We all stood up at the same time, it must have been like a shock. Then everything was plunged in darkness, as the electricity went off.”

“We were lucky, you had the lightening conductor on top of the house, otherwise the whole house could have burnt down.”

“I’m not so sure it could have, for I remember, after I lit a candle, we all sat down again, when suddenly water came rushing down from the ceiling, where the lamp hung. You cried out: “Die Sündflut, die Sündflut” (the biblical food). We were all terrified, but your interpretation made us really laugh.”

“Didn’t the water tank burst in the attic, after that lightening?”

“Yes, that was the cause of the flood.”

On rainy days, the four of us would spend hours and hours playing rummy in Oma’s house. Even when the rain had stopped, we would still sit there, until Oma came in and said: “Shouldn’t you be running outside a bit to get rid of your surplus energy?”

That’s when we stopped for the day, but the next would be a rummy day again.

Oma’s life must have been rather monotonous, but she never complained. Her cousin Gertrud Schmid from Stuttgart, came to stay with Oma for lengthy periods. She helped her over the loneliness. They would sit on garden chairs under the shade of large trees and talk for hours. Tante Gertrud became quite popular with us, and when I did not seem to make any progress in English at school, she gave me some good coaching, especially in pronunciation, as she had been a teacher all her life, and had lived in England for some time.

In Spring we usually were looking forward to Summer, as there was not so much to do at home. We preferred either Winter or Summer. It was not unusual, therefore, for us to be waiting impatiently for summer to come in 1941.

CHAPTER 7

Summer holidays

Our summer holidays started earlier than usual in June 1941. We didn't ask any questions, as we were only too happy to come home again for the long holidays, usually until early in September.

At home we had billets. Officers of the German army. They stayed in the manor house, but they came to us for meals. The troops were billeted in the barns. They slept on straw. They all seemed to be having a marvellous time in Schönsee, especially the officers, full of free time, swimming and boating on the lake, and enjoying the good food, the park and the pleasant surroundings. One of them was a medical doctor.

"You should really bandage your ankle bones," he said, looking at my festering sores on both of them.

"Do you really think so?" I asked somewhat doubtfully. "I've had them for weeks, and every time a scab forms there, I knock them again with the heel of the other foot when I walk."

"That's why they should be bandaged. Come over to my room in the manor house and I will do it for you."

"Thanks, that'll be great."

From then on we were friends, and the sores began to heal.

One evening, after he had put a new dressing on, he told me: "We have to go away from here the day after tomorrow."

"Oh, what a shame. Can't you stay a bit longer? Why do you have to leave?"

"I'd love to stay longer but I can't, and I'm not supposed to tell you, but we have to go further east."

"Further east?" I said in a parrot way, for I knew that could only mean Russia, but then Russia was an ally of Germany. So I was confused.

"Don't ask any more questions. I can't tell you any more."

"At least let us have a nice day tomorrow. I'll row you, and you can relax and look out for the beautiful white swans, the herons, and the other birds. Best thing is you don't think at all about the day after tomorrow."

He smiled at me and ruffled my hair. "Pity I can't take you with me."

"No thanks, I'd rather stay here."

"I thought you would, but that's a good idea of yours, to have a really good day tomorrow. Let's do that."

We went over to our home and had dinner. I didn't say a word to

anyone about our conversation. I was thinking about the day after tomorrow, and I was sad.

When tomorrow came, I was cheerful again. I had heard from Mutter, that all the officers would be leaving the next day.

"So they told you too?" I said knowingly.

"You knew, and didn't say anything?" she replied. "You can keep secrets well!"

I left. I had my appointment with the doctor. We spent a lovely day on the lake, and we talked non-stop. He told me about his training as a doctor, that he wanted to save lives, not destroy them, and how he hated the war. I told him about school. I tried hard to cheer him up, telling him about the pranks we played at school, but then I became sad again, for tomorrow he would be gone.

"Thank you for a wonderful day, and thank you for being my friend."

I could hardly say good-bye. There was something choking me. I wanted to give him a hug, but I couldn't.

They all left before dawn, on Friday, 20 June 1941.

On Sunday morning we heard through the news, that Germany had declared war on Russia and it's troops were advancing into Russian territory. It had been a complete surprise attack and as a result, there was hardly any resistance.

"Strange," I thought, "to have come so close to history at my age, knowing a few days before the Russians knew that they would be attacked."

A few weeks later we received a letter from another one of our billets, telling us that the doctor had died during an air raid by the Russians on the advancing troops.

I found it difficult to cope with that news. Our idyllic and peaceful home seemed to be blown apart by this terrible war. I remembered, that the doctor didn't like the war, and now he was dead. What else would the war bring? More death and destruction? From that moment on I had lost all interest in the war, no matter how victorious the German army seemed to be at that time.

The death of my doctor friend shocked me more than I thought. I had to seek comfort and consolation from the past. It had been such a wonderful and unforgettable childhood. Thinking of the past gave me strength in my present crisis.



It was summer 1934. Vater was worried that we couldn't swim, as our park was so close to the lake, and he wanted us to be able to roam around freely by ourselves.

"Come, children, I'll teach you how to swim," he said one afternoon.

We didn't have to be told twice. We went with him to the boat shed, not our usual swimming spot.

"Why are you taking us here?" we wanted to know.

"Just wait and you'll see."

"First you need to learn the breast stroke movements. Arms like that ... yes that's right, and feet like that."

"That's how frogs swim," said Günter in his matter of fact voice.

"Yes, and that's how you are going to learn to swim."

Then he got a belt with braces out of his bag, and a strong line. He tied the line to the braces and said: "Who is going to be the first one?"

We both said "Me" at the same time, but as Günter is older, he got the nod from Vater first.

"Put the belt round your waist, and both arms through here. Now I'll tie it behind you, quite firm, can you feel it. I'll hold you on this rope, no matter what, do you understand?"

"Of course." And in he went to his waist in the water.

"Now do your arm movements and lie flat on your stomach."

Günter did just that, while Vater held him up, body in the water, but the head was well above.

"That's great, Günter, now try to do the leg movements."

It took a bit longer, as they had to be synchronised, but he soon managed very well.

"Now comes the breathing. As you put your arms forward, you breathe out, and as you make the circle with your arms, you breathe in."

That did not go too well, but then it had been only the first day. My attempts were even poorer, but Vater had a lot of patience.

"Tomorrow we'll try again," he said.

For the next few weeks we had our regular practice. Then he took us to the swimming spot where we had a long board going from the dressing shed right past the reeds, with a railing on one side, and a spring board at the end, where the water was quite deep.

"I'll give you a few more training sessions here," he said, "But I think you're now good enough to swim without the braces and the line."

Without us knowing, Vater had constantly loosened his hold on us until he held the line merely for 'just in case'. Another couple of days at the swimming spot, and he said:

"I'm not holding you now at all. You can swim, boys, congratulations."

We were mighty proud.

"Tomorrow I'll give you a test."

Next day, Vater was treading water at the end of the spring-board.

"Now you go in at the steps and start swimming from there towards me, as you are."

I swam towards Vater, and then back again without stopping. The stretches became longer and longer until Vater said: "I'll give you two more days to practice, then you must swim for 15 minutes without

stopping. If you do that I know that you can swim”.

I knew that I could do it and a few days later I passed my test without any trouble. We knew that Vater could now relax and not worry about us falling into the water and drowning. I was five-and-a-half then.

“Do you remember when you were only three-and-a-half? We were all at the jetty near the boat-shed. We were looking for crabs in the water (fresh water yabbies). The water was rather murky, and suddenly I saw you jumping up and down with excitement, calling out: “Keeps, Keeps” (for Krebs), leaning over and — splash — you disappeared under the water. But I got you out quickly. You were dripping and crying.”

I nodded my head: “I was only crying, because you all laughed at me.”

“That’s a good story, anyway,” concluded Günter.

“Now you know why I was always worried about you near the water. That’s why I wanted you to learn to swim.”

Once we could swim our parents let us go anywhere we liked. One of my favourite past times was to go on the small white boat and row along the foreshore and explore the thick bulrushes. It was full of bird life. One spot was favoured by a couple of white swans. During breeding time they were rather touchy. The male would not let me near the nest. He came flying straight at me, landed with a big splash, wetting me in the process. Then he would ruffle his feathers, put his beak to his long neck and give a warning hiss, seemingly saying: “Don’t come any closer or I’ll get you.”

I also loved to row to the other side of the lake, perhaps 200 to 300 meters across. There were big trees with overhanging branches, reaching right into the water. I could get the boat in behind the branches and so be completely hidden from view. This added to my imagination of being a pirate, waiting for another boat to capture. Needless to say, it never came.

The usual swimming season lasted from the middle of June until the beginning of September, parallel with the school holidays. As young children, before we could swim, we had a special spot where the reeds had been cleared and one could go slowly into the water from the shore. The ground was murky and a bit slimy, but to us it did not matter. From early on, I loved the water. Visitors were less taken by that spot. But they could usually swim anyway, and the swimming jetty was just a bit further on.



In the summer of 1936, our parents wanted to go and see the Olympic Games in Berlin, unhindered by us two youngsters. For that reason they booked us into a children’s holiday camp by the sea. The place was called Widow. We didn’t like it very much. I think conditions were rather primitive and sparse. We were also terribly home-sick.

From Berlin, Vater and Mutter brought us a lot of sporting equipment, such as a javelin, shot-put, discus, stop watch, and also an Olympic Flag.

Vater also had our carpenter make us a gym, with a cross bar and a vertical bar to climb up.

“Yippee,” said Günter, “We can now hold our own Olympic Games.”

We fixed a day, and invited about 20 young people for this occasion. Horst and Bernd, of course, and they brought their two cousins Junkermann along. They also brought some of their Polish friends from Strykowo. The rest of the participants came from our own village.

To make the competitions somewhat more even, we grouped ourselves into different age-groups.

Our games started with a parade. Our parents, grandparents, and any others present stood on the steps of the big house, taking the salute. We waved and they waved back. After that the races started all around the drive way. From one end to the other was about 120 meters, so the 60 meters and 100 meters sprints were started in such a way that we ended up by the steps of the house. So did the 200 meters and 400 meters. We did not have any races longer than that. We had dug a sand pit for long jump and high jump, and on the lawn in front of the house we threw the javelin, shot-put and discus.

Swimming was also part of our Olympics, and diving. Our families were the umpires and we received gold, silver and bronze medals at the end of the games. Mutter had made these medals from gold, silver and bronze paper, over some card board. Because there were so many divisions, and so many different kinds of competitions, somehow we all managed to get at least some of the medals and proudly displayed them afterwards. This was quite a memorable day for us. We kept talking about it long afterwards, reliving all the details. We also kept up with our athletics for years after that.



It was good to dream of the past, even though the sadness about the death of the young doctor was still there.

Soon after that, Vater and Mutter invited a boy from the city to stay with us. His name was Heinz, and he was the son of a friend of theirs. He stayed with us for three weeks. The previous Christmas we had been given an Indian tent with red-indian head gear made of turkey feathers, and a tomahawk. The spear was our javelin. We were now fully equipped to wage war against the pale faces. They were, of course, imaginary, and we spent many hours fighting them, making camp fires, and smoking the peace pipe (a chestnut hollowed out, using dried leaves).

Heinz's visit was just at the right time for me. He helped me to get over my sadness.

Once the harvest started, we were again fully occupied with our horse-drawn rakes. A feeling of peace and freedom came over me, and for a time I was allowed to forget the horrors of war.

Autumn in Sapowice

Hans Zipper was really Günter's friend, but he came so often to visit us, that I became fond of him too. We all liked him, and he loved our free and easy life. During the summer of 1941, he had worked, as we had, throughout the harvest time on the horse-drawn rake, got up at 5 every morning, and came home late, sometimes after 7 pm. For Opa's birthday, 29 July, he came with us to Lake Górka, where we often went to a nice restaurant which served delicious ice creams, and Opa hired a pedal boat. We fought with him to be the first to pedal the family in around, and shared with him our teenage secrets. He lived in Posen not far from our boarding house, so even during the week we would see quite a lot of each other.

On one of his visits to Sapowice he asked me: "Don't you have any harvest festivals here? I helped bringing in the harvest, I would like to be also part of the festival, when it comes."

"Sorry, Hans, since the war we have not had any harvest festival, but you should have been here before the war!"

"Was it good then?"

"Absolutely magic!"

"Can you tell me a little bit about it?"

"The harvest festival of 1933 is still very fresh in my memory, because Günter and I received a pair of rabbits then. Oma and Opa, my parents, and we both stood on top of the front steps of the manor house over there. We all wore our sunday bests, watching a procession of brightly decorated harvesting wagons coming towards us from the right, along the circular drive way, just passing here by this tree. There were about eight of them, all beautifully decorated with coloured ribbons, with straw and with greenery. On the first cart were all the musicians, playing a march, with plenty of umpah, umpah. You know, those typical village bands with wind instruments and a strong drummer."

"Yes, I love those."

"The cart with the band stopped on this side of the steps, leaving enough space for the other carts to file past. On the next cart, and those that followed, were our women folk, all dressed in their white dresses, aprons, and with those coloured ribbons hanging around, typical of the traditional Polish dresses of this area. Each cart was driven by a fomal, you know those workers responsible for the horses. There were other men and

women on the carts as well. When the whole procession came to a halt, all, except the formals, came down and walked slowly towards our stairs. Four women were carrying a 'harvest crown', two per crown. They looked a bit like a very large lamp shade, where bunches of ears of corn were tied around the wires, a bit how wreaths are tied, interspersed with flowers and coloured ribbons. When it is fully decorated, it does look like a crown, though I wouldn't like to wear one."

"Would be a bit scratchy, I imagine? But what did you do with them?"

"They came up the steps, two at a time, and presented a crown first to Opa and Oma, the other was for Vater and Mutter. It was considered a gift from all the people to honour my grandparents and my parents. Afterwards they were hung up in our hallways, where they would hang until at least spring time. But that was not all. Another pair of women walked up the steps, and walked right up to where Günter and I were standing. They presented us with an open basket with two rabbits. We were very thrilled, of course, and as we held the basket up for everyone to see, they all clapped."

"So what did you do with the rabbits?"

"Our carpenter made us a hutch for them and we put it under Oma's verandah, on the west side of the manor house. There was no floor, just sand, but it had a door, and the area was closed in. We let them run around there, feeding them occasionally, but someone else must have helped with that, because we were still not responsible enough to look fully after them. As you know, rabbits are terrific breeders and after a few weeks, instead of two, there were already ten running around. They had dug holes into the sand and lived there almost like wild rabbits, and breeding like them too. Of course, we had no idea where they came from."

"And did you ask your parents?"

"I can't remember, but I think not, because we still had no idea where all these young rabbits came from."

"It would have been a good opportunity for your parents to tell you."

"Of course, but I think they missed it. They multiplied so much, that eventually there were rabbits everywhere. And then, one day, one by one they all died."

"How awful. Why was that?"

"Vater said, much later, mind you, that they were in-bred. They had lost their resistance and just died."

"What a sad ending to a lovely story."

"Hang on, I haven't finished telling you about the harvest festival. The following year we received a pair of pigeons on a plate. They too did very well in the pigeon tower in our yard."

"Yeah, but what about the actual harvest festival? Better get on with that."

"I told you it is a long story. After the presentations, Vater made a speech, thanking everybody for their good work that year, that they had

worked hard, often for long hours, first to get the seeds in, then to cultivate the fields, and finally to harvest the grain. He mentioned also that nothing got wet that year, for which they all had to thank God, but also them for they had worked on the last field till nine before it started raining. As the harvest had been good, they would all get a bonus that year. Then, of course, loud cheers and clapping came from all around the people crowding around the staircase. To finish off he told them that this day was a day of celebration. The coach house had been emptied and decorated. The band was ready to play all night for them. There was food and there was drink for everyone. They could go now and enjoy themselves. Then the band started a song, in which everyone joined in:

‘Sto lat, sto lat, niech żyje, żyje nam, ...
Jeszcze duże, jeszcze duże, niech żyje żyje nam ...’

“And what does that mean?” interjected Hans, who couldn’t speak Polish.

“It says:

‘Hundred years, hundred years, may you live for hundred years.’
... and ‘Even longer, even longer may you even longer live.’”

“Well, well!”

“When Vater went to the *vieniec*, the harvest festivities, they sang this song again, and in doing so, several strong men grabbed him and threw him up in the air repeatedly, each time catching him, as he came down.”

“That must have been a bit scary?”

“I don’t think so. He is used to that. They always do it when they are happy and want to thank him in a special way.”

“Hm, I’m not too sure. But what happened afterwards?”

“Well, the whole procession went again around the oval drive way, and then disappeared through the gate, to the coach house.”

“Did you go there too?”

“Not that year, we were too small then. But from 1938 we were allowed. It was good fun, but we didn’t like the dancing. It was all right to watch though. The band sat at one end, seats and tables along the wall, and the rest was dancing floor, all on concrete, of course. Vater and Mutter had to have the first dance. They always opened with the *Mazurka*, and when everybody joined the dancing floor, we too mingled in, chasing each other between the dancing couples. But then the floor became too crowded, so we just sat and watched.”

“How long did you stay there?”

“Not much longer than that. As the evening progressed the *Stimmung* or atmosphere, became more rowdy, and we were advised to go home. You know, sometimes we heard next morning, that some gate-crashers from

another village had tried to come in and cause trouble, but Vater made sure there were enough people at the gate to prevent anybody from disturbing the peace. We knew from other festivities in the village, that often these types of parties ended up with a bad fight, where knives and knuckle dusters were used, and once somebody even died as a result of it."

"Really? Didn't the police do anything about it?"

"We have no police in our village. Vater had to see to it that law and order was kept."

"A big responsibility, especially, if you have some hot-heads among your people."

"That's why we always had guards at the gate for our *vieniec*. And, really, our harvest festivals were always beautiful."

"I wish they had them again this year."

"So do I. It's the war. Vater would not get a permit."

"Pity."

Our conversation drifted on to some other subject, but the excitement of the wonderful harvest festivals in the past lingered on.



Hans wanted to know what other work was there to do on the farm before the winter set in. I explained that all the potatoes still had to be harvested, and the sugar beet and feeding beet, which was again quite hard work.

As we were walking towards the forest, Hans asked me: "Why are there those dog kennels made of straw alongside the road?"

"Hans!?" He sometimes liked to tease me. "They are for the guards of the apple and pear harvest. One of them actually is the contractor who buys the harvest of all those trees along this road and the other roads. When the various brands of apples, pears and plums begin to ripen, he estimates the crop, and offers Vater a price for the whole lot. When they agree on the price, it is his responsibility to guard it with his dogs and the other helpers."

"Don't tell me that he sleeps in these straw shelters."

"He does, Hans, but I don't think he gets much sleep during the days when the fruit is nearly ripe."

"And who harvests them later?"

"That's his job too. He then has to sell it. The best fruit he offers back to us and we buy from him what we need for the winter. The rest goes to the shops in Posen."

"But how come, I didn't see many apples or pears on these trees? They look pretty young to me."

"They are. Most of the old trees died in the severe winter of last year."

This contractor just doesn't want to lose his job. Vater didn't charge him anything for the few apples that are left, and he also keeps an eye on the new trees."

"I don't think I would like that job."

"Neither would I. But how about going to the orchard instead to the forest?"

"Why, would there be anything left that we could eat? I thought you had no fruit this year?"

"You are quite right, but I know an old pear tree which survived the severe winter."

"Oh, I like pears," said Hans.

"So do I, let's go then."

We went through the garden gate and turned towards the third greenhouse. There was a tall pear tree, with branches hanging low enough to be reached, if we climbed along the outside wall of the sloping greenhouse roof. There were a few pears hanging in the tree.

"Hans, I must tell you a story connected with this tree. It must have been in September 1934, before my school lessons started. I often roamed about then with my Polish friends. Günter was already getting his school lessons from Mutter, so I was left to amuse myself."

"What has that to do with the pear tree here?"

"One day I played again with my Polish friends in the sand pit over the fence there. We knew that the fruit in this garden were beginning to ripen. As some branches were hanging over the fence, we could see some pears almost ready for picking."

"But it's very tall."

"It wasn't that tall then, but as it stands right close to the fence and near the greenhouse here, we just had to steal some pears."

"Why didn't you just go into the garden and get them, as we are doing now?"

"Opa didn't want us here, and as I had about four friends from the village with me, he most certainly would have had a fit."

"So, what did you do?"

"I said to Józiu, one of my play-mates: 'could you climb the fence for us and reach those pears?'"

"But Józiu was scared. 'Let Stefan go, he is taller'. Stefan, his older brother, didn't need any encouragement. The pears looked too attractive to him to argue about who was to go up. He climbed the fence from out there, then on to the side of the roof, and higher to where he could reach the pears. He threw a couple of pears down for each of us, and some more went inside the top of his jumper, after he made sure that it was tucked into his belt. When he picked all the pears he could reach, he turned to come down. Then he suddenly ducked. 'The Wiele Możny is coming,' he shouted."

"Who's that?"

"That's what they call Opa, it means 'the Mighty One'."

"That must have given you all a bit of a fright?"

"It sure had. We all panicked. Stefan must have felt the most guilty, for when he had jumped off the fence, he ran way ahead of us. We could hardly keep up with him. Out of the corner of my eye I could see him emptying his loot by beating his jumper from the belt upwards, first with his left hand, then with his right, like the blades of a paddle boat, whilst running as fast as he could. The pears came toppling out one by one, until all were scattered over the ground in the park."

"What a waste! And where did you run to?"

"Straight home, of course, everyone to their own home. These kids were really terrified of Opa."

"What about you? You ran too, didn't you?"

"Yes, I guess I had a bad conscience too. But Opa never said a thing to me about this. Maybe he had not caught up with the pranks of his grandson. But in general, he was very stingy about the fruit in his garden."

"What, to you and Günter too?"

"Yes, every time we sneaked into the strawberry patch or into the raspberries, we had a guilty conscience. But Mutter would never say anything. If you ask me, she didn't mind us eating the fruit here, provided we did not damage anything, and of course we did not bring in all our friends from the village."

"What about now? Is Opa still the same? Could he chase us out here now?"

"I don't think so. He has mellowed a great deal. Mutter is slowly taking control of the garden, but of course, she always consults with him."

"So, how about those pears then?"

"Okay. Can you climb up there?"

"No thanks, I'll leave that to you. I'd rather you fall through those glass panels, than I."

I had no trouble climbing the side wall of the greenhouse.

"There are just a couple of ripe ones here, Hans. I can't reach the others. That'll have to do."

"Sure. Just make sure you don't fall, when you come down."

"No worries," I replied, and jumped the last bit to the ground. "This is better than seven years ago. At least we can enjoy a nice, juicy pear."

"Hm, they are really sweet and juicy. Thanks a lot."

"How about going to the rabbits? I'll take some cabbage leaves from here to feed them."

"Yes, let's go there. I like rabbits."

"You haven't seen our latest batch of babies yet, have you?"

"No, when were they born?"

"Only two days ago. The mother is a good one, she lets us take the babies out of the nest and have a close look at them. Not like the other. She bites and scratches, every time you put your hand inside the hatch."

“Do Horst and Bernd still breed rabbits?”

“My word. We’ve got ours all started through them, as you know. They bought the Chinchilla breed, so did we. Their carpenter made them that beautiful rabbit house, so did ours. We always compare notes about our rabbits.”

“How many single hutches has your rabbit house?”

“There are twelve. And you know, the floor of ours is made of slats so the straw doesn’t get so wet and dirty.”

“Does the dirt then fall on the heads of the rabbits below?”

“Oh, don’t be silly. There’s a floor between each row.”

Meanwhile we had arrived at our rabbit house, which stood in Oma and Opa’s chicken enclosure.

“These rabbits eat a lot. They need to be fed twice a day, and fresh water also. Now that we live in Posen, someone else is looking after them, but we always do the cleaning out when we come home for the weekend.”

“Can I pat one?”

“Here, take this one, he’s a young male. We’re fattening them.”

“How can you tell that’s a male?”

“It’s not so easy when they are very young. But this one is already about six weeks old. I’ll show you.”

I took him gently by the scruff of his neck, legs up. Then I pushed the outer genitals towards the tummy.

“See, this protrusion? This is the penis. If there’s nothing, it’s a female. We keep only the females for breeding. Occasionally we have to buy a new male, so that they won’t inbreed. When these males are big we sell them to Mutter for the kitchen.”

“That’s a good scheme.”

“It is. We then ask the kitchen staff to dry the skins and save them up for a fur-coat for Mutter.”

“That should look nice, a whole fur coat of these blue-grey pelts.”

“Very nice indeed, but somehow I fear she will never get her fur-coat. The skins have a tendency to disappear.”

“Somebody else must like them too.”

“I am afraid so. It’s best to enjoy and admire them, when they are still alive, though.”

Hans went back to Posen, thinking about how he could start breeding rabbits in his home. But I don’t think it ever came to anything.



When we came home the following weekend, it was raining all Saturday. It was typical autumn weather. Sunday, however, was bright again, and Vater suggested we all go for a walk.

“Okay, we’ll come with you, but what about Gerda?”

"She can stay with Maria," said Mutter. Maria had recently started to help in the house and look after Gerda.

"Will you tell us a story, please?" we begged Vater.

Our parents had just finished their afternoon snooze, and Vater couldn't think of a story at that moment.

Vater's stories were not fairy tales. They were usually taken from his own life, or from a book, or even out of his head and then adapted with names changed. We never knew, which it was. He had the wonderful gift to mix fact and fiction, intertwined with his own experience, and he would spin an interesting story for us. We found these stories quite fascinating, and we could never get enough of them. He usually started soon after we left home, and finished just before we got back again.

"I don't know what to tell you."

Günter said: "Don't tell us a story this time, we would like to know what life was like here when you were young."

Vater's face turned very serious, and after a while he began: "As you know, your Opa and Oma lived in Antwerp when they grew up. Both their parents had businesses there. As Opa had always loved animals and birds, and his health was rather delicate at that time, his parents thought that it would be better for him to live in the country. He learnt farming from Mr. von Bernut in Borowo and Mr. von Guenther in Gzybno, who still live there. In 1888 he bought the manor here at Sapowice, which was then known as Eberhardslust, named after the former owner Ebert. Opa and Oma were married in 1890 at Antwerp and moved into the manor house here. They had three boys, Walter, born in 1893, me born in 1894, and Werner born in 1898.

"We grew up here just like you, in the freedom of this beautiful place. When I was four, Walter and I had a French nanny who taught us French in no time. Then we had private tuition until 1905, when Walter and I came to a high school at Posen, he in year three and I in year two.

"We boarded in Posen with an elderly couple, but always came home for the weekends, like you now."

"Except for the times I'm not allowed to come home," I had to interrupt.

"Only because you don't want to learn English. But where was I? Oh yes, coming home for the weekends. In those days there was no railway station at Strykowo. The line hadn't been built yet. We had to take the train to Otusz, on the line to Berlin, where we were met by our coach, seven kilometers from here. During holidays our friends came here, just like yours, and we rode horses, swam, rowed, sailed, played tennis and drove through our property and the woods. I did everything together with Walter. We were inseparable.

"Then something dreadful happened to him. There was an epidemic of scarlet fever here at Sapowice in 1909, and we were not allowed to come home for the summer holidays. When we came home in autumn, we

helped with the potato harvest as usual. In those days only hoes were used, and somehow Walter must have got infected from one of those hoes we borrowed. He was very sick with scarlet fever for six weeks. To make things worse, he also contracted diphtheria and in spite of the best nursing care he never recovered. He died in November.

"This was a terrible shock to my parents and me, and we never really got over it.

"Opa and Oma then decided to send me to Antwerp, to help me forget. I went to school there from 1910 till 1912 and stayed with my grandmother Schmid, Oma's mother. Grandma's brother was Eugene Kreglinger. His children grew up with Oma like her own brothers and sisters, for they had lost their mother when they were very young. The social life in my grandmother's and uncle's houses was extraordinary. I met great artists and famous people and I remember to this day some of the most interesting conversations I had with them. I played lots of tennis, learnt fencing, went to concerts and theatres and had the best time of my life there."

"Vater, could you stop for a while please?" I interrupted.

Our walk had taken us to the forest, where we had turned into a driveway, walking along the soft forest road with tall trees forming a canopy over our heads. We had just come to a silver birch grove which was less dense and had some grass growing underneath.

"I can see some mushrooms."

"Where?" asked Günter, who was also keen on collecting mushrooms.

"Under that beech tree. It's a Steinpilz!" It was a large mushroom, fairly firm with sponge-like gills.

"They are very nice," said Mutter. "See if we can get any more, then we can have mushrooms for supper."

I knew quite a lot of varieties of edible mushrooms. Soon I came across a large umbrella mushroom, standing above the green grass.

"We can fry this one in bread crumbs. That tastes yummy."

"But we need a few more to make it worth while."

Günter, who had raced ahead, shouted: "There are many more umbrella mushrooms over here, just come and see for yourselves."

"That should be enough for the whole family!" Mutter seemed very pleased. She got out her head scarf, which she always had in her pocket, just in case it would rain, and we almost filled it with those delicious mushrooms.

"They are really most delicious," Vater said, who had not found any to that point. But he knew that there were mushrooms in the pine forest, and he came back with a handful of yellow Pfifferlings.

"Oh Alfred, they will go well in our stew," said Mutter. "But I can't carry any more in this scarf. It's full to the brim."

"Please, Vater, continue your story," we both pleaded.

We had just come to a T-junction, where we turned into a broad avenue

lined with holly bushes, leading to our private burial place with the family tomb, surrounded by a fence.

"Let's go first to the tomb," he said.

We stood along the fence and looked at the brick building, which had a door on the side facing us, and a window on the opposite side. Behind the door a few steps led to the tomb itself.

"Why is Onkel Walter's coffin standing there all on its own?" I wanted to know.

"There is enough space for several more coffins. One day Opa and Oma's will be standing there."

I couldn't imagine that anyone living now could one day be dead. Then I thought of Vater losing his brother. How terrible that must have been for him. I could never lose Günter, it would tear me apart.

"Why is Anna Berta, Onkel Werner and Tante Margaret's daughter, buried here and not inside the tomb?"

"She died when she was only three months old," Mutter said. "They didn't want her inside. There's plenty of space between the fence and the tomb."

"You can bury me here when I die," said Vater. "I don't want to be inside the tomb either."

"Oh, Vater!" I said. "Stop it!"

I turned away from this place of the dead. Life was still all in front of me, and I didn't want to think about death on this lovely autumn day.

"Please, Vater, tell us some more about your life."

Vater looked into the distance. His mind was obviously still somewhere else.

"Where was I?"

Mutter helped him out: "In Antwerp."

"Oh yes. I came back from Antwerp in 1912. Meanwhile a new railroad had been built to Grodzisk in 1909, with a station at Strykowo. To allow us all-weather access to the station, the Government cobbled the road to Strykowo. With that Opa could grow sugarbeet, which went by rail via Grodzisk to the sugar factory at Opalenica. He made a lot of money with that, and instead of living it up, as others might have done, Opa ploughed it back into the farm. He built new and much better homes for all the workers, the ones that are still there, and modernised the starch factory, and built the cow shed and the stables for the horses. He also added the top of the eastern wing to the manor house, put running water through the house and had a septic tank built. Later in 1915, when because of the war kerosene was hard to get, he put a generator into the factory and connected electricity to all the stables and the manor house.

"Conditions in the village also improved. The yellow post coach which delivered our mail from Buk, came now from Stęszew. When I came back from Antwerp, I wanted to follow Opa's footsteps. To do this I had to learn farming, first with a friend of Opa's nearby for a year. The second place

was near Anklam, north of Berlin. There I had to run the farm all on my own for some time, as the owner went away on an extended holiday.

“Meanwhile the war broke out, and I joined the cavalry as a lieutenant, spending three years on the Russian front, and one year on the western front. After the armistice I just made it home for Christmas in 1918.

“By then this area had become part of Poland. Opa couldn’t cope with the stress of the war. He spent long periods in a sanatorium in Berlin, and left an incompetent Polish administrator in charge. As a result, the farm was run down again when I took over early in 1919. It wasn’t easy to return the farm to profitability, though. I was helped by some financial manipulation. I bought fertiliser, life stock and some machinery on twelve months credit, and held on to the crops until just before the new harvest. By then the price was six times the amount I would have received immediately after the harvest. I had learnt this at Antwerp from the family merchants there.

“Well, gradually the farm prospered again until now, and you yourselves are the continuation of the story.”

We had reached the *Świąty Jan*. It began to get dark. I thought of all the other stories which Vater had told us in the past. He always gave us something to think about. He certainly was a great story teller.

He was not so good, however, telling us about the facts of life. It had only been the year before when he told us on a long walk through the fields. Günter was then 13 and I nearly 12. By then we had heard from either Horst or our Polish friends ages ago, where babies came from. He told us about prostitutes, and how to avoid them, about sexually transmitted diseases and condoms, and about keeping ourselves clean, and to avoid the world’s so-called pleasure spots. To us it seemed all a bit stilted. Probably we would have appreciated an open discussion on this subject, but Vater just didn’t have the knack for it, but neither did we. Had he talked to us about procreation, when we received the rabbits from our people at the harvest festival, I’m sure it would have helped us more, as then we were not quite five or six. He had left it far too late.

CHAPTER 9

The beginning of the end

In September 1941 I had started third year at the Schiller High School in Posen. The Siebenbürger boarding house, situated on the ground floor in a block of very large flats in the Helmholzstrasse, was full of boarders. Tante Else had to rent a couple of more rooms two floors up. We were sixteen boarders altogether, boys and girls.

One day, Günter and I were summoned to the Hitler Youth office in the block of flats next door. Before we plucked up enough courage to go, I asked Günter: "What do you think they want from us?"

"I don't know. Maybe they want to ask us, why we are not attending the meetings more regularly."

"I don't know how we can attend? Their meetings are always during weekends, and I'm not going to stay here just because of the Hitler Youth."

"We have to be careful what we say," was his wise comment.

"I don't know what's happened with the Hitler Youth. Do you remember the first rally we went to way back in January 1940? I was so enthusiastic about it then."

"So was I. It was in the big square in front of the Schloss. There were so many of us there."

"We had to wear white shirts and black shorts with white socks and black shoes. Gee, I was cold then."

"And some big shot of the Hitler Youth came, making a long speech and then he inaugurated the Hitler Youth movement here in Posen."

"And the fanfares, drums, and flags — it all made a big impression on me."

"And then, with all the rest, we all joined up."

"I loved it when they taught us to play the fanfare at the camps."

"I preferred the drums," said Günter. "But that doesn't help us now when they ask us."

"Why can't we just tell them the truth? We are not here over the weekends, but at home."

"Let's hope they'll accept that."

With that we walked up the four flights next door to the office of the Hitler Youth. As we walked through the door, our hearts were pounding, and not only because we were puffed.

"Is the Bannführer there?" Günter asked, "He wanted to see us."

"Just wait here a moment," and the girl disappeared through another door.

"He is down the corridor, the last office on your right," she said when she came back.

As we entered, we both stood at attention, greeting him with "Heil Hitler", as we had learnt.

The man was in his late twenties, rather mature from our point of view. He was in uniform, wearing the black cord from his epaulet to his side pocket, the symbol of Bannführer, in charge of the Hitler Youth in the whole province of Posen.

As we made ourselves as comfortable as we could on the hard chairs in front of his desk, he came straight to the point: "I have heard from your group leader, that you have been missing a lot of meetings recently. Can you tell me why?"

I looked at Günter, he looked at me. Then he said: "We always go home for the weekends, we are never here. We actually live in Schönsee, we only go to school here in Posen."

"I see," he said, looking straight at Günter first, then at me. "And why don't you join a group in Schönsee then?"

"There is none," I said quickly, hoping that that would end our interrogation.

"Well, why don't you start one there, if there is none?" came his unexpected reply.

"There are not enough Germans there," said Günter.

"Didn't your village get some new settlers from Besarabia, and the Germans from the Volga, who have been recently liberated by our victorious German army from Soviet oppression?"

"Yes, some."

"Then you can recruit them and start a new group in Schönsee, is that understood?"

"But there are only three or four families in our village, that wouldn't be enough for a group."

I had to give full credit for persistency to Günter, but I didn't know, how persistent the Bannführer could be. Looking at the map of the Province of Posen, he said: "Then you join up with another village nearby, and get all the young boys together there."

"That could only be in Strykowo," Günter said quickly. Neither of us wanted to go anywhere else.

"Okay. I order you then to start a group in Strykowo. I'll appoint you to be the leader of your region, and Dieter, you can be your brother's assistant. Later I'll make you the group leader, once one has been established. Good luck to you, and report back to me, as soon as you've got the group going."

Back in our room, we looked at each other with mixed feelings.

"At least we can go home each weekend," I said, trying to see the good side of it.

"Yeah, but half of our valuable time will be spent working for the Hitler Youth!"

"Never mind, Bernd can help us. Wouldn't you like to join us in Strykowo?"

"I guess I'll have to. They want us to go to a meeting somewhere, so it might as well be at home."

The reason why we had become reluctant members of the Hitler Youth went back to the beginning of 1941. Our early enthusiasm had gone when we began to question some of its principles, especially after an incident at a weekend camp, where we went with lots of other Hitler Youth groups, older and younger ones. We slept in a barn on straw.

Early on Sunday morning we were woken up by a lot of noise and quite a commotion.

"This time we have really shown them what it means to live in Germany," I heard, still half asleep, one of the older youth bragging.

"What have you done?" I asked.

"Never mind, you twerp, none of your business." I noticed that among the group was also my cousin Horst. When we were on our way home I asked him: "What has happened this morning when your group came in so late, or should I say so early in the morning?"

I could see that Horst was somewhat disturbed by my question. He really didn't want to answer, but then he said: "Promise me that you won't tell anybody. Otherwise I'll get into trouble."

I promised.

"After you all had gone to sleep last night, our group got up and went around this village and to some neighbouring villages. You know how our people (the Poles) always have statues of their saints standing at all sorts of public places and along the roads and groves among trees?"

"Yes," I said, "Like the Święty Jan in Sapowice?"

"That's right. We got the order to smash them all up, and so we went from one saint to the next and did a very thorough job, with stones, sledge hammers and the like."

"You really did that?" I couldn't believe it, for I knew how important religion was for our Poles, and how we had learnt as young boys, always to respected them. We would have never dreamed of doing such a thing.

"How could you?"

Horst was ashamed. "Everyone did it, and I couldn't get out of it. I was practically forced to do it, but I hate them for doing that to me."

From that moment the glamour of the Hitler Youth had gone for us. All four of us felt that this was certainly not why we had joined in the first place. We had lived with the Poles before the war, had played with them, they were our friends. During the time when the bandits roamed the country, at the beginning of the war, our Polish workers had protected

Vater and Onkel Werner and Tante Margaret. We couldn't suddenly turn against them now. Gradually we became aware, that we could not be loyal Hitler Youth at the same time as being loyal to our Polish people. It seemed crazy to us, but we had to choose either the one or the other. After the episode with the saints which we heard from Horst, it wasn't difficult to decide.

However, we had to follow orders. The following weekend we visited our German families. The original Polish owners of the farms had been thrown out by the German authorities without compensation, and had been banished into the General Gouvernement, to form a buffer zone between Germany and Russia. We had witnessed their method of 'resettlement' ourselves in Posen, and we felt terribly sad about it, especially, as we could not do anything about it. We had heard of a plan by the German authorities, to make the province of Posen a purely German province through resettlement.

We found there were four boys between the age of 10 to 14 in Schönsee. They spoke fluent German, but with a strange accent. We told them that they had to join a group in Strykowo. From Bernd we heard the following Monday, that there were eight boys in his village, so plenty to start the planned group.

We reported back to the Bannführer, and he gave us instructions on how to conduct meetings. A lot of time would be spent in learning Hitler songs, marching, and general drill. Some time was also spent in indoctrination, teaching everyone Hitler's life story, which we all had to know by heart.



Günter and I in Hitler Youth uniform

Günter was made an area leader, with a green cord hanging from his epaulet, and I was given a red and white thin cord and was put in charge of the smallest unit (between 10 to 15 members).

But our heart wasn't in it. We really resented the free time we had to spend at Hitler Youth meetings, and gradually we eased ourselves out of the situation. We told our district leader at home, that we had to go back to Posen because of mounting school work. In Posen, they thought we were still involved in the country group. By stealth we had become 'passive' members.



Our life in Posen went on as usual. Otto Körner was my class mate, and we did a lot of home work together, as he lived in the room next door at Tante Else's.

"I have to buy a book for Biology," I said to him one day, "Do you want to come with me?"

"Sure, I like to browse through the book shop."

We caught the tram to town.

When we were in the book shop, I saw Otto leafing through a book on birds.

"I'd love to buy this book for my father," he said, looking at the beautifully coloured pages.

"Why don't you?"

"It's too expensive. I haven't got the money."

"I'll fix that," I said, and looking around, to see if anybody was watching, I put the book into my bag. Then I walked over to the counter with the biology books, found what I was looking for, and went to the cashier near the door, handing her the biology book.

"That will be RM4.20," she said.

I handed her a fiver, got the change, and said to Otto: "Come on, let's go home."

After we had gone some way, Otto said: "Gee, that was easy."

"Yeah, my friend, that's how it is done."

At home I handed him the book on birds for his father.

"I hope he'll like it."

"I'm sure he will."

Temptation struck again, when next I visited the bookshop. I told Otto afterwards: "I went again to our book shop."

"Yes? and what happened?"

"Do you remember the book on mushrooms?"

"The one in the same series as the bird book?"

"Here it is."

"Well done, Dieter. Did you pinch it?"

“It was a bit more difficult than last time. You see, I had no other book to buy, so I just stuffed it into my jacket, and walked out of the shop.”

“As easy as that, hey?”

Some weeks passed.

Otto never came back to the boarding house after the Easter holidays. We all wondered what had happened to him. I missed him very much, as for more than a year we had been close friends. Later I heard, that his father had taken him out of the school, out of our boarding house, and put him into a proper boarding school, away from Posen. He had been caught stealing books from a certain book shop in Posen. I felt terribly guilty, for I knew I had started him off on this road. I might have ruined his life, and I certainly have ruined a beautiful friendship. I was ashamed. It should have been me who got caught.



In February of 1942, Horst was called up into the Arbeits Dienst, a military style working service, which built bridges, maintained roads, and worked on other national projects. This was a government funded organisation, and like military service, was compulsory for all German males above the age of seventeen. After six months in one of their units, young people were usually drafted into the military service.

“I don’t think Horst minds,” said Bernd, when we found ourselves reduced to three Tiemans at the Siebenbürgers. “He never liked school very much.”

“But we will miss him,” I said. “It will never be the same, neither here nor at home.”

“And to think, when the war started, we all said that we were far too young to ever get involved in it,” Bernd reminded us.

“That’s right.”

“Maybe, one day, it’ll be our turn.”

“Surely, by then, the war will be over?”

“You never know.”



The summer holidays of 1942 had passed as usual. Günter, Hans and I spent most of the time sitting on our horse-drawn rakes, working and dreaming, and enjoying the freedom of a care-free life.

One Sunday morning we were sitting around the breakfast table, talking about what had happened during the week in Posen.

Günter said: “They opened a new swimming pool for us in Posen this

week. Only this one is special, it's the first indoor pool for Posen."

"Yes," I piped in, "We all went there. It's huge."

"They converted a Jewish Synagogue into this pool. It's near the market place, absolutely enormous."

"Oh?" Vater said, "tell us more about it.."

"I saw a star of David on the wall, above the main entrance. And some of the windows looked more like cathedral windows, not really suitable for a swimming pool. But it was really nice."

"They must have done a thorough job, to make a place of worship into a swimming pool!" Vater pondered. "Didn't you feel funny swimming there?"

"No," I said, "The water was a bit cold, though."

I had no concept of what Vater was hinting at. I accepted that it had formerly been a Synagogue, but so what? Jews in Germany simply had no rights, and I never questioned that.

"But," Vater said cautiously, "just imagine someone converting our church into a swimming pool."

"Ah, but that's different," I said. "Jews are criminals. I have seen some Jews being marched along the street with a yellow star of David on the left sleeve, or on the backs of their shabby coats. They had a guard marching with them. They are not like us. They are all criminals."

"Really?" was all that Vater could answer. He wasn't too sure whether he could trust us on this point. Had we been so much indoctrinated by the Nazis, that we would report him to the authorities? He preferred to err on the safe side. I would have probably welcomed some guidance from him on this issue, but as this subject was never mentioned again, I didn't question why Jews were being marched along the streets, nor what might be happening to them afterwards.

"Do you remember at Tante Joni's the other day, where we met a nephew of hers, I think Fritz was his name?" Günter asked me.

"The one who said he was a quarter Jewish?"

"Yes, he was very nice. He said, and I think he was telling us a joke, 'it was an advantage to have a Jewish grandmother, because: (a) she didn't cause you any harm (in terms of Nazi persecution), and (b) she brought money into the family.'"

"Everyone laughed, when he said that."

"That's enough, boys. This is serious, and not a laughing matter," Vater said sternly.

He continued: "You know the war is affecting us all. Many places in western Germany have daily air raids, especially in the Rhine/Ruhr area. Similar to Hamburg earlier in the war. People are tense and anxious, because they don't get enough sleep."

"We are lucky here. At least we can sleep through the nights."

"And have enough to eat!" I added.

"While we are on that subject," Mutter came in, "I wanted to tell you

that my cousin, Tante Ruth Goebel, will come to us with her four children to seek refuge from the daily bombing attacks on Essen.”

“Do we know her?” Günter wanted to know.

“No, you have never met her. She is the daughter of Onkel Richard Forstmann, Oma Beyme’s brother. He and Onkel Karl, Tante Ruth’s husband, will bring the whole family to live with us.”

“Where are they going to stay?”

“They will live in the manor house on the upper floor of the western wing.”

“Just the two rooms upstairs?”

“Yes, but we will have to divide the room facing north into two, as they are bringing their nanny.”

“So they’ll have three rooms plus the bathroom and toilet in the one wing?”

“Yes, that’s right. But they’ll have their meals always with us here.”

“That’ll make a big family. And who are their children?”

“Barbara is the eldest, she is eight, Karl is six, Richard is four and Hedwig is the youngest, she is not quite two.”

“Wonderful,” said Gerda, “then I’ll have plenty of children to play with.”

“And it will be nice for me too,” said Mutter, “I’ll have my cousin to talk to all day, and Nanny can look after all of you then.”

“Oh, what fun!” Gerda couldn’t wait for them to arrive.

When they came, our small house seemed full. We felt that home was no longer the same, but it was also good to have someone else to talk to. They brought with them a bigger world, a different perspective. We found them very stimulating and we got on well together, a big family living in harmony and peace.



Horst in army uniform with his family, 1943.

The war seemed far away for us, had it not been for Horst. After he served his six months in the Arbeits Dienst, Horst was called up into the army. He had just turned 18. I think he was quite glad that school was over for him, as he had never liked it very much. Would he be happier in the army? I had my doubts. I quite liked school, and I hoped that our turn to join up would never come.

From then on we anxiously followed the movements of the German troops on a map. The German army, once forging ahead, became stationary, lost a town here and gained another there. The euphoria over the first victories in east and west had changed to caution. In trams and stations and advertising columns in the streets, we would read warnings to all Germans:

ACHTUNG, FEIND HÖRT MIT
(Attention, the enemy is listening in)

Food was beginning to become scarce, especially in towns.

Our province had received a lot of refugees from west Germany. But quite a number also came from the east; ethnic Germans from the Baltic States and from southern Russia. They all had to be integrated into the community. They helped to make the province of Posen more of a 'German' area, according to official plans, if one conveniently overlooked all the Poles, who lived in the country side, and who worked for the German war effort.

We celebrated Christmas 1942 together with the Goebel family. It was wonderful, with so many of us there. Günter and I had received a new bicycle each.

"Wherever did you get two new bicycles?" I wondered, as I was stroking the shiny frame with the leather saddle. "You can't get one for love or money anywhere these days!"

"Never mind," laughed Vater, "I still have my connections."

"Would we be able to take it with us to Posen to ride to school?" inquired Günter.

"That's why we bought it for you. You are old enough now to know the traffic rules, and it's about time you learn to ride in city traffic. But remember, a car is always stronger than a bike, so don't do anything foolish."

"When the weather fines up, perhaps later in spring, we will be able to ride to Posen and back."

"I would wait and see first. For the time being, you can take it on the train, and come here from the station under your own steam."

"That is really great. Thanks Vater, thanks Mutter."

"Gee, Günter, this is really the best present we've had in years!"

"Not just the bikes," he said, "but the fact that we are allowed to use them in Posen. Just imagine, it won't take us half an hour to school, as it would by tram."

"If we use the road over the bridge straight after the station, it would take us at the most 15 minutes to get there!"

"Then we can sleep a little longer! Marvellous."

It was indeed. We saw Posen from a different perspective. We could move around freely, and were not dependent on tram connections. We loved our bikes.

"Do you remember, when we learnt to ride a bike?"

"It was easy. You were seven and I was eight then."

"It was only easy, because we had learnt to ride a scooter before."

"I just stood on the left pedal and held the handle bar like the scooter, and down I went the hill near the big house."

"When I tried to put my right leg over the saddle, I nearly crashed, but once I was on it, away we went."

That seemed a long time ago.



One by one the older boys at Tante Else's were called up. When they came home on leave, they brought back horrible stories from the war.

Goggi Mosebach had been near Stalingrad in February 1943, where a whole German army was defeated and over 100,000 prisoners taken. His unit had just escaped being circled in by the Russians. He was slightly wounded and was on home leave.

"I tell you," he said, "the situation there was a shambles. The Ruskis came from all sides, and to this day I don't know how our unit escaped."

"Were there a lot of casualties?" Tante Else asked. Her son was fighting in that area.

"Many. The German troops suffered the most crushing defeat in Stalingrad."

"No wonder, that Hitler declared a week of mourning for all Germans after that," said Rosel, who was usually full of fun and laughter. "You know, they closed down all cinemas, all amusement centres, no one was allowed to dance, and over the radio, only classical music was played for a whole week."

"I think, this is the beginning of the end," said Goggi. We didn't understand. The German propaganda machine was bleating out that victory was imminent, last heroic efforts were needed to bring this about, everybody was to work together to defeat the enemy.

Hitler declared the state of Totaler Krieg, or All-out War. This meant, that wherever possible, women replaced men in the factories, the farms, the offices, and the men were called up to the front. Call-up age was reduced from 18 to 17 years. A 'total' effort was to be made on the part of every German to win the war. 'Daylight Saving' was introduced to save energy. As a 14-year-old, I thought we could still win the war.

Coming home for a weekend, we found that Opa looked very worried. He had never been an optimist, but with the battle at Stalingrad lost, he warned: "We can never win that war. It's madness. Mark my words: Napoleon got beaten in Russia, the First World War was lost because of the large front with Russia, and now again. You will see. This is the beginning of the end."

These were prophetic words. We had heard them before that week, but we simply couldn't face the thought of defeat.



In January 1943 Mutter had decided that we were old enough to have confirmation classes.

"But how can we go to Stęszew every week, for six weeks! We just haven't got the time," Günter spoke up for us both.

"I have made arrangements with our Pastor Fetzer, that whenever he is in Posen, and that is usually once a week, he will come to you and give you three boys your classes there."

"So Bernd is in it too?" I asked.

"Yes, all three of you, and Easter Sunday will be the day of confirmation."

"Will we get some nice presents too?"

"That's not, why you will be confirmed, now get that into your heads."

I thought I had better keep my mouth shut, but we agreed to attend confirmation classes at the boarding house.

Pastor Fetzer came to us several times. I think he tried to teach us the Catechism, as set out by the Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands (Evangelical Church of Germany), as our Church was known, an amalgamation of the Reformed tradition and the Lutheran Church early this century.

Unfortunately, his teaching methods were rather strange, and he was not a good communicator. I had learnt more from Mutter in our earlier days. She used to call us together and tell us Bible stories, or read from a picture bible book with coloured pictures, which always interested us. She had taught us prayers, which we took in turn to say at dinner time, but not, if we had visitors, and she made sure that we would always say our prayer at night, before going to sleep.

But Pastor Fetzer? All I can remember from his lessons is, when he told us about angels in heaven who were blowing their trumpets. He mistakenly used the German word *pupen*, for blowing, which we kids knew as farting. Our unrestrained laughter could be heard throughout the whole boarding house. Pastor Fetzer did not add anything to our faith, but what was there was the strong foundation laid by Mutter.



The winter of 1943 had been a mild one for us, but not so in Russia. Our troops suffered greatly under the extreme cold there, and the German Volk were asked to send woollen jumpers and socks to the front.

Opa became more and more pessimistic. He saw what was happening, and he knew in his heart, that the mighty German army had already been beaten. He could never convince us, though.

Normally, when we asked him: "And how are you Opa?" he would say: "I'm feeling terrible. I think I'm going to die."

But a week before the Easter week of 1943 he really did get sick. He had a bladder infection, and had to go to the hospital in Posen. I visited him there after school.

"And how are you, Opa?"

"Oh, as good as can be expected. I am comfortable here."

This answer made me immediately suspicious. He never mentioned that he was going to die. He was sitting there in bed and looking into the distance. We talked a little, but his mind was obviously already preoccupied with eternal things. The day after my visit he became unconscious. I was the last one of the family to see him with all his faculties still in tact. A few days later he died, on 20 April 1943.

His funeral took place on Good Friday, 23 April 1943. His coffin stood in the large salon, where we always used to celebrate Christmas together. The double doors to the dining room was wide open, and also the double doors to the servery. All rooms were packed with people, neighbours and workers. The minister spoke about Opa's life here, and how much he was loved by everyone, and his achievements in his early life.

Then the coffin was carried out and put on an open horse-drawn cart. All our coaches were being used for our family and other visitors. The village people all walked. Günter, Bernd and I had a coach for ourselves. We came after Oma, Vater and Mutter and Gerda, and Onkel Werner and Tante Margaret. There were many more following us towards the forest. It seemed as if the whole village was there to bid Opa a last farewell.

As our coach emerged from the road lined with chestnut trees, past the *Święty Jan*, a heavy and sad feeling came over me. We would never see Opa again. All his jokes, his humour and his little tricks would be only memories now. When our coach entered the forest, I remembered that he had planted it more than 50 years ago. And now he was going to rest in the tomb, which he also had built, right in the centre of his beloved forest.

We walked the last 100 meters along a path that was lined with holly and small shrubs. The gate of the burial place stood open. All mourners crowded around the fence. After the committal the coffin was carried into the tomb, where it stood next to Walter's.

Opa had not been very religious, but he certainly had been a good man. Oma usually went to church on her own. Opa's excuse was, that he could not hear properly. But Oma was regular, rain or shine. She used the closed coupe carriage most of the time to go to our church in *Stęszew*.

Sometimes we were allowed to go with her as a special privilege.

The church in Stęszew was small. It stood on the main road to Posen, just past the market place on the left. It was the only protestant church this side of Posen, and my parents, grand parents, and the Tieman's from Strykowo and Tante Joni von Treskow, were the major contributors. Onkel Werner as an elder, and Vater on the Council provided valuable leadership.

Our Confirmation took place on Easter Sunday, 25 April 1943. It turned out to be a solemn occasion, so soon after Opa's funeral, but our parents tried to make it a memorable day. Mutter had selected a verse from scripture for each of us which was read, before Pastor Fetzer laid his hands on us. My verse was to guide me throughout my life. Looking back, it had become the most influential word from God for my future. It was Mark 8:36:

'Does a person gain anything if he wins the whole world but loses his life? Of course not!'

We received lots of presents, from parents, aunts and uncles, but I do not think that I was ready then for confirmation. I liked going to church, it meant a lot to me, and gave me a strong sense of belonging, but at that age I was not ready yet to make a serious commitment.



In May, Günter and I went on our first bike ride home. As soon as school was over we left. We made good time through the villages we usually passed by train, and in Stęszew we took the road straight to Schönsee. We arrived there in less than two hours. Somewhat puffed, but very proud to have arrived earlier than by train.

"We must do it again," I urged.

"Wait 'til we have pedalled back on Monday morning. Maybe you won't be so keen then."

He was right. It was a bit of a slog, and we decided to ride our bikes only on special occasions. It was much easier to go by train and have our bikes with us there.

Soon after Opa had died, Oma wanted to swap homes with us. She did not want to live in the large house all by herself.

"You can all live together then, with Tante Ruth and her family. There is so much more room here."

"But what about all your things?"

"I don't need them all. I'll take what I can fit in the small house, and the rest can stay here. You will see, it will be quite cosy there."

She was right. She took her heavy drapes and curtains, with the furniture of the salon and the lounge, and it all looked very nice. Fräulein

Lina moved with her and looked after her as before.

The manor house was just enormous, after having lived in our small house all my life. Mutter had a few renovations carried out, like removing the inside glass doors of the entrance hall, which made it look much more gracious, and an arch way to an ante-room where all our overcoats and furs were hanging. Oma's old bedroom on the ground floor became a visitor's room, and Opa's became ours. It was facing the lake, with the most wonderful view. My parents chose a room upstairs, exactly above us, which had an en-suit bathroom.

Gerda had the room opposite. The Goebel's kept their wing as before.

As it became warmer in June, we used the back terrace far more than Oma and Opa had. It was like sitting in a place of your dreams. A lovely view of the lake was framed by some of the tall trees of the park, gently sloping down towards the lake.

Sitting there on the terrace on a warm summer evening, sipping a glass of wine, and watching the silver light of the full moon reflect in the still waters of the lake, was an unforgettable experience. We also enjoyed being treated as adults. The war seemed as far removed from this idyllic place, as the moon from the earth.



During a weekend in October, just a few days before Günter's birthday, a German stuka plane had made an emergency landing on the paddock behind the barns. We had not heard anything until the pilot suddenly appeared at our front door.

"I had to make this emergency landing, because it was far too foggy for me to steer the stuka single handed to the Russian front."

"How come you could land here in this fog?" Vater wanted to know.

"I just saw a break in the cloud and saw some green grass, and I went for it. That was very lucky."

"Come in then, and have something to eat. You can also use the phone, if you like."

"Thank you, I'll have some lunch, if you would be so kind, but I won't use your phone."

Günter and I were delighted.

"Are you really a stuka pilot?"

He nodded and we asked: "Have you been flying a stuka for long?"

"Over three years. I'm now training younger men to fly it."

"Does it always make such a terrifying noise when you are in the air?" I wanted to know.

"No, only if we fly in attack, with a bomb in our belly, falling from the sky as it were. At the last moment you pull the steering stick towards you as hard as you can. That releases the bomb, hopefully exactly on target."

"Wow, do you think we could have a look at the machine?"

"Sure, after I finished my lunch. That's mighty good food, by the way. I haven't eaten such a nice piece of salami for years."

"It's all home made."

"You are lucky."

We crawled all over the plane, and the pilot was very kind to us showing us all the things youngsters are interested in.

Mutter said to him, after he had shown us over the plane: "You will stay here the night, of course?"

"If it is not too much trouble to you, yes thank you."

He was given a guest room in the manor house, and he enjoyed our good food very much.

The fog stayed around all Saturday, but Sunday morning it began to lift. The pilot announced: "I have to make sure that the weather is clear higher up. Do you want to come with me for a joy ride, Günter and Dieter?"

"Of course," we said, without even considering any danger or anything unforeseen.

"Vater and Mutter, can we go up with the stuka? The pilot said we could come with him."

"Is that true? Did you say that?"

"Yes, sure. They will have a nice view over Schönsee from up there."

We climbed into the back seat, where the co-pilot normally sits.

"Sit a bit sideways, then you can both squeeze in," we heard the pilot call over the roar of the engine.

We managed somehow, but not very comfortably.

"Look, the whole village is out there," shouted Günter.

I looked up and could see Vater, Mutter and Gerda waving, all the Goebels were there, and countless people from the village. They all came to see our plane take off and land again. It became really exciting.

"Fly over our lake and over our house, we want to see how it looks from up here," we shouted over the roaring of the engine. The pilot just nodded. Unfortunately, we couldn't see much over the side of the plane, as the wings on both sides were in the way. Then we saw him chuckle. The earth seemed to turn steeply before us on one side. There we saw the lake and both our homes, the park, the yard, and all the villagers assembled on the paddock way down below. This was great fun and we gave the pilot a thumbs up sign.

He just grinned again. The engine was roaring and we felt the pressure on our head and chest. We couldn't see the ground. Then suddenly we saw the earth rushing towards us very fast.

"This is a real stuka dive," I shouted to Günter, who was already looking somewhat green.

I felt my stomach pressing up, and suddenly I was violently ill. Günter followed me in quick succession.

When the pilot turned around again to see how we were going, he was

not smiling any more. He had not given us any spew-bags, and the mess was all over the back of his plane. He soon landed. We staggered out of the plane like drunks, green and pale looking. Our unfortunate mishap was written all over our face, for everyone to see.

At that moment we didn't care. Just to have firm ground under our feet again was already comforting. We did not eat any lunch that day. The pilot had a job cleaning up. He had a quick lunch with my parents, and then came to see us.

"You can't become stuka fighters, if you get sick like that!" he said.

"I don't think we want to be either," said Günter, still a bit shaky, but already feeling much better.

"Thank you very much for taking us up there. It was really great, before we got sick."

"Everything looks so nice from above. Thank you, and sorry about the mess."

"It's all cleaned up. Don't worry about it. Auf Wiedersehn."

And he was gone. Ten minutes later, a stuka came roaring towards our house. At the last minute, the pilot pulled up the machine, and it flew over the house. We waved, but I don't think he saw us.



Reports from the war in Russia became more disturbing. After Stalingrad, Germany only won the odd battles. We heard in the news about 'heroic retreats', 'brilliant defences', and there always seemed to be an air of expectation. Rumours had it that a new weapon was in the making, which would decide the war in our favour. But following the names of towns mentioned in the news on the map, I could see that the German troops were definitely retreating.

More and more people were being called up into the army, following the proclamation of the Total War.

In July Horst came home on leave. He had been serving in France with his unit.

"I can tell you, you never want to go to war. It's terrible."

We crowded around him near the rabbit hutch. Horst did not want to be overheard by any unwanted listener.

"I'm lucky to be in a regular army unit, but I can tell you, never get into the clutches of the S.S. They behave like animals. Some of the soldiers are okay, of course, but it's the leaders. They have no regard for other people, not even women and children. I've seen so much brutality, I never want to see it again. It's really terrible."

"But isn't it better in France than in Russia?"

"In one way, yes, but in another, no. You see, there is no fighting in France, but the resistance is strong, and if you are not careful, they get you

before you have a chance to get them.”

“Snipers and such things?”

“You are never safe anywhere. That’s why the S.S. has gone mad in that area. They hate the French and don’t understand, that we would do the same if the shoe were on the other foot.”

“How can we avoid being grabbed by the S.S?”

“You just volunteer for any unit you want to go to. They can make a kind of contract with you that says, they will take you when you turn 17.”

“What, like the cavalry?”

“Yeah, why not, but don’t think you are going to ride horses. They are all motorised these days. But by all means, keep up the Tieman and Lewinski tradition!”

Later we made some enquiries and were told that it was possible to put our names down for a cavalry unit. We were promised that when we reached 17 years we would be called up by them.

After hearing Horst’s report, we had some hope that that would never happen. Surely the war by then would be finished!

Soon Horst had to go back to the war, and we back to school. But for Günter, something very unexpected happened. His class, all those born in 1927, were called up to the FLAK (the anti-aircraft defence), as a FLAK helper. This seemed to be an extension of the total war effort, now affecting even us youngsters. Günter wasn’t quite 16 yet.

When I thought of the future, I was getting more worried. How on earth could we win the war when everyone on the eastern front was retreating and they were now recruiting 15 and 16-year-olds to help with the war effort?



The year drew to an end. Christmas was very special to us, as it was the first one in the manor house. Everything seemed so fresh and new. A new place for our Christmas tree, new surroundings, new curtains. And yet, there was also the old, reminding us of the good old days, like the cosy tiled stove in the lounge with the warm seat, where Opa had loved to sit and warm his bottom. We were lucky that Günter got home-leave over Christmas. After our usual celebration in the manor house, the Goebel family stayed behind, as we went over to our old house for Christmas Eve, to be with Oma and our family from Strykowo, minus Horst, and minus Opa. Who would be missing next year? I didn’t want to think of that. I wanted to hold on to what we had now.

CHAPTER 10

Soldier or student?

When I went back to school in January 1944, our teacher entered the class room with a face that warned us about some bad news.

"The 'Total War' is going to affect you too, my friends."

He looked sternly, but kindly, at each one of us, as we stood at attention.

"Germany needs more soldiers at the front. Everyone has to make even bigger sacrifices than so far."

We looked at each other. What could he mean?

"Next week, those of you who were born in 1928 have to report to Battery 213 of the Anti Aircraft System, which is stationed in the north-east of Posen, as FLAK helpers. You will be engaged in the defence of Posen."

No one moved. We were all stunned. We stood in shock, and no one even found the presence of mind to ask a question. We knew that Günter's year of 1927 had been drafted to the FLAK, but that had been in September, and we hadn't expected it at the beginning of the year.

"Sit down, please. I know this comes as a great shock to you, but these are the orders from the Commander of the German Air Force. We don't like it either, as we will have to continue giving you lessons at the barracks."

Part of the 'Total War' idea was, to release regular men from the forces at home and send them to the front. For this reason the FLAK helpers had been created in 1943. FLAK is an acronym for Flug Abwehr Kanone, literally Flight Defence Canon, or Anti Aircraft Gun. The entire senior year of high school was drafted to become the FLAK Helpers. They remained as a unit in the school class of their year, and were housed in barracks together. Teachers came out to these units and gave their lessons there.

"Last year," the teacher continued, "those that went up to year 6 were called up. This year they can't wait until September, they need you now. Although you are only in year 5, those born in 1928 will have to go. So who is remaining in the class?"

Four hands went up.

"You were born in 1929?"

They nodded.

"We will have to make a composite class of all those who remain."

I still couldn't believe it. Was I hearing right? I had just turned 15!

Bernd was in the class parallel to mine. What would he think?

"You can all go home now, except the four who remain. You have a whole week to get your things in order at home. On Monday, at 8 am, you report to Unit 213. You will have to find your own way. It is situated near the end of tram No.3, North-East."

We were dismissed.

Above the noise that ensued I could hear the voice of Karl, a younger class mate of mine: "I wish I could come with you. It will be miserable here with just the few of us remaining."

"I don't know, Karl, but I would rather stay here."

"We'll come and visit you in your battery."

"That would be nice. Good-bye then."

I walked to the tram in a daze. Every now and again I looked back at our Schiller School, standing there like a monument. It had been the place of learning for me for nearly five years. I had come to like it in a way, thinking of all the fun we've had with our mates and some of the teachers. Would I ever be coming back again?

Bernd was already in our boarding house. He felt as dazed as I.

"It's not fair," he said, "at our age!" After some thoughts he asked: "And where have they put you?"

"Battery 213, north-east, at the end of tram 3. And you?"

"Our battery is 216. We are going north-west, near the Zeppelin Building."

"You poor thing, right at the opposite end from home."

"You might as well forget about home." Bernd was still angry.

"Nothing we can do about it. An order is an order."

We phoned home and told them about our bad news, and that we would be coming with the usual train that day, and asked to be picked up.

Then we went to Tante Else, our matron.

"Now all the Tiemans will have gone from us!" she exclaimed, when we told her. "I'm so sorry to hear this. We will miss you. The boarding house won't be the same without you."

"Yeah, there won't be many left. Just the girls and the young ones. At least it will be quieter."

"Do you remember, Dieter, when the first boarders left for the war, you said that you were sorry to be too young for the war?" Tante Else looked at me.

"That was a stupid remark, and I wish I had never made it."

"I think you are still too young to go to the war."

"But we will still be at school, only the teachers come out to teach us."

"So, what are you then, soldiers or students?"

"I don't know."

"You need to pack up all your things. What about your beds, and the desks?"

"Vater can see to that. We'll just take all our personal things."

After packing and a quick lunch we said our good-byes to Tante Else and her cook.

The last week at home went far too quickly.

Thursday, 3 February 1944, Vater had to go to Posen by car. He left earlier than usual and dropped me off outside the gate of Schwere Heimatflak Batterie 213.

I walked with my bag of personal belongings to a group of young people. As I came nearer, I recognised them as my class mates. We greeted each other with mixed feelings. It was a chilly and wet morning.

At 8 o'clock sharp, a group of men emerged from the office, and the sergeant greeted us: "I am Sergeant Baumann. Welcome to Battery 213. This is a military establishment, and military rules apply here day and night. I will be in charge of you for the daily routine work, and this here is Lieutenant Günther, who is in charge of the whole Unit."

Then Lieutenant Günther welcomed us. He seemed a reasonable chap. I thought: 'if only you let me go home weekends, you'll do me'. He was talking about exercises, training, and co-operation with the military staff of the Battery. Then he continued:

"Because we need to train you as rapidly as we can, you will not be receiving any school classes for the first four weeks. And there will be no leave. Is that understood?"

"Jawohl, Herr Leutenant" we all answered in chorus.

"Damn it," I thought, "that's not fair." But I quickly learnt to keep my mouth shut.



I in FLAK uniform

We then received our uniforms and were allocated our barracks. I shared one with 11 others. Corporal Fritz Gensch was in charge of our group: "You will receive training in the most secret part of our unit, the brain centre, so to speak. You will have the best job of all, for you will be sitting inside. I will show you shortly the dish, which is being guarded 24 hours a day, as it is new and the latest aircraft detection device. It is called FU-EM-GE or Funk Mess Gerät (RADAR in English, acronym of radio detection and ranging). It can trace a plane at night and in cloudy weather."

"How does it work?" asked Erich.

"It sends out a radio signal from the centre of the dish, and when that signal hits a firm object, like a plane, it bounces back, and the dish catches the signal and records it."

"That's physics," Albert commented.

"Quite right. Now because of this radar, our unit does not need a search light, and thus does not become an easy target for the bombs. But why am I telling you all this? It's much easier to show you. Come with me now."

We all followed him to a bunker, which stood in the centre of the complex, with 6 guns (88 mm) surrounding it.

"The radar dish is over there and sends its signals here into this bunker. Next to the radar is our four meter base telescope, for the visual tracing of planes."

We entered the command bunker.

"Here the data of the radar and telescope are converted and passed on to the six guns by voice through these microphones."

"How do they work?"

"You hang them around your neck, like this, and these two little things that look like ear phones press against your vocal chords. They just pick up your voice, and ignore all the other noise in this room. You can imagine, in the middle of an attack, it gets very noisy here."

"That's quite ingenious. But why are there so many of these microphones on this table?"

"Patience, gentlemen, I'll tell you, everything in turn. When the RADAR has latched its beam onto a plane, the position is given here in degrees, for the horizontal level it is given in the degrees of a full circle, i.e. 360°, and the height is given also in degrees, but only to a maximum of 70° of course. Why do you think this is so, smart arse?"

"Because it would be too heavy to wind the gun any higher."

"You've still got a lot to learn, boys. 'Too heavy to wind up', you fool. Because the gun would topple over, of course!"

He looked around and could see a grin of approval on most faces.

"The third data you need for a shell to hit a plane is the distance. That is also given by the radar. Can you follow me so far?"

Erhard stretched out his fist and let out his thumb, index and middle finger, as he was counting: "We have the side or horizontal, the height, and the distance."

"Well done. Now I have to tell you about a complication. From the time the RADAR receives the position of the plane and the shell exploding in the air, the plane would be many kilometers away. So we have to trace the flight path here on this map with the instrument, which looks like a bent ruler, anticipating where it will be when the shell reaches the position. Then we relay the data of this point to the guns. Simple, isn't it?"

"You would have to be a genius to calculate the speed of the plane and the flight path of the shell in such a short time."

"It's all in this little instrument. But I must admit, that it is not very accurate. That's why we have now this machine here, we call 'Mary', who's doing all the calculating for us. But if Mary is out of action, we still use the bent ruler."

"So you pass the degrees of the side and height to the guns, but what about the distance? How is that measured?"

"Just in meters, and then you relay it through this microphone here."

"At the other end, each microphone is connected to the ear phone of the person operating the appropriate function of the gun, I suppose?"

"That's correct. Your mates at the guns have to follow your instructions immediately, degree by degree."

"But how is the distance put into the gun?"

"Not the gun, of course, but into the shell. The Russkis, our Russian volunteer prisoners, put the shell into a gadget that twists the top, which is the detonator timer. The shells would be far too heavy for you to carry"

"Does the timer start as from then on?"

"You'd blow yourself up with that, stupid! No, the timer starts when the shell is shot. Any more questions?"

There were none. We all went back to our quarters for lunch. One rostered orderly from our barrack had to go to the kitchen to get our lunch. He came back with a big pot of Eintopf, a mixed stew, which had to be distributed in our barrack.

"We have to get all our rations this way."

"What, all the meals, or just lunch?"

"Bread, butter, jam and if there is anything to go with the bread, will be distributed in the evening, after duties. We will always get it in bulk, and then have to divide it up here."

"Who's going to divide it? Better make sure, somebody with a good eye for fairness."

Klaus suggested: "How about doing it this way? One of us, perhaps the orderly, cuts up the butter, or divides the jam etc. in 12 equal parts."

"But that's what I mean, he has to divide it fairly," I interrupted.

"Hang on, I haven't finished. Because it can never be that accurate, another person turns his back to the rations and the one who divided the stuff will call: 'Who is going to get this piece?' Whoever is named then, gets that piece, and so on. Don't you think that's fair?"

We all agreed. It could have developed into favouritism, and that would

have been destructive, as we were always hungry. The bread was easy to divide, each one received half a loaf a day.

After lunch the stupid drill commenced. We knew it from the Hitler Youth, and fortunately didn't need to spend too much time on it. But to use the equipment in the command bunker we received daily training until we were competent to operate it all. I had some trouble with the throat microphone, as my voice box around the Adam's apple had not fully developed and my voice did not come across the other end as strongly as from an adult. But it must have been all right, for they kept me there.

After the first four weeks had passed, one half of our group was allowed to go on leave, either the Saturday afternoon, or the following Sunday afternoon. As I did not want to go to the boarding house, I stayed at the barracks, hoping that I would be allowed longer leave next weekend. When Friday evening came, I plucked up some courage and went to see Lieutenant Günther in his barrack:

"Sir," I asked him, "Would I be able to go home this weekend? I live in the countryside, and half a day leave is no good to me. It takes half a day to go there and back."

"What is your father doing there"?

"We have a property, Sir"

"Yes, sure, you can have this weekend off. By the way, I would like to meet your father one day, whenever convenient."

"Yes Sir. Thank you Sir," and I was off delighted to have the whole weekend free, away from 'playing soldier'.

I reported my conversation with the boss at home, and Vater, being a man of the world, cottoned on immediately. He guessed what the lieutenant wanted. After a fortnight he called in at the battery on Saturday morning, taking with him a freshly shot hare in a brown paper bag under his arm. He went to see Lieutenant Günther. I was never told the contents of this conversation, but from then on I had my free weekend every second week. I still had to ask the boss personally every time I wanted to go, but I don't know how many hares, pheasants, or other useful things went his way. I was never refused a request for a weekend off.

In the week that followed, our teachers were called in to give us our daily lessons in the barracks. A reminder, that we were still school kids.

It was hard, though, to take school very seriously. Particularly, if the night before we had been called out to our instruments, when enemy planes were approaching. Sitting next day in class bleary-eyed, we didn't take much in. Fortunately we didn't have many disturbed nights initially.

Easter Sunday fell in 1944 on 9 April. Although I had been home the weekend before, because of the additional holiday of Good Friday, I arrived on Saturday, and had leave till Monday morning. Just after lunch, about a quarter to two, the windows of our lounge room began to rattle.

"Let's see what it is," I said to Vater as I rushed outside. He followed me with Mutter.

“Look up,” I shouted over the droning noise, “hundreds of planes. They are Lancaster bombers, four engines. We had to learn to identify enemy planes. I’m sure that’s what they are. They are all heading for Posen.”

“They are flying in formation. I think there are about 25 planes in this squadron.” Vater took his glasses off to see better.

“There comes another one.” It was Mutter’s turn to count, but she didn’t get very far.

“And another!” I exclaimed. They kept coming, squadron after squadron. At least 200 planes went right over our house, high above, about 10,000 m. The noise went right through my bones.

“Here I am, sitting at home, when my comrades have to operate the instruments and man the guns. I’ll go crazy. I missed the first encounter of a real air attack.”

“Calm down, Dieter. Be glad that you’re here and not in Posen. Who knows what damage they will do?” Vater had been through one war, he knew the devastation and destruction of the First World War. This one was only worse.

“My comrades will be engaged in fierce shooting in a couple of minutes, and I’m just watching them fly over. What can I do?”

I was almost envious, the first real experience of a major air raid in broad daylight, and I wasn’t there!

Next day I heard everybody’s story. They all seemed heroes in my eyes.

“And you know what? We were awarded two full hits, two bombers of the ones that were shot down. We can now paint two white rings around the barrels of our canons.”

“Good luck to you. I saw all the planes, they flew right over our house.”

“Did they drop a bomb? Obviously not, otherwise you wouldn’t be here. But joking apart, it was terrible here. It scared the living daylight out of me. Bombs were falling, the noise of the guns, the smell of gun powder and dust. I wouldn’t mind if I didn’t have to go through that again.”

The destruction from that air raid was considerable. Parts of the passenger and goods station were hit (including the waiting room for Poles and a train with soldiers on leave from the front), the Focke Wulf works (aviation parts), also the railway bridge, the exhibition building, and some buildings in town. Apart from 150 soldiers killed, there were 35 German civilians and 47 Poles killed. (Armin Ziegler, Posen Januar 1945, p.4)

There were no casualties in our battery.

Soon after, all boys in our barrack were ordered to change from the command bunker to the canons. I was trained to operate the gadget for the distance. The change came about, because our unit had received a new electrically operated transmitter, which transferred the data directly on to a gauge of the canons’ instruments. That meant, it was no longer done orally, but electrically. The crew at the guns had just to follow the indicator on the panel before them.

The second raid on Posen followed on 29 May 1944. This time I was there right in the midst of it, doing my 'distance' for the shells. My heart was pounding so loudly that I was glad I didn't have to listen to a voice on the other end of the line, but simply follow the hand on the indicator.

Every time the command came to 'fire', we had to open our mouths and stop our ears, for the noise was terrific. My body was shaking all over, and I was bathed in sweat. I don't think I had the stuff to be a soldier, or was it just the first 'baptism of fire'? Whatever it was, I felt dreadful, and very pleased when it was all over. There were much fewer bombers in this air raid than at Easter, but it lasted for about 20 to 25 minutes. The Focke Wulf works were again hit, together with other buildings. Loss of life was: 16 Germans and 25 Poles.

This time our unit was not awarded a direct hit.

During the air raid I observed, that the Russkis were doing a very good job, carrying the shells from the safety of the bunker and putting them straight into my gadget. They lived in a separate barrack, which was constantly guarded by proper soldiers. The 88 mm shells were really far too heavy for us youngsters to carry. These Russkis were Russian prisoners of war, who, we were told, had 'volunteered' for this job. We had been told not to have any contact with them, but occasionally we would pass their barrack, and the smell of Machorka (Russian cigarettes) would come wafting over to us. I couldn't stand the smell. One day I stood near the open window, and looked at the prisoners. I felt sorry for them in their cramped condition, and always being locked up. Then I heard a voice: "Hey you, want a basket"? Out came a beautifully woven box made from straw.

"What do you want for it?" I asked.

"Khleb" was the answer. As I knew Polish, I knew that they were asking for Bread.

"Okay, I'll be back again."

I went back to my barrack and said: "Look at this lovely box. The Russkis made it. They want bread for it."

"Let's save up some from our next ration, and give it to them."

We agreed. After dark, I took half a loaf and went back to the window, making sure that no one could see me. Crouching under it I called out: "Khleb."

After a while a hand reached out. I gave him the bread, and heard what sounded like "spassibo", thank you. Poor bastards, I thought, they can't be getting enough to eat.

We did this several times, until each one in our barrack had a woven box to take home.

About a month after the second air raid, in June, two Russian prisoners had escaped. All of us, the whole unit, were called to an assembly. We were informed of the escape, and everybody was issued a rifle.

"If you see one, shoot. No questions asked. If you don't shoot, you may

be killed yourselves.” These were the orders of Lieutenant Günther.

Then we were sent into the fields like the drivers in a hunt. I felt absolutely awful. I had no problem going on a hunt and shoot hares or pheasants, but shooting a human being, even if Russian, no! I couldn't do it. I was scared stiff, and my knees were knocking, as we walked through that tall corn field. I probably wouldn't shoot anyhow, I thought, the Russki would jump up and grab me, before I had any chance to do any harm to him.

We kept about five meters distance from each other. I thought of the hunt at home, and a shiver came over me. Here we were, trampling the still green corn down, looking out for the escapees. I prayed, that we wouldn't see them. After about two hours we heard a shot in the distance. Word came quickly down the line, 'the boss had shot one escapee.' After an hour more, the search for the second man was called off. I hoped he was able to get away. I was greatly relieved when this episode was over. At 15 my constitution was still too sensitive to cope with this. I never set eyes on the dead escapee.

'D'-Day, 6 June 1944. Lieutenant Günther had us all assembled again.

"The Americans and the British have landed in France. They are holding on to the bridge head, and it seems that we will be fighting again on two fronts."

We looked at each other in dismay.

"This means, that the German army needs every available soldier. Five regulars from our battery will have to leave us. We wish them well. For the rest of you, you will have to do more work, and put more effort into our battery, so that it can function as before."

The battery was dismissed.

I knew that Horst was stationed in France, and I was worried about him.

On 22 June there was another special assembly. This time we were informed, that the Soviets had started a major offensive and had achieved a break-through on the river Dnieper. Within a few weeks the Soviet army reached to about 300 kilometers from Posen. (Amin Ziegler, Posen, January 1945, p.5)

Then came 20 July, the assassination attempt on Hitler. Had Hitler been killed, the war would have been over, I thought. What a pity. On the other hand, I was scared. I was too much influenced by German propaganda. In the afternoon we were called again for a special assembly.

"As you have all heard, the assassination attempt on Hitler has failed. We have been ordered from now on to show our loyalty to Hitler in a special way. All military units are to observe the Hitler salute, instead of the common military salute. Heil Hitler!"

His right arm was thrust forward in the familiar Hitler salute, which we thought looked quite ridiculous coming from an officer in the air force. The exercises that followed to perfect that salute seemed to us all even more ridiculous, and none of us took it too seriously. Was there a seed of

rebellion in us all? Maybe, but it did not have any chance to surface. As we heard through the news, those involved in the plot were executed, and other opponents of Hitler were ruthlessly persecuted. I think we were all too afraid to say anything in opposition.

On one of those rare occasions when Günter, Bernd and I came together again in Strykowo, we had afternoon tea on the terrace overlooking the lake. Onkel Roland, Tante Margaret's brother, was visiting there. He was in military intelligence. We all huddled together, as he was telling us: "After the putsch against Hitler, we realised, how much opposition there was in the army against him, especially among the professional higher officers."

"Really?" Günter said. "Why is that?"

"He wants to do everything himself. He doesn't trust anyone any more."

"Perhaps not so surprising, after the coup attempt."

"But one person can't fight a whole war by himself, especially now on several fronts!"

This was the first time that I had heard of any opposition or disagreement with Hitler from somebody in our family.



Günter seated at the 88mm FLAK

When we came back to Posen, our battery had to change positions. We were relocated in the south-west of Posen, near Lenzingen. We kept our battery commander Günther, who had been promoted to Captain. There

was a large central building, with smaller barracks scattered around. We were allocated quarters in an individual barrack, which had room for 12 FLAK helpers.

One day we were sitting at our evening meal around the table, spooning in a thin, watery cabbage soup.

"Gee, the cook has been rather mean again," said Karl, "I can't see any meat floating around".

"I've got something," said Herbert, and with that he pulled out a medium sized rat.

We all gasped, but not Herbert. He just put the dead rat beside his plate and continued to eat. His appetite was stronger than our revulsion.

"Don't show off, Herbert, that's disgusting." Karl just put down his spoon. He couldn't finish his soup.

"Come on," Herbert challenged us, after he had finished, "Who can finish their soup?"

Some of us could, others suddenly didn't feel hungry any more.

After lights out we would often listen to Albert, who had a special gift for story telling. Stories about strange places and strange people, which I had never heard before. One of those stories was about an Australian bush ranger, called Ned Kelly. I had learnt in Geography roughly where Australia was on the map, but I knew hardly any more than that. Through Albert's stories, Australia and other parts of the world obtained a new meaning, and brightened the monotony of our existence. Often I had to ask the next morning though, how the story had finished, as I had dropped off to sleep before hearing the end.

Night air raids became more frequent, and school lessons became more peripheral. I have a school report, dated 13 July 1944, which reads:

As a result of the achievements and behaviour during classes, and of his duties in the service ...the pupil Dieter Tieman goes up to year 6 of high school.

The following Subjects were studied and results were listed as follows:

German: fair	Maths: satisfactory
History: satisfactory	Latin: fair
Geography: fair	Biology: satisfactory
Chemistry: fair	Physics: satisfactory

It is signed by the class teacher, the Principal, and the commander of our battery, countersigned by Vater. It is noteworthy that English as a subject was absent. It was considered that only 'necessary' subjects were to be included in the curriculum.

On 2 November, all of us who were born in 1928 had to register for military service in Posen. Everyone had to strip naked before the doctors

and examiners, and at the end of it, all in our group were declared fit for military service. Those who turned 17 were immediately called up. Those in Posen who did not pass the fitness test (due to either lack of height, malformation, or health), were drafted into a new category of FLAK Helpers, called FLAKV soldiers. Some of them had been allocated to our battery, to fill the gap left by those comrades, who had turned 17 and had been drafted into the army. It seemed strange to us, that they were not fit for the army, but deemed fit for the anti-aircraft guns. We were given the task of training them for their work.

I heard from my parents during November, that Günter had received his call-up notice to report on Monday, 4 December, to Krotoschin, about 125 km south-east of Posen. He was home for only a week, but I was glad to be able to see him before he went. Tante Ruth and her family had already gone back to Essen, as Onkel Richard considered the situation on the eastern front unsafe.

The atmosphere that weekend at home was tense and gloomy. Our hearts were heavy, for deep down we knew that the future was anything but rosy. Unfortunately, these feelings were never expressed. Günter had been drafted into the army, not the cavalry, as he had hoped. His unit was the Grenadier Reserve Battalion 96. We heard from reports of the eastern front, that the German defence line along the river Vistula was holding. German newspapers had described in gruesome detail, about brutalities committed by the Russian army on German civilians in Eastern Prussia.

Armin Ziegler writes in his book *Posen Januar 1945*, p.7 "At the end of October 1944, German troops were able to beat back units of the Soviet army. In the re-captured Nemmersdorf, cruelties of bestial proportion had been committed on the German civilian population. They are not described here, German papers did that in full details. An international commission confirmed this. Any German, who did not know what would happen to them following Soviet occupation, should know this."

No one wanted to fall into their hands, and now Günter had to go to Krotoschin, even closer to the front than we were in Posen. But no one could have foreseen, that this was to be the last time we saw each other.

On 1 December 1944 I was promoted, with most other FLAK helpers of my year, to 'Luftwaffen Oberhelfer', and in recognition of my duties for the FLAK artillery, I received a badge on the 17.12.44.

The war was coming closer to home. Air raids became more frequent now. Had we been allowed to listen to the BBC, we would have known, that two days earlier Churchill had announced in the Lower House, that an agreement had been reached with Stalin from the USSR, that the Poles, fighting for the Allies, should not expect the same national borders as when the War had started.

"Until this time, the agreement reached in Teheran was neither official nor public knowledge. In his speech to the Lower House on 15.12.44,

Churchill warned the Polish Government in Exile, residing in England, not to resist the borders as set out in the so called Curzon-Line between the USSR and Poland, and not to object to Lvów being handed to the Russians. At the same time he announced the generous reparation Poland would receive from German territory to the west of Poland's border. He spoke for the first time of resettlement and displacement of several millions of Germans. The centre of Germany could take many millions, as the victims of the war had reduced the population, and the victims still to come in the new year would see to it, that room would be created." (Armin Ziegler, p.7)

However, it was strictly forbidden to listen to any foreign broadcasts, and so we didn't know anything about the planned movement of millions of Germans from east to west.

Instead, orders were issued to dig fortifications around Posen, supposedly as an additional security, but they were never used. No one was told about the true situation. The propaganda machine let everyone believe, that the final victory was just around the corner. A headline of the *Ostdeutscher Beobachter* dated 13.1.45 announced: 'Evidence to Believe in Victory'.

I did not get any home leave until Christmas, as all hands were needed to dig some trenches, connecting our six guns with the command bunker.

As a special concession for Christmas, a roster was drawn up of all FLAK Helpers, who wanted to have leave over Christmas. These were divided into three groups, and I was allocated leave for Christmas Eve. I had to report back on Christmas Day by 12 noon.

For me it was a very sad Christmas, the first in my life without Günter. Onkel Werner and Tante Margaret left early, as Bernd was expected the next morning. We talked about the clouds of uncertainty. The German people from the Baltic states, who had been through similar situations before, had all packed their things and were about to leave, against official orders.

What were we to do? The easiest thing was, to sit back and wait for orders. We sat in the salon, the candles lit on the Christmas tree, letting them burn out one by one. No one said a word. We were immersed in our own thoughts, looking at the ceiling, where the diminishing candles cast strange shadows. It was getting darker and darker, reflecting our mood. We knew we would soon sit in complete darkness. Now, all but one candle had gone out. It stayed bright for so much longer than the others.

"Could this be an omen for us, a sign that God is still in charge although right now it doesn't seem so?" Mutter broke the silence. "Only a really strong faith can see the light of God amidst the darkness all around us. We need to believe in a loving God who will overcome all the hatred in this world."

"I am very worried about the future, full of foreboding," Vater began to

speak. "There doesn't seem to be a way out."

"This can't be the end!" I was getting quite anxious. "Günter in the army, I at the FLAK, you here, it doesn't make sense." After a pause ... "We belong together, and we belong together here. This is where my roots are, the roots of my being! Our beautiful world, our childhood's paradise!"

I sat back and stopped trying to hold back my tears, which had pressed against my eyes and my voice box. I cried, and cried. Tears of a child rebelling at the adult. Tears that knew subconsciously, that neither the past, nor the present, could be retrieved.

After a while I felt renewed. All the tension of the last months seemed to have gone. Then I looked up. The last Christmas candle was still shining brightly.

"There is light, there is hope, Mutter, there must be! I can see the colours of the rainbow reflected in the chandelier."

At that moment I felt very adult. The student in me was pushed right into the background, the soldier seemed to have won the day.

It was to be the last time I stayed in our beloved home.

Soon after breakfast on Christmas morning, I had to leave. Vater had asked Franek, our playmate of old, to take me in our dockar, a sulky, directly to Battery 213 near Posen. Vater described the way carefully, so that we would not get lost, for I had to be back before noon. I was amazed how quickly we got there, in less than two hours. By train it would have taken me more than half a day.

I thanked Franek for his kindness and sent him off to have his Christmas dinner.

I took my rucksack with my things, including some of the Christmas presents and walked towards our barracks. I had stopped the sulky some distance before the gate. I didn't want to give my mates an opportunity to make any comments about my feudal background.

The inside of our barrack was devoid of any Christmas decorations. It was rather dingy inside, stepping in from the snow-covered outdoors. My room mates were going about their leisure activities. I stowed my stuff in my corner, got out some of the Christmas biscuits from home, and offered them around.

"Happy Christmas to you all."

"These are good. Where did you get them?"

"From home. My mother made them."

"No doubt about you bods from the country. The war doesn't seem to have affected you at all. Some people are lucky."

"Yeah. Have another one."

I really didn't want to be here. The others lived all in the city, which was such a different lifestyle from ours. I was feeling lonely and sad. I was thinking of my family back home, the only place I wanted to be. So I curled up with a book from the night before and read.

Boxing day was also free from duties, very boring with too much time

to think of home and what I was missing. I forgot all about my 16th birthday. Would Günter get some time off to get home, perhaps after Christmas? I hoped so for his sake, and for my parents' sake.

On 27 December 1944 duties were back to normal. We had to repair some of the cables that led to the gun furthest away from the command bunker. Suddenly we heard the siren going.

"What's that, an air raid?" the sergeant asked?

It seemed different. No one was running to their positions. Then someone called out: "Fire, fire!"

We looked around and we could see a big cloud of black smoke coming from the place where our huts were.

"Is it our barrack?"

"No, it's yours!" someone said to me as I was running towards our barrack as fast as I could in those heavy boots.

The flames had already engulfed the whole building, there was no way of getting anything out. The biscuits, the cake, my Christmas presents, the book, all my personal gear, my photos, my diary — I just stood stunned as I watched the flames consume everything. I had been depressed and sad before, but this? I needed a thick shell around me to cope, and some strength from above. There was no one to talk to. I tried desperately to grow a skin as thick as an elephant's, so that nothing would ever hurt me again.

When the fire was out, we were allowed to go through the ashes. One of my mates said: "Look, here is my jumper. A bit singed, but I can still wear it."

"I've found my book!" someone else called out.

Encouraged by this, I started going through the ashes, where my corner had been. I used my fingers carefully, like a comb, so that I would not miss anything. By a strange coincident I found my diary, and some photos! All singed on the edges, but otherwise in good condition. All else had been burnt to powdery ashes. Here was something of my own, something to remind me of the past, something I could cling on to. I greatly treasured these things.

Then we were allocated bunks in the large building. We were given a bare minimum of clothes, no underwear, a 'bread bag' akin to a larger pouch or bum bag, a toothbrush, soap, and that was all. It all fitted neatly into the bag, with some room to spare.

When I lay down to sleep that night I did not pray the Lord's Prayer as I usually did. Instead I prayed: "Lord, this is it. Now I have nothing. I don't ask you to give me any material things, for I know we can live without them. But please make me less sensitive, or give me the strength to cope, and a calm mind, whatever may lie ahead."

That night I slept like a baby.

Next night I reverted to the Lord's Prayer as usual:

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name — Have I honoured your name today, Lord? ...

“Your Kingdom come — Do I really want your Kingdom to come? ...

“Your will be done, on earth as in heaven — Was it your will that our barrack burnt down yesterday? ...

“Give us today our daily bread — thanks, that we can still have food, and warm food too ...

“Forgive us our sin — and I thought of any wrongs I had done during the day that needed forgiveness, from God or from others? ...

“As we forgive those who sin against us — Do I need to forgive someone else? ...

“Save us from the time of trial — What was there that could have been a test for me? The fire? My home? ...

“And deliver us from evil — Especially the war and all the evil that it brings out in people. God, please take it away from me, but not my will, but your will be done.

“For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, everything is yours, and I am in your hands, now and for ever. Amen.”

I had prayed this prayer in this fashion for years, but now it seemed to become even more meaningful to me. Every night after I had prayed it, I felt calm and peaceful, and soon I would drift into a deep, healing sleep. This prayer had become a great comfort to me. It was to keep me in touch with my Maker and my Protector, and see me through my most difficult time in my life.

On New Year's Eve I volunteered to do the midnight shift, standing watch at the radar unit. It was a frosty night, but because there was snow on the ground, it was not quite dark, but brilliantly clear. I walked over to the four-meter base and looked at the moon through the telescope. It seemed so much nearer. What would it be like, standing on the moon?

Then I focused on Saturn. I could see the rings around it, like a trailing veil, getting the feeling that all was in motion.

At midnight, I could hear some bangers go off in a distant village, then the barking of a dog. Then all was quiet again.

“God, what have you got in store for us in 1945?” I looked for a guiding star, but there was none.



January 1945 was cold right from the start. There was plenty of snow, and the earth was frozen hard. We stopped digging the trenches in the hope of an early thaw. But the news from the east front got worse.

On 12 January, a major Russian offensive started. They pushed the German troops over their fortified defence positions, in spite of heroic resistance.

The next day we were all called out for a special assembly. Captain Günther, standing alone on the frozen ground, addressed the whole battery: "Friends, the news has just come through, that the Russian Army has started a major offensive in the Vistula basin. They have broken through our German defence line in some places. Between the Russians and us there are no reserves, and no co-ordinated resistance is expected. The civilian population will be evacuated, but for obvious reasons, none of you is allowed to leave the battery. All leave, regardless of reason, is cancelled forthwith. It is expected that Posen will be declared a fortress. This means that the enemy will surround Posen, and we have been ordered to defend it to the last drop of blood in our veins."

We all stood rooted to the ground. Although we had expected something like that, when the news came, it took us by surprise. It was like hearing our death sentence.

"We have been ordered to prepare our battery for ground defence. That means, we have to pull out each gun from the bunkers to be able to shoot at the Russian tanks. We shall do our best to stop the Russki and defend Posen. Everybody needs to chip in and do their best. Any questions?"

There were hundreds of questions in my mind, but I didn't think that Captain Günther would have the answers to them. How could we dig some walls of protection around the guns with the ground frozen hard? How could we set the distance of the range accurately for such a short distance, compared to thousands of meters into the air? How could the few of us hold the onslaught of the mighty Russian army? It all seemed rather hopeless, and of course no one asked any questions.

"You are all dismissed to receive instructions from your Sergeant Major."

Our unit crowded around our gun, proudly sporting the two rings from its previous glory. We felt paralysed. Where were we to start? Then our Sergeant Major appeared: "Go to the store house, you, you and you, and get picks and shovels for each one of us. We are going to start removing the rampart and when this is finished, we will pull the canon out to its new position up here."

It was back-breaking work. The ground was hard, we could only manage to chip small lumps at a time. Very slowly a section of the rampart was removed and the soil was placed on the ground where the gun was going to stand. We were all very tired at night, and no one spoke much. Each one of us was immersed in his own thoughts. Will we ever get out of this mess? There seemed to be no way out.

I was convinced that my last days had come. I didn't want to get into Russian hands alive. I would fight to the last. That night, before going to sleep, I handed my life over to God. There was no point avoiding the issue. In a few days I would be dead. After saying my prayer, a great calm came over me. Dying was not going to be so bad after all. It meant that I would be with God. With that I slept the sleep of one whose body was totally exhausted.

Next morning we went back to the same job we had left the night before. Only very slow progress was made. I thought of my parents, imagining them on their way to the west, away from the Russian onslaught. We could not phone out from our battery, but I was sure that the civilians would have all left by now. I visualised them trekking in endless columns, as we had seen so many on the news reels in the cinemas. They had always been other people on the march. This time it would be our own people, our village, our own family. It was good to think that they would be safe. I thought of Günter. If he gets through the War alive, he will find our parents and Gerda, and start a new life. It was a strange feeling, to think in such a detached way about our family without me.

Another five days passed with back breaking work. On the 18.1.45, the Ostdeutscher Beobachter had an editorial by Herbert Koch entitled "The Challenge of this Hour". It said there: "No one needs to worry about wife and children. Everything has been arranged so that those who cannot fight and need to be defended, can in all calmness be protected. This guarantee have all who fight at the front, naturally." (see Posen Januar 1945, p.17)

Luckily, there was not much time to think, let alone to read a newspaper. We didn't know anything about what was going on outside our battery.

Eventually we could see that we were getting somewhere with our work. Some units had hauled their guns already outside, ours was not quite ready. It looked funny to see the anti aircraft guns sitting high up on the ground. They seemed much larger than in their parapets, with just a small wall around. Would they be able to shoot low enough?

The 20th January 1945 dawned. At 5.25 am Posen was declared a fortress. Full alert was given to the fortress Posen and the C-Line (defence line around Posen). The Party boss Greiser, asked if the C-line could be defended. General Petzel advised that it would hardly be possible, with the forces available.

Military command was handed over to Major General Mattern, but we had no idea that the civilians were still unaware of this and of the collapse of the front.

Suddenly word came around: "Dieter Tieman to the telephone!"

I ran as fast as my legs could carry me. Who was there to phone me?

"Hallo, this is Dieter," I panted, and through the crackling of a poor telephone line I heard: "This is Vater".

"What? Vater? Where are you?" I asked, unable to believe it.

"I am phoning from Posen, from the Potato Growers Association. I came here for business, but everything is a bit chaotic. I want to come over to see you. I should be there in about an hour's time."

"But Vater, how come that you are still there? I thought you people had left a long time ago. Haven't you heard about the Russian break through about a week ago?"

“Look, I can’t discuss this with you over the phone. I’ll be over shortly. Bye-bye.”

I hung up, still believing that I had heard a voice from the other side. Very slowly I walked back to my comrades. Maybe the situation is not as desperate as we were told? Maybe they hadn’t told the civilian population? Suddenly I was afraid again, afraid that my parents and Gerda would be stuck at home and be overrun by the Russians. When Vater comes I would warn him to leave immediately. There was no time to lose. Back at the bunker my comrades wanted to know, why I was called.

“A phone call.”

“Who would phone you at this time?”

“My father. They are still at home.”

“What? Holy mackerel, hasn’t anybody told them?”

“He said he is going to come over.”

They were just as perplexed as I. We had all assumed that the civilian population had long been evacuated, but apparently this was not the case. Our position in the battery had kept us in isolation. We began to worry, but with heavy work, everyone was soon absorbed in their own thoughts. One by one, though, they looked up to see if my father was arriving. I was also anxious, as I didn’t want to miss him. The minutes crawled by. Then an hour had gone since my phone call. Maybe he got delayed? Maybe there is a lot of traffic on the roads? I knew he had his car with him, so he should not be much longer. More time passed. After two hours there was still no sign of Vater. By then it was lunch time, and I went back to the office: “Has my father called, or left a message?”

“No,” was the brief reply.

What happened to him? Why isn’t he coming?

I waited, and waited, but Vater never came. All the questions I wanted to ask him had to remain on my mind. I realised then how isolated we were from the outside world. We had no idea of what was going on out there.

That night I was restless again. In the stillness of the night, and through the darkness I could hear a distant noise. I asked my comrades: “Can you hear some rumbling in the distance?”

“Let’s go outside and see.”

We all went outside and listened intently into the moonlit night.

“I can hear something. Sounds like thunder. It comes and goes.”

“It’s guns. Heavy artillery.”

“The Russians must be coming closer. I hope, my parents are safe.”

My prayers that night were very much concerned with my parents, Günter and Gerda. May God protect them all, and let them get through this mess unscathed. As for myself I only asked that it would soon be over and I would be with him. Peace came again over me. I checked my gun by my side, and my boots, ready to jump into them if the alarm was raised. We had been told not to undress, but sleep in full uniform to be ready for

quick action. I rolled over and went to sleep.

Sunday, 21 January. It didn't feel like Sunday. Work was as usual, but we all listened to the distant gunfire and made comments. If anything, it spurred us on to finish the work. Our gun was finally outside the bunker too, proudly exposing itself to full view, with a small mound of earth around it. We are going to show the Russki! It won't be long now, and we will shoot against tanks. All our actions became mechanical, there was little room left for emotions, or for thinking.

That night we could see in the distance what looked like lightening flashes, and the sound of gunfire had definitely come closer. Maybe tomorrow was going to be the day? No one knew, and no one mentioned it. What were the others thinking about? No one spoke. I thought of tomorrow, but it didn't touch my emotions. We went again to bed, fully clothed, and I thought how easy it was to go to sleep.

"Raus, all FLAK helpers line up on the exercise yard, and bring your personal belongings!" was shouted through the night and woke us rudely from our much needed sleep. It was 2 am, Monday 22.1.45. I just packed my bread bag with my few things that I had accumulated since the fire and was outside in the cold morning among the first ones to line up. Everyone was rushed and hurried up. When we had all assembled outside, shivering, Captain Günther addressed us: "Major General Mattern, the supreme commander of the Fortress Posen, has ordered, that all FLAK helpers be pulled out of Posen. This doesn't apply to FLAKV helpers, they are staying back. There is a train waiting for you at the station. Sergeant Will is going to escort you, to make sure that you get there. I'm sorry to lose you, but I hope you'll get through. I wish you good luck. Auf Wiedersehen."

I saw one or two of the FLAKV helpers standing at the door. Did they want to come with us, or were they happy to defend Posen to the last man? I personally had mixed feelings about leaving at this point.

Suddenly it dawned on me: This may be our chance to get out of Posen alive? Could this be possible? I had given up hope, but there seemed to be the faintest glimmer of a rainbow in the distance. A strange feeling came over me. Was there life for us after death?

It was hard to grasp that I, with about 40 other FLAK helpers, was about to be pulled out of our battery with the enemy just on the door step. Who could this Mattern be, that he had pity on us? And what about the others? Were we to leave the rest of the men to the barbarous Russians, who showed no pity on anyone? One half of me wanted to stay with the comrades, to fight the battle we had been preparing for so long, the other half was elated that there was this glimpse of hope.

We began to walk silently through the icy night. It was very slippery on the road, and bitter cold, -20°C. The full moon was throwing a ghostly silvery light over the frosted landscape.

At first the way went past some fields along a country road. We

stumbled over the uneven road, because it was hard to see the unevenness in the moon light. In the distance, now closer than last night, we could hear the gunfire and see also the light of the explosions. This spurred us on, and after about an hour we reached the outskirts of Posen.

"Hey Walter, what's the matter with you?" I called out when I saw him heaving his heavy suitcase over the front fence of a house, where it came crashing down on the frozen earth.

"It's too heavy."

"I could have helped you Walter. Look, I have only this little bag around my belt. Lost all of my things in the fire."

"No, thanks, I didn't need that stuff anyway."

"You are lucky, with so little," Albert noticed.

"Every cloud has a silver lining, Albert."

The foot path was even more slippery than the road before. We made only very slow progress.

"Look, there's a tram!" someone shouted. "May be we can get it started?"

"Let me try," said Walter, "I have driven one before."

First he put the arm up to connect the tram with the electricity grid. Then he turned the starter wheel on, but ... there was no power.

"Bad luck chum. Would have been good to put our suitcases on."

Full of frustration, Walter stepped several times on the lever to the bell. The tinny tram bell sounded eerie in the otherwise empty street at this hour of the morning.

It was a pity that Walter had failed to get the tram moving. It meant that we had to walk all the 15 km to the station in these icy conditions. I was quite hot by now, and my perspiration seemed to freeze on the skin. So we just had to walk. Every now and again I could hear the thud of a bag or a suitcase landing on the frozen ground over a front fence somewhere. So much for our worldly possessions, I thought. I was glad I was spared such a decision.

The homes along the street all seemed empty and deserted. There was no sign of life in the streets. Had all people been able to leave? Slowly our group moved towards the centre of Posen, in a very unmilitary fashion, more like a bunch of refugees.

The 22nd January dawned. We were still on our way, but not much further to go. Soon we entered the plaza on the east side of the station. This was a very familiar sight to me, as our tram had taken us along this plaza to school countless times. Those days seemed ages ago. We had to line up and wait.

In a short while another group of FLAK helpers appeared from a different direction. This was Bernd's unit. Was I glad to see him again! We stood and chatted.

"Vater phone me on the 20th. They still hadn't gone by then. It was about 10 am when he phoned."

"My father came to the battery to take me with him, but of course the boss would not have allowed that. Besides, I would not have wanted to leave all my chums behind."

"Do you remember, Bernd, in the good old days, when we did so many things together at home?"

"Seems a long time ago."

"The rabbits, and the horses."

"Wonder who is looking after them?"

"And just imagine, all the food in our cellar."

"Oh, home, will we ever see it again?"

"If only we could sneak away from here and go home."

"Yeah, and forget the Russki and all the shambles."

"I don't think I could ever forget what I have been through."

"I agree, Dieter, it's been terrible."

"But imagine, our cellar full of those lovely bottled strawberries! If only we could raid that. You could have one whole bottle and I another, and eat to our heart's delight."

"You must be very hungry."

"Yes, I am, aren't you?"

"So much, that my stomach aches."

We must have been rather hungry to think of nothing else than food, forgetting about the danger around us. The waiting seemed to be endless. Of course we didn't know why we were standing and waiting. Our sergeant had disappeared in the station building ages ago.

On the platform right next to the plaza, we saw a hospital train being loaded with a lot of wounded soldiers. It was not a pretty sight, and the seriousness of our situation came back to us. Bernd's battery had heard the shooting from a closer range, as his unit was placed in the north of Posen.

"I was wondering whether we were going to make it," he said. "The Russki was so close to our battery."

"Well, you have. As long as we won't get trapped here waiting at the station for so long."

More FLAK helpers came from other batteries, making the total of those waiting to about 500.

Suddenly several sergeants came out of the station building, pulling one of those baggage carts full of bread. We all cheered as we received half a loaf of bread each. Then the face of our sergeant changed. He became sad, and I could see a tear or two in his eyes. One by one we said good-bye to him. "Stay alive, Sergeant, and thanks for everything."

"You had better get back to the battery quickly, before the Russki comes."

"And regards to everyone!"

What would happen to him? Was he leaving us, because the Russki was about to attack? Were we stuck here?

As he waved, he pointed to a passenger train, that was pulling up on

the platform opposite the hospital train.

"Your train," he shouted, as he disappeared around a street corner.

A sigh of relief.

"Just like our train to Strykowo," I motioned to Bernd. "It has those doors for each compartment, with a runner board connecting them."

"Let's sit together, Dieter."

"Sorry, I think we have to stay with our own units."

"At least we know that we are not far from one another."

It was a long train, all full of FLAK helpers. Suddenly, the engine pulled with a jerk, and our train was moving ever so slowly.

"What time is it?" Someone's watch said just on 3 pm.

"I wonder whether the hospital train is going to make it?"

"It's still being loaded. An officer said, that they are just about ready to leave. I hope they leave soon." After a pause he said: "I'm wondering whether we are going to make it."

The feeling, to leave the fortress Posen behind us, seemed like waking up from a night mare. It was almost too good to believe. But there was still danger ahead.

The train went painfully slow. It stopped about every hundred meters, and then started again with a jerk. We thought that there was something wrong with our train or the steam engine.

"It feels like one of the soldiers is driving the engine," commented Albert, our story teller, who was always witty and ready for a joke.

"Wrong," said the sergeant major, who had just overheard the comment, as he opened the door for a quick check. "The points have to be shifted by hand. All the railway men have already gone."

Gradually, we left Posen behind, and the train picked up speed. There was another stop, however, about 5pm. It was already getting dark. Those near the windows strained their eyes.

"Can you see anything?"

"Looks like someone is lying in the ditch right near the embankment."

A military guard from our train went to investigate. It was the body of a man, shot dead.

"Maybe the Russians have already been here?"

Could it be? We looked anxiously at each other.

"There could be some Russian snipers, waiting for our train to move into a trap?"

"Don't be absurd. Just trying to scare us all, eh?"

"The guard is looking around now. I told you, there is an ambush."

"He's coming up now," and Albert opened the door just a slit, not to let too much cold air in.

Through the opening we heard the guard call out: "It's all right. We're going on."

We were rather subdued for the next couple of hours, but when nothing happened, we relaxed again. We had worried for nothing, as we

later found out, for our train and the hospital train after us, were the last trains to leave Posen without being shot at. (see Posen Januar 1945, p.20 reporting that on 22.1.45 towards evening a train had been shot at by enemy tanks near Luban, which we had passed about an hour earlier, and that at 6.30 pm two artillery shells hit the Rochus Bridge at the eastern end of Posen. At that time the Russians were in the process of encircling Posen, and their forward units of fast tanks had crossed our train line to Berlin a couple of hours after our train went past.

The train was still moving rather slowly, but we felt more relaxed. Albert, our friend with those lovely stories from far away lands, settled into his corner and began to sing:

“Hang up your washing on the Siegfried Line,
have you any dirty washing, Mother dear.”

One by one we joined in and the tension eased, but not for long. A military guard came along on the outside runner board, opened the door of our compartment and created a hell of a row: “How dare you sing that ‘Schmachtfetzen’, that filthy smut, a song from the enemy! Do you all want to be arrested for sedition?”

I couldn’t believe my ears. Here we were, letting off some steam of our pent-up emotions, having just overcome some anxious moments, and slowly realising that we had actually escaped certain death, and then copping this! We were furious. We didn’t say a word to the guard, and he just left us. We resolved to continue to sing, but not at the top of our voices. With the rattling of the train the guard would not be able to hear anything.

We crossed the river Oder about midnight, shortly before Frankfurt. Only then did we feel secure. What bliss it was to fall asleep in the knowledge, that we had escaped. The agony of the last few weeks drifted over into dream land. No nightmare could have been as frightening.

In the early morning hours the train passed through the suburbs of Berlin. Here life was still in full swing. The “S” Bahn, (electric suburban trains) were wizzing past our slow train, and people were waiting at stations. At Neukölln station our train came to its final stop. We were all ordered out and marched to a nearby sports hall, where we found some floor space to continue our interrupted sleep.

In the afternoon an order came through to line up again, according to our previous batteries. After welcoming us to Berlin, the commanding officer said: “You have two options: either be de-mobbed and then you can go home or to some relatives or friends, as long as you know their address. The other option is to continue as a FLAK helper. You will be engaged in training younger ones. You can make phone calls tonight, think it over, talk it over with your friends. I give you three days, then I want your reply.”

“What will you do, Bernd?” I asked, after we had been dismissed.

“I’ll go to Potsdam to Onkel Roland and Tante Hilda. I can find their address and see if they can take me. What about you?”

“I don’t know. We haven’t got anybody here. And what’s the use, anyhow, they’ll soon catch up with us and put us into the army.”

“You can always come with me.”

“I’ll think it over.”

My group was already in a corner, when I came in. None of them had any relatives or friends in Berlin. They wanted to remain FLAK helpers. I felt more secure amongst them. They were my friends, with whom I had shared the most difficult year of my life.

Next morning I told Bernd: “Everyone in my group wants to stay on. Thanks for your offer, but I’d rather stay with my friends and become a trainer of the younger FLAK helpers.”

After a few more nights in the sports hall we said good-bye to the boys of the other units.

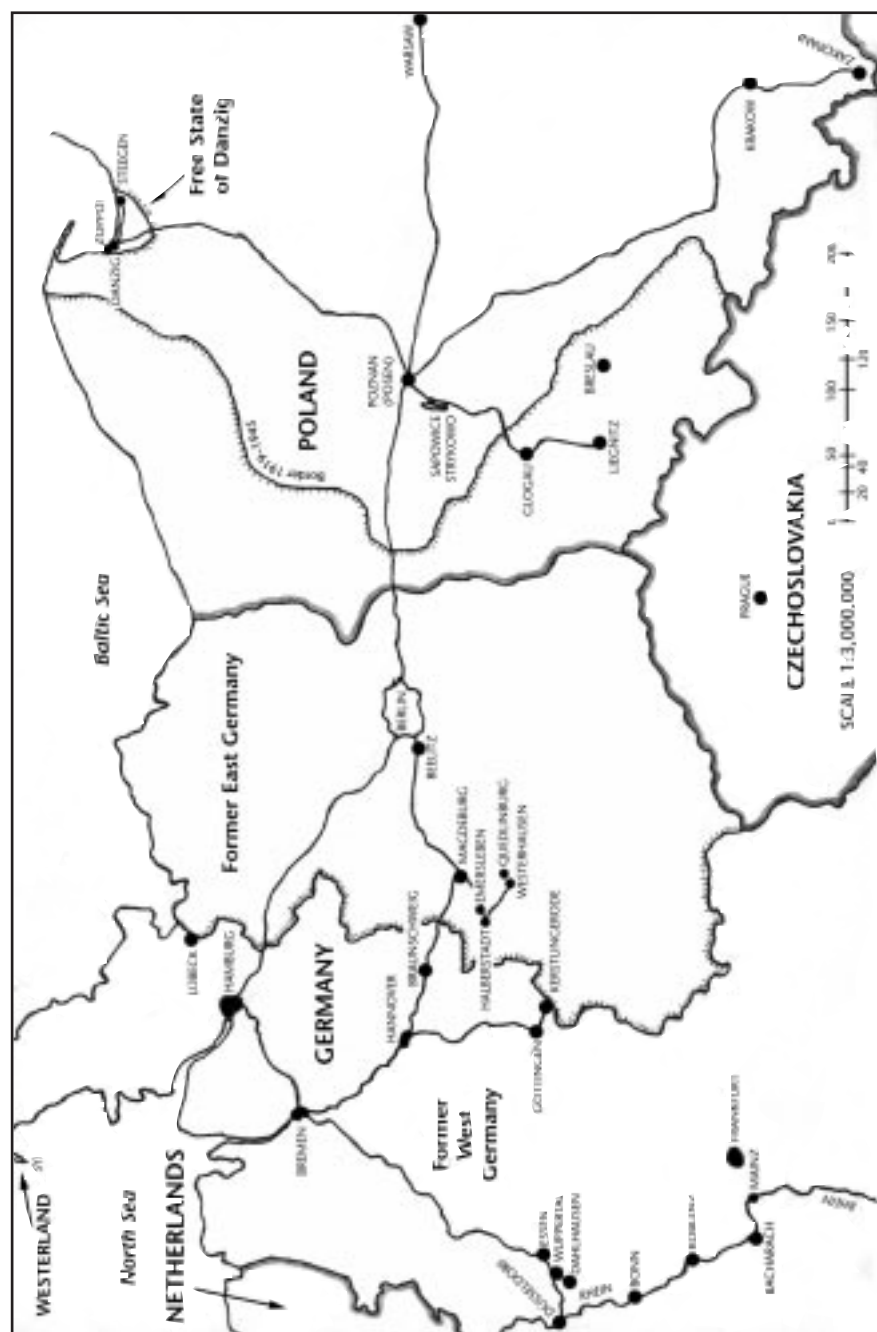
“Good-bye, Bernd. When shall we see each other again?”

“We don’t know what the future holds, do we?”

“Our unit is going to the Military Base in Bornstedter Feld, in the South of Berlin. Maybe you could come and visit us there one day?”

“Maybe. Cheerio for now.”

Bernd was the last link to my family and to the past. Our separation seemed to draw the final line under an irretrievable past. I had left childhood behind with all its magic, beauty and adventure, together with my family, friends and place I could call home. Berlin looked foreign, hostile and uninviting to me. Should I have gone with Bernd? Had I made a mistake? Once again, the dark clouds of an unknown future loomed threateningly before my eyes.



PART TWO

REFUGEE IN SEARCH OF A HOMELAND

The German word for homeland is *Heimat*, one's native land, but for me this translation doesn't sound right. In recent times, 'homeland' has received the connotation of a place of banishment created by apartheid South Africa. Very much the opposite, *Heimat* in German conveys the meaning of belonging, a place where your roots are, where your ancestors lived, the soil, the actual ground, where you can grow and take risks, surrounded by the nurture of family and friends. The thought of *Heimat* stirs deep feelings of love and happiness, a source necessary for life in an otherwise alien and hostile world. To be deprived of a *Heimat*, a place where you can recharge spiritually and renew your energy, means that the odds are stacked against you in the everyday struggle to survive, and to emerge eventually unscathed.

Refugees remain strangers in the land where they live, sojourners without a home, without friends, often surrounded by a foreign tongue. While refugees often leave their *Heimat* voluntarily, they equally often cannot go back there again, and so they are constantly searching for greener pastures. They need to be ready to pick up their meagre belongings, when other opportunities beckon. They remain refugees, until the soil is right for roots to grow again, for relationships to develop, for love to be answered.

Berlin — on the run

Berlin, founded in 1230, the capital of Germany and before that of Prussia since 1701, the place we had looked at with reverence and admiration, spread out before us. The most modern city transport system in the world at that time, took us to the new place of our activity, the Military Training Centre called Bornstedter Feld. Our new quarters were much better than the ones we had in Posen. As we were still extremely tired, we had a good feed and went straight to sleep.

In the middle of the night, however, we were again woken up by sirens howling quite near us.

"The Russki," shouted Albert in his sleep. We had trouble waking him up. I felt groggy myself, as I had been roused from the deepest possible sleep.

"An air raid, Albert, come on, wake up!"

Slowly he regained consciousness.

"Do we have to go?" still not quite himself.

"We can't stay here, the barrack has to be cleared."

Gradually, we made our way outside, where a spectacular show presented itself to us. Very close to where we were standing, the beam of a search light was scanning the dark night like a giant finger. There were five other search lights from different places doing the same. Between those search lights we could see what looked like two Christmas trees, one near us, another further away.

"What are these?" I asked a sergeant near the search light. "We have never seen anything like it before. In fact, we have never been in an air raid by night."

"What cushy jobs you must have had. We get an air raid on Berlin almost every night. If we are unlucky, there are two or three a night. These things that look like Christmas trees are the markers, released by one plane for the other enemy planes. There are usually three or four. When the squadrons come, they just unload their bombs inside those markers."

"I wouldn't want to be inside one of those squares."

"Nothing you can do about it, just pull your head in, and run for a shelter."

We had still not been assigned our jobs, so we just stood around and watched the spectacle unfold. There appeared two more markers, much further away, for which we were very thankful. Then came the bombers,

one squadron after another, all trying to drop their bombs within the square that the markers indicated.

"There is a plane caught by the beams of two search lights!"

"We can't see the other planes, but we can hear them. It's a terrific noise they make."

No sooner had he spoken, when a deafening detonation shattered our casual observations. One of those mega bombs had hit a block of flats about 300 meters from our position, sending us all scuttling. Bits and pieces were falling all around us.

"Come and stand inside this rampart," the Sergeant called out to us, "you are not supposed to stand there unprotected."

We quickly followed his instruction. It was dangerous, and the way the air raid developed was quite strange to us. After all, this was Berlin, the capital of Germany.

As we were peeping over the wall, we could see more and more bombs exploding and setting fire to a large part of the city. The raid took over an hour.

"How terrible for the poor people out there."

"They should all be in cellars or shelters."

"Still, it's frightening when the bombs keep crashing all around you."

Then suddenly it was calm, a terrifying calm. We could imagine, that a lot of people would have died again during this raid, and we seemed to be watching helplessly. When the 'all clear' signal came, we went back to bed again, still exhausted, and now terrified, with the new experience of a full scale air raid on Berlin, with all its force.

Next day we were divided into groups of eight and allocated to units where we would become the instructors for new FLAK helper recruits.

"The eight of you will stay here in the search light unit," the sergeant we had talked to last night announced.

"But we don't know anything about search lights. We never even saw one before last night."

"What did you use at home then?"

"Radar."

"Oh, you can't use that here. The enemy path finders usually scatter what looks like lametta, those fine silver metal strips, and they put radar out of action."

"So, how do you operate one of those search lights?"

"Do you know the radius of a circle?"

"Oh, I know now, the same principle as we use for the guns, isn't it?"

"Precisely. You will find no difficulties teaching the new boys, once you have familiarised yourselves with these machines. They have to learn to follow accurately the commands of the Sergeant."

"That shouldn't be a problem." We all gave a sigh of relief.

"Once you catch a plane in the beam, you hold on to it. Usually, another search light will try to follow you. With two beams holding it, the

plane has less chance to escape. Then the four-meter-base will hook on to it, and the guns receive their commands from there. You know, how that works, don't you?"

"Yes, we are familiar with that."

"Good, then you can start tomorrow."

The rest of the day was free.

The night that followed was another air raid. The sergeant called each one of us to practice on the search light. As he had anticipated, we had no trouble working it. The new FLAK helpers were standing around and watched us. I found it a bit scary, for the light was so bright that everything around us seemed flooded in light, though it was only the reflection of the beam. We suddenly realised how dangerous our position was. 'Like sitting ducks', I thought. The bombers could try to eliminate us before anything else!

Our beam of light was penetrating the darkness. As soon as a plane was caught in its beam, we had to do our utmost not to lose it again. We found the whole exercise so absorbing, that in the excitement our initial fear dissipated.

We heard again the crashing of the bombs like yesterday, only this time they seemed to be nearer. The whole earth trembled. When was it going to end?

The raid that night lasted for over two hours. I was totally exhausted by the end, both physically and emotionally. All I could think of was sleep, but sleep was a luxury in Berlin.

The following morning we had an air raid during the day. Since search lights are useless during daylight hours, we just stood there and watched the terrible destruction of what the sergeant called 'carpet bombing'. A grid seemed to be selected by the bombers, and all unloaded their load of death and destruction onto a single square down below, erasing everything in its path.

Oh beautiful city of Berlin, what has the Führer done to you? Is Berlin, like Posen, going to be defended to the last man? A cold shudder came over me, just to think of the future.

Whenever I had an opportunity to listen to the news, my ears were focussing on reports about the fortress Posen. It had been completely encircled on the evening of the day we had escaped. The Soviets were fighting hard to take it, but so far, heroic fighting by the Germans kept it in German hands. I heard, though, that the enemy was making slow progress towards the centre of town, the Kernwerk, a fortification from World War One. My thoughts went, full of sorrow, back to those we had left behind. Were they still alive, or had they been able to withdraw to the centre?

In the morning of 8 February I thought of Mutter. It was her birthday. Had they been able to escape the Russian onslaught? And where were they? Had Günter been caught by the Russians in the fracas of fighting

and retreat? I felt extremely weak, when I got up. I said to a comrade: "I feel sick. I don't think I'll be able to go on duty today."

"You had better report to the sick bay."

My temperature was 38.7°. No wonder I had been so tired and completely listless. My left ear ached, and I had no energy left.

"You have to stay here in the sick bay," the orderly growled. There were already two others in, and he seemed to be annoyed that another one came, adding even more work for him.

He gave me some aspirins.

"You have to stay here for two days, and if it is no better, you'll have to go to hospital."

My ear ache became unbearable whenever the effect of the aspirin subsided. After two days, the orderly couldn't stand it any longer.

"I've had enough of your whingeing. You have to go to the hospital today."

"How can I go to hospital in my condition?"

"Just get up, get dressed and go!" he roared.

I could hardly stand on my wobbly legs. I dressed and sat down again.

"I can't walk far."

"Oh, it isn't far," he lied.

He showed me the direction to walk, and I made a start. After about 200 meters, I had to sit down again. I was too weak. The orderly must have watched me, for a few minutes later he came stomping after me.

"I'll get you there," he shouted, "even if I have to kick you all the way to the hospital."

I felt too weak even to argue, so I got up and went perhaps another 200 meters with him behind me. When I tried to sit down again, he screamed: "I'll kick you in the arse." I felt his boot landing on my backside. The kick reverberated through my whole body.

"I'm not pretending," I said weakly, "I'm really sick."

"That's why I'm getting you to hospital, you ... (expletive). Now shut up and walk."

He bullied and kicked me in my behind several times, and swore in the foulest way possible. I was outraged. I was treated like a stray dog. It was sheer torture, and he knew it. Did he have no compassion? A real hatred welled up inside me. This must have given me supernatural strength, for I made the long road to the hospital, over three kilometers! Once there I collapsed on a stretcher. My temperature was 39.8°.

From then on things took their own course. Nurses looked after me. I was allowed just to lay there, happy to have escaped my torturer. The people in hospital treated me with kindness and compassion. They soon realised that I had a middle ear infection and that I needed immediate treatment.

After a few days I was transferred by ambulance to a military hospital, which was established in Beelitz Heilstätten, formerly a sanatorium for

T.B. patients, situated in the South West of Berlin, outside the city perimeter.

I was put in a room with 11 other patients, all of them adult soldiers. As I had no change of clothes since the fire, and no opportunity to get a new supply, my underwear was filthy and in tatters, and I was ashamed of being so dirty and wearing rags. I didn't know how to dispose of them, so I just hid them under the mattress of my bed.

The air raid sirens went off in bright daylight.

"You must get up and come with us into the shelter," a room mate said.

"Can't I just stay here? It doesn't matter, if a bomb hits us I'll be dead and no more pains."

"Not possible. These are the orders."

I got up with some effort, wrapped a blanket around me and made for the cellar with the others. But they were walking far too fast for me. I practically crawled the last few meters, just in time before the bombs began to fall. There were no seats left, so I just crumpled up in a heap on the floor, with my back to the wall. The wall opposite was only four meters away. I felt claustrophobic, especially when the walls began to shake every time a bomb hit nearby. There was deathly silence all around. Sometimes pieces of plaster come down. I thought, 'not here Lord'. Having come so far, I didn't want to be buried alive here.

Back in my ward I was given sulphur drugs as my first treatment. It helped slightly, but I was still feeling terribly weak. A nurse came in: "There is another FLAK helper in a ward next door. Why don't you go and see him. I must warn you, though, he is not very well. You might be able to cheer him up a bit."

"What do you mean by cheering him up? I think I need cheering up."

"You'll see."

He was in a bad way.

"I'm Dieter, in the ward next door to yours. They told me that you had a mastoid operation?"

"Yes, about a week ago."

"And how are you feeling?"

"No good. I don't know what it is, but I don't feel any better than before."

"I thought you might tell me a bit about your operation, as I might have to go through one myself."

"Oh, the operation was all right. Slept right through it. I just don't seem to be able to pick up since."

"You feel a bit hot, have you still got a temperature?"

"38.9."

"That's pretty high."

"They are giving me sulphur tablets, but they don't seem to have an effect."

"I'm on sulphur tablets too. You're supposed to drink a lot with this

treatment.”

“Yeah, I know, but I find it a bit hard.”

“So, no appetite either?”

“None.”

He looked tired and weak.

“I’ll tell you something about my experience. You just lay there and listen. Would that be okay?”

He nodded. I could see it in his eyes, that he was pleased. Then I told him about Posen, about life in the battery there, and how we had been pulled out right at the last minute. I told him that I have had to face death, and that it had not been frightening. He gave my hand a weak squeeze — our souls had hugged. I could not talk any further. We just sat and looked at each other.

Next day I dropped in on him for a moment. He was just staring into space. Speaking was too difficult for him, so we just held hands. He smiled at me when I left.

After that, my condition worsened. I was feeling too wretched to visit him, but I thought of him all day. Before the week was up, the nurse told me that my new-found friend had died. I buried my head under the sheet for a long time.

The specialist realised that the drugs would not cure me. I still had this tremendous ear ache all the time, and high temperature with it.

I was very sick and felt terribly lonely and wretched. The thought of my friend next door wouldn’t leave me. Was I going along the same road?

The air raid sirens kept sending their whining sound right through my bones, sometimes several times a day. I felt that I could not go down into the shelter for much longer.

As I was lying in my bed and staring in front of me, I suddenly saw a familiar face. Through the haze of my mind I thought at first that I was dreaming. But then I realised that I was not. Before me stood Vater.

He bent down and gave me a big hug. He knelt there by the bed and we didn’t let go of each other for a long time.

“I’m so glad that I found you. To have one son left in the war somewhere is enough. I won’t let you go again.”

It was so comforting. Life became worth living again.

“Bernd told me that all of you FLAK helpers had escaped from Posen. You can imagine, how happy we all were.”

“And how is Mutter and Gerda and Oma? Are they all safe?” I was bubbling over with happiness, and wanted to know everything at once.

“They are all well. They don’t even know yet that I found you.”

“That will be a surprise. But how did you know where I was?”

“Yesterday I went to the FLAK battery at Bornstedter Feld, as Bernd had said. A Sergeant told me, that you got sick and had to go to hospital.”

“The nice one, from the search light unit?”

“Yes, I think it was him. He seemed to know you well. After that, I went

to the hospital, but they told me that you had been transferred to here. By then it was too late to come all the way here. I went home again, and started early this morning to come here. It took some time to find you, but I am so glad that I did."

"So am I, Vater, it's just too good for words. You have suddenly appeared like from a forgotten world."

"The Germans from our whole village are billeted with some farmers in Gross Marzehns, not so far from here."

I still couldn't believe it, it was too good to be true. I had not experienced life-giving news for such a long time. It was simply overwhelming. I fell back on my pillow, rather weak and exhausted.

"Please tell me everything that happened to you, beginning from our phone conversation on 20 January. Do you remember? I'll just lay here and listen."

"It seems much longer than three weeks ago. So much has happened since. After I hung up on you I heard in the office that everyone in the province of Posen had received marching orders. They were to pack up immediately and catch the next train out of Posen. Thousands of them were already streaming to the station, and there was chaos everywhere. I then had to make the hard decision not to go and see you, as I was anxious about Mutter. You see, she had gone a couple of days earlier to visit Günter in Krotoschin, and hadn't come back from there.

"Since the evacuation order had come that day, I feared she would not get a place on a train to come home. So I phoned Irene and told her to get the farm wagons with rubber wheels ready, get our staff to pack our things straight away, and put them on the wagons, and to tell Oma. I also told her to organise all the Germans in the village and tell them to pack up and leave for the main road towards Berlin. I would follow with Mutter and the others, as soon as we were together again. I then took the car and went to Krotoschin to pick up Mutter.

"The road to Krotoschin was completely chaotic. I arrived there late in the afternoon to learn that Mutter had been offered a lift back home that same day. I made my way back home straight away and got home at about 10 pm, only shortly after Mutter had arrived. She then told me, that she had reached Krotoschin 10 minutes after Günter's unit had left for the front. So the whole trip had been in vain. The wagons were ready packed and waiting for our arrival. We sent them ahead and went quickly through the house to pick up things which our staff might have forgotten, but then forgot ourselves to take some of our papers and documents. Luckily, Mutter picked up all the photo albums. By the time we left it was about 11 pm. It was freezing, about -20°C, and the roads were terribly slippery."

"Have you heard from Günter?"

"No. The Russians broke through there on 22 January, according to the news. Perhaps he is in their hands as a prisoner of war."

“Poor Günter.” There was a long pause.

“What happened then?” I wanted to know.

“Oma, together with Gerda’s teacher and Fräulein Lina, her housekeeper, went ahead of us in her coupé. Mutter, Gerda and I followed in our car. We drove throughout the night, and caught up with the rest of the trek in Neutomischel. I had to leave our car there, as we ran out of petrol and couldn’t get it anywhere.

“From then on we sat on the wagons, or in Oma’s coupé. Actually, I must have gone most of the way on foot, as I had to keep the wagons from our village together. We only drove during the day, and luckily we always had a bed for Oma at night.”

“How did you manage that?”

“When we arrived in a place towards the late afternoon, Mutter went to the protestant minister and told him that we had an 80-year-old Oma with us, and usually he found a bed for her. The three of us slept most of the time together with the rest of our people on some straw in a school or barn. Local welfare groups always organised some hot soup for us, which was quite nourishing. That’s how we arrived in Gross Marzehns, as I said, not far from this place, on 2 February.” From then on I felt more like a human being again, having a loving family, who were concerned about me. Mutter came to visit me too, and she brought me a jar of Fräulein Lina’s most delicious custard. It tasted just like out of this world. I had missed some home cooking for so long.

Eventually the specialist decided to operate on me. From others I heard that once I had my operation I would not need to go into the air-raid shelter. They would wheel my bed down there. This sounded to me like heaven. But it was not to be for another week or so, as the list of those requiring surgery was rather long.

My operation took place on 24 February. That night, as usual, there was an air raid. I was still too groggy to be fully aware of things, but I gratefully noticed, that I was wheeled in my bed into the shelter. I was not allowed to move my head for quite a few days. From then on this would become routine for the next three weeks. Mastoid patients were not allowed to get out of bed for that period, because of ‘balance problems’. Well, I didn’t mind at all.

In my new ward there were a couple of very nice men, one on my right the other on my left. The one on the left had lost an eye in the war, the other had his tonsils removed. He was in terrible pains for a whole week, and he could hardly talk. Once he was better again, he was very critical of the whole Nazi regime, the war and everything. He and my neighbour on the left had long arguments, to which I only listened with great interest, but felt somewhat out of it.

Onkel Werner and Tante Margaret came to visit me one day. They wanted to know what I thought of the outcome of the war.

I had been too preoccupied with my illness to think about the war, and

I really didn't know what to think about it. In one way I just couldn't imagine Germany losing it, as there was talk about some miracle weapons, on the other hand I remembered what my neighbour on the right had said, that some think that the war was already lost, and that it would be better to stop it here and now.

But I realised that I had been so indoctrinated by the Nazi propaganda, that I was unable to think straight for myself. Or was I just being naïve? Or had the isolation at the FLAK battery shielded me from real life? I was confused.

It took a long time for me to recover, as the hole in my head had been large. Another comrade from my ward, who had gone through the same operation as I, pushed me on a trolley to the theatre for the first change of dressing. He had nearly fully recovered, but he still remembered how painful this had been for him. He stayed by my side throughout the whole procedure. This was done without anaesthetic. When the doctor pulled the gauze, it felt like he was pulling out my brains, bit by bit. My mate got hold of my hand, put his inside mine and whispered: "squeeze this as hard as you like", and I did. I will never forget his kindness and compassion. When the wound was completely exposed, the specialist called one of his colleagues to show him his work. He pointed out the depth and how the inner ear could be seen, even some of the brain tissue.

No wonder it had felt like my brain had been pulled out! But my specialist seemed very happy with his operation, and my head got a fresh clean bandage, like a turban. I felt much better afterwards. From then on I made quick progress.

At night the nurse would come around with pills. I was still on sulphur drugs, and for the first week or so I received a needle to help me go to sleep. I literally felt dropping off to sleep, it was so wonderful to be able to forget all the pain. I stayed for three weeks in this special recovery ward. Then I was allowed to get up and that meant, that I had to walk down into the shelter again during air raids. But I didn't mind it then. My one-eyed neighbour on my left took me sometimes for a walk into the garden, where spring had arrived. It was a beautiful place and well cared for. He noticed that he had difficulty estimating the distance with only one eye. He would probably get used to it, but at first he found it most distressing.

Meanwhile the Russians were approaching Berlin. Friends of my parents, who had come from the Baltic states, were packing their bags again and were leaving across the river Elbe. It was rumoured, that Germany would be divided there between East (the Russians) and the West (the Americans, English and French). They were not going to be caught by the Russians. Bitter experience had taught them to fear them more than anyone else. So my parents decided to leave too. They came to say good-bye to me and promised that they would come to get me, once they were settled in another place of refuge.

I felt lonely again, deserted, like the time before Vater had found me.

What if they can't come back for me? This terrible war seemed to come to a rapid end now, but could life go on thereafter? Wasn't everyone expected to fight to the last man, to the last drop of blood, as we had been told? Somehow I had never contemplated that life could go on, should we lose the war. It was hard to shake off years of propaganda and brain washing. Every day we heard of advancing enemy forces on both sides and of terrible bombing raids, especially on Dresden, which had been full of refugees. Carpet bombing and incendiaries inflicted terrible casualties among the civilian population. Fighter planes were now strafing country roads, which once again had become clogged with refugees. Would my parents make it across the Elbe? And what about the bridge there? If that were to be damaged, what then? Were we to welcome the enemy who had inflicted such suffering on civilians everywhere? Why should I want to go to the West in the first place, and not just stay in the East?

Were the Russians really so different from the western allies? We had heard that the former killed even more indiscriminately, if that was possible. We were told that they were even more vicious, and that the communist system was just another totalitarian regime, which we had hoped to escape.

It all was still very confusing to me. Some soldiers from the Russian front had said, that they would have been quite happy to turn around and go together with the Americans, the British and the French and continue the fight against the Russians. This never eventuated of course, but it might have solved a lot of future problems.

This time I didn't have to wait for Vater in vain. He came on 4 April 1945.

"Am I glad to see you, Vater!"

"So am I, I can assure you. But we must not lose any time. Come with me, I want to see the Head of this military hospital."

When we found him, Vater told him that I was his son and that I had a mastoid operation in this hospital. I had nearly fully recovered, and that he wanted to take me home. He also told him about Günter who was missing at the Russian front, and that he didn't want to lose another son.

After hearing that my operation had taken place five weeks ago, he referred us to the specialist. He insisted that I had to see a doctor in the village to change my dressing. Then he took my bandage off and told me to go into the corner of the room. He went to the opposite corner and said in a low voice "twenty three."

I repeated, "twenty three." He seemed happy. Then he lowered his voice to a whisper: "Forty eight." I repeated again, "forty eight."

"This is extraordinary!" he exclaimed. He called his colleague, whom he had shown my open wound at the first change of dressing, and said: "You remember this chap? the big wound where you could see the brain?"

"Yes, I do"

"Listen to this!" and out of his corner came a very faint whisper, hardly

audible: "Thirty five."

Proudly I repeated, "Thirty five".

"You have certainly done an excellent job here," his colleague praised. "His hearing is better than normal!"

"Yes, that's what I thought too."

I was delighted, both that my hearing was so good, and that my specialist was so proud of his success. This would hopefully give me the desired discharge.

And so it was. He told me to see an ENT specialist at Quedlinburg Hospital as soon as I arrived there. He then wrote out a Notice of Leave and an army railway ticket:

By reason of discharge from Military Hospital on 5.4.45 to the FLAK Training Centre No.1, Berlin-Rudow, on convalescence leave to Westerhausen, near Quedlinburg, Luftwaffenoberhelfer Dieter Tieman from FLAK Training Centre 2, Potsdam. Leave from 5 April 1945 to 21 April 1945, 9.00 hours. Destination: Westerhausen near Quedlinburg, Berlin-Rudow. Notes: Pay and provisions received till 30.4.45. Issued 4 April 1945, Military Hospital Beelitz.

The ticket was issued from Beelitz Heilstätten to Quedlinburg, and from Quedlinburg to Berlin-Rudow. It had to be used in conjunction with my certificate of leave and my FLAK I.D. card, giving me two weeks of convalescence leave. On 21 April 1945, at 9 am, I would have to report back to the FLAK Training Centre No.2 at Potsdam, in Berlin-Rudow.

With my discharge papers and ticket in my pocket, we both were very happy, and went straight to the station, to catch the next train for Quedlinburg.

It was a wonderful feeling to sit with Vater in the train, and not having to be constantly aware of orders coming from some superior. But as I was dressed in uniform, I was still subject to the military. Vater and I decided there and then to make sure that no one in Westerhausen, where the family was staying, would see me in uniform. We wanted to make sure, that reporting back on 21 April would never be necessary.

It was dangerous in those days to travel by train during daylight hours, as many trains were attacked by British or American fighter planes. In spite of this, the train was full. When we crossed the river Elbe, near Calbe, a feeling of new-found freedom came over me. For the first time in about nine months I felt out of reach of the Russians. It was like a new lease of life.

The train went through Aschersleben, the largest town since Berlin. Would we be spared an air raid? There were some anxious moments. Soon the train pulled out again and we were greatly relieved. Next stop was Quedlinburg, our destination. We arrived there late in the afternoon.

"The next eight kilometers are going to be hard for you, my boy," said

Vater. "We'll see, whether all the walking in the hospital gardens did you any good."

"I'll be all right." I was determined.

"Here, give me your pack, it will make it easier for you to walk."

The pack, my 'bread bag', which contained just my tooth brush, comb, soap and shaver, plus my diary and some photos, wasn't heavy. I had never received any spare clothes.

"Thanks, Vater, that's very nice of you. It will help."

Was there a note of uncertainty? I didn't want Vater to think that I couldn't make it, but I wasn't too sure myself.

As we were walking along the road, the last ten weeks in Berlin came flashing by. It had been a springboard on the road to freedom. I had escaped from certain death, only to face death again in hospital. I had lost contact with my family but found them again, except Günter. I had lost all my friends, my home, my roots where I had grown, would the new-gained lease of life help me to find a new Heimat?

WESTERHAUSEN

The End of the War

Vater and I were walking slowly along the road from Quedlinburg to Westerhausen, leaving behind us one of the most beautiful medieval towns in Germany. It is situated on the river Bode, which has its source in the Harz mountains. Its Tudor style of architecture, dating back to the 14th century, with its palace of Heinrich I, who was elected the first German King in 919, makes Quedlinburg one of the best preserved historic towns in Germany. Our sealed road was winding past some low mountain ranges, with sharp cliffs pointing up. In the distance I could see another range emerging.

Vater pointed in that direction and said that they called it the ‘camel’, which could be seen from their house. By then I was glad that we didn’t have far to go, as my legs began to feel weak. After a brief stop we continued. The faint glimmer of the horizon in the west had disappeared, and we were walking in total darkness.

We entered the village of Westerhausen and reached the farm house, where our family had been billeted. Nobody had seen me and I wouldn’t show myself to the farmer’s widow either until the following morning. She needn’t know that I was a FLAK helper either. Our plan had worked out all right. I was prepared to do anything not to report back to Berlin. It seemed so futile. Vater thought by then the American troops will have ‘liberated’ us.

Our new home was an old farm house, right at the end of a cul-de-sac.

As we entered the old farm house, my heart began to beat. I had seen neither Gerda nor Oma since before we had left home. I could hardly wait to see them all again. I opened the door, and there they were, sitting around a table and having dinner. With tears in my eyes, I gave everyone a big hug, including Fräulein Lina.

“My word, you have grown since I saw you last, Gerda. And Oma, you haven’t changed a bit, in spite of all the hardship you’ve been through.”

“Oh, everybody has been so good to me. I never lacked anything. I even had a bed for the night throughout our trek.”

It was good to be with the family again.

"The last time you came home was Christmas," said Gerda, who seemed to have not only grown physically, but also had matured a lot. "I'm happy to have at least one brother again."

"You must be hungry," Fräulein Lina interrupted the happy scene. "I've cooked you a nice dinner. You look like you could do with a bit of fattening. You too, sir, there are two spare chairs."

Oma's cook was just wonderful. Her meal tasted so good!

"Like in the good old days, Fräulein Lina. I don't know how you can get a dinner like this together in these hard days."

"I have my ways," she said mysteriously.

She hadn't changed either.

The Bürgermeister, or village mayor, had allocated three rooms for our family: one for Oma, which also served as our dining and living room, one for Fräulein Lina, who shared her room with Gerda, and one where my parents slept. Mutter had organised a day-bed for me in their room.

Vater told the family about our plan: "The Amis can't be far. Dieter has only two weeks of convalescence leave. We are not going to report to any military office about him being a FLAK helper. Tomorrow Dieter is going to have a rest. Then on Friday we will go to the Bürgermeister and tell him that Dieter had been in hospital for his ear operation, and that we had to leave him there when we came here. He has now been discharged and from now on he will be living with us again."

"That's a good idea."

Mutter didn't mind taking shortcuts. Vater would usually choose the correct way, even if it meant some personal sacrifice. In this case, however, it was his suggestion and Mutter of course agreed immediately.

"There is no point telling anyone about Dieter, especially when the Americans are practically at our door. If they found out, they might take him as a prisoner of war. And we don't want that, do we?"

All agreed with Mutter.

"You must promise not to tell anyone, and I mean anyone." Vater was still uneasy about the whole business, but there was no other way.

After everyone had promised, I was ready for bed. It's been a long day for me. Mutter came upstairs to get my uniform jacket, to take off all the insignia, lapels, and shoulder straps, so that I would be able to wear it again the next day. I had no other clothes. She was going to try to get a shirt for me, as she disapproved of just wearing a singlet under my jacket. Vater's shirts were too small for me.

"Good night, Mutter. I'm really happy now. It's such a peaceful place here. A night without air raids, a whole night of uninterrupted sleep! It must be absolute bliss."

I didn't need a sleeping pill that night. Before Mutter had gone downstairs, I was already in dream land.

Some time during that night I felt someone pulling at my toes. I was annoyed: "What's the matter?"

Mutter whispered: "I just wanted to see if you were still alive. You hadn't moved all night and I couldn't even hear you breathing. Thank God that you are all right. Go back to sleep again."

So much for an uninterrupted night, I grumbled to myself! But it was not long before I went back to sleep, a wonderful deep and restful sleep.

The sun was already high in the sky, when I woke up. I must have slept for 14 hours, with just the one interruption.

As there were no sirens in the village, there was never an air raid.

"Sorry for pulling at your toe last night, I was really worried," said Mutter.

"Doesn't matter, I went straight back to sleep. You see, I had to lie on my right side all the time since my ear trouble, as it hurt too much on the other. Any movement meant the ear hurt, so I learnt to sleep very still."

We all laughed about this little incident. Dear Mutter, always worrying!

After breakfast I was introduced to Frau Koggel, the farmer's widow, who was now our land lady. She was a rather grumpy old woman, and accepted the story about my mastoid operation without any question.

There were no longer animals on the farm yard, but the surrounding barns were used by a relative of Frau Koggel. The toilet was a little wooden cage above the dung heap.

I spent all day looking around and talking to the family, which I hadn't done for so long. After lunch I had a long sleep again, still catching up on the strenuous day yesterday.

Vater took me to the Bürgermeister on Friday, as we had planned. He asked me all sorts of questions, where I have been, whether I want to stay with my parents from now on, and what I intended doing. After giving him satisfactory answers, he seemed quite approachable. A great deal depended on him, for he had authority to give me my resident permit and, what was more important in those days, my ration cards. I was greatly relieved when I left the office as a civilian! It was official. I had the papers in my pocket.

In the afternoon Mutter introduced me to the local minister. The church was just two minutes from our house. His name was Pastor Borchert. He greeted me warmly and said that he had heard about me and was glad that I had arrived safely. Then he wanted to know who was going to attend to my operation wound. When I told him that I had a referral to a specialist in Quedlinburg he seem happy that all was under control. Before we left he wanted to know how old I was. When I told him sixteen, he wanted me to meet his son Heinz. He was turning 16 later this year.

Heinz was slightly smaller than I. He had a fresh face and intelligent eyes. We seemed to click immediately.

"Come, I'll show you around."

He showed me his room, his books and old toys, and then the church. He's lived there all his high school years, attending the school in Quedlinburg. I told him about my school years, my home, and then I opened up to him about my year at the FLAK.

"I don't know why, but I trust you, Heinz. You are the only one in this village, apart from my family and your father, who knows about it, and I would like this to remain so."

"You can rely on me, Dieter."

From then on we became good friends.

"Since Günter has been in the army, I had no one to share my thoughts and feelings. I need someone. Would you like to be a brother to me? I still think a lot of him, longing to hear from him, or about him. You see, I miss him very much."

"I always wanted an older brother. I think that would be wonderful."

We kept talking until late in the afternoon.

"What do you think about the future of Germany?" Heinz asked me the next day, when he came to visit me.

"I don't know, Heinz. I still hope that Germany is going to win the war. You must have heard about the miracle weapon and all that."

"But Dieter, wake up! The Amis are nearly here, you told me that the Russki was close to Berlin, what is there left of Germany to win?"

"They keep telling us, not to give up. They kept reminding us of the end of the last war, when Germany capitulated, as they said, five minutes before midnight, meaning five minutes before victory. We don't want to repeat that!"

"I think you've taken far too much notice of Nazi propaganda. Look at the mess we're in now. All our major towns are destroyed by bombs. Centuries of culture and history just wiped off the face of the earth. There're thousands dead at the front and here from the bombs. You've lost your home, as have thousands like you. We've lost the war already, a long time ago."

"I can't see it that way. I'll have to think about it."

"Why don't you talk to your father, he might help you."

"Has your father been ... against the Nazis?"

"Well, let me put it this way: he certainly wasn't for them. It was part of his job to keep an open mind."

"I never talked to my father about that."

"You should."

My mind was made up. Tomorrow I would ask Vater.

After breakfast I saw Vater:

"How about going for a walk? It's such a beautiful spring day."

"Where would you like to go?"

"To the forest."

We walked and we talked. It was the first really serious and honest conversation I had with Vater. He shared with me all the doubts he had about the Nazis, how they nearly arrested him, because he had defended our butcher Szyfter from Stęszew, and how they opposed him, because he would not give up his membership in the church. It all came as a great surprise.

"Why have you never told me this before?"

"For your own sake. It would have caused a colossal conflict within you. One day you might have said something, quite unwittingly, which could have betrayed your real feelings, and then you, and we all, would have been in trouble."

"But Vater, didn't you trust me?"

"Of course I trusted you. Maybe one day you will understand."

"I want to understand now, that's why I wanted to talk to you. Heinz was telling me, that there's little hope that we're going to win the war. I just can't see how Germany can go on, after we have lost the war? All those efforts, all the dead, all the destruction, can all this have been in vain?"

"No, my boy, such things never happen without a purpose, provided that we learn from them. Wars do not solve differences between nations."

"So what will happen after Germany has been defeated?"

"We will probably be ruled by the occupying nations, until such time when we can form our own government. Life goes on."

"Really! Ah yes, the rainbow! So there is life ... after death?"

We walked silently, each one immersed in our deep thoughts.

"I can see now, why you were so keen to get over the river Elbe, because you didn't want to come under Russian rule."

"That's quite right."

My political naivety had been eroded. I began to learn slowly.

Sunday, 8 April. Our family went to church in the morning. Pastor Borchert was a good preacher, and I felt I would have learnt a great deal from him, had I lived here. No wonder Heinz was so mature.

On our way back from church, I heard a familiar droning sound high up in the sky. There were several squadrons of bombers flying in formation in a northerly direction. I was reminded of previous sights and I shuddered. Who would be the target this time? We didn't have to wait for long. We heard the sound of explosions in the distance. It wasn't far from us.

As soon as we arrived home we went through the garden gate, overlooking a low land where vegetables were grown. Further down we could see horses grazing on meadows near a brook. From here we could see north. A cloud of smoke appeared on the horizon.

"This can't be more than ten kilometers from here," Vater commented. He was very good at estimating distances.

"Where could that be?" I asked, no one in particular.

At that moment Frau Koggel, the farmer's widow, appeared in the garden gate. She pointed at the smoke and said: "This is where Halberstadt lies."

I had never heard of that place. The clouds of smoke became bigger and blacker. The bombing had ceased. We went inside for lunch.

When I saw Frau Koggel after lunch again I asked her, what sort of place Halberstadt was.

"It is a lovely, old, medieval town, similar to Quedlinburg. It has Tudor style houses in the centre of town, dating back about 500 years."

"Has it got any military significance?"

"None whatsoever."

That afternoon I saw an endless column of people walking from the direction of Halberstadt, some pushing a few belongings in strollers, or pulling a hand cart, others were carrying bundles on their back. Most of them had very little. Their faces looked blackened and their clothes singed. Soon we heard, that most of them had lost all their possessions in the flames, and hundreds were still left behind, either dead, or buried under the rubble. The column never ended. A stream of refugees from the terrible and senseless air raid on Halberstadt. These refugees were looking for shelter in our village and beyond. They reported that the old city had been totally destroyed. We saw the smoke for days afterwards, a grim reminder that the war was not over yet.

That night Frau Koggel slept in the cellar. The bombing and the flow of refugees had been too much for her. She had never in her life before experienced anything like it. For me this appeared relatively insignificant compared to the war and destruction in Posen and Berlin, but then destruction of life and property is never insignificant. These were people, families with children like our family.

Heinz came early in the morning with some more news about the refugees. Hundreds of them had found accommodation in the church hall, in the village school, and in barns of various farmers.

I remarked how much my parents were reminded of their own flight from the Russians. They too were going in endless columns, just like those refugees from Halberstadt, and they had to leave practically all their belongings behind. It can't have been easy for them, but it helped us all to realise that there were other values in life which were more important.

"By the way, were you able to talk to your father?"

"Yes, Heinz, it was wonderful to talk with him. I should have asked him ages ago. Thanks a lot. Gee, it is great to have you as my friend, someone I can trust. I have missed that for so long. I am seeing things so much clearer now, thanks to you and Vater. It helped me to feel free again. I must have been sleep-walking all these months."

"Perhaps not sleep-walking, Dieter, more like with a closed mind?"

"You are right, Heinz. I told you, how much I needed a heart to heart talk with you."

As we were still talking, we both heard a dull explosion.

We both jumped to our feet, ran outside and through the garden gate, from where the sound had come.

Thump ... thump ... two more explosions, and we saw some dirt from the vegetable patch splashing into the air, just a hundred meters from where we were standing.

"They're shelling our village! The Amis are coming!" I shouted at the

top of my voice, as I was running inside, with Heinz on my heels.

"Let's go into the cellar."

We all joined Frau Koggel, this time we were as scared as she was. But nothing happened for about two hours.

"Can't we have some lunch while we are all here?" I asked.

"We don't have to sit at the table upstairs, we can have it here." Fräulein Lina was always practical. As long as Gerda was near Mutter, she was quite courageous.

"I'll have a big sandwich please."

We shared some food with Heinz and Frau Koggel, who seemed pleased that we were there.

After lunch, Heinz and I went upstairs.

"It's all clear," we announced, after we had looked through the garden gate and along the street.

The family came upstairs too. They needed a rest. Heinz and I sat by the barn in the warm midday sun, talking.

Suddenly there was another explosion. Not a dull thump, as before. This was a 'crash ... bang.' It came from the next farm house. We looked at each other.

"That was close. I think, something got hit."

"Let's have a look."

As we walked towards the farm yard of the farmer next door, we could already see some smoke coming from the barn. We raced over and raised the alarm, shouting: "Fire, fire!" as loud as we could.

In no time there were lots of people coming from all directions with buckets, wash basins and other containers, helping to extinguish the fire. Fortunately we had discovered the fire early, before it could spread.

When we arrived back home, I slumped into the chair, feeling quite weak and exhausted.

"I'm not used to working physically any more. This nearly knocked me out."

"You shouldn't have exerted yourself. You still have your head in a bandage, don't forget."

"Thanks for your concern, Heinz, but I'll be all right again tomorrow."

"When are you going to see the doctor?"

"The doctor in Berlin said, that I should go as soon as possible."

"I don't think you should go while the shooting is going on," he seemed worried. "Go, when it's all over."

"Whenever that may be."

Heinz went home after a day full of adventures.

"See you again in the morning."

That evening we heard several gunshots firing at irregular intervals. First we heard the whistle of a shell flying over us, then two explosions, one from the canon firing, the other from the exploding shell.

"The Amis must be shooting over Westerhausen towards the town of

Quedlinburg," I suggested.

"What will we do, sleep upstairs, or in the cellar?" Mutter was not too keen to spend the night down there.

"A direct hit seems unlikely, as they are shooting over us."

"I think we can risk it."

We decided to sleep in our beds upstairs. Even Gerda did not seem to be too anxious, although the firing became more constant.

"Don't worry when you hear the whistle, Gerda. By then, the shell has already gone past," I told her.

"Oh, is that so?" I had to explain that sound travelled slower than the shell. She seemed reassured.

It wasn't a very restful night. The shooting kept up all night, with a few resting periods. We were glad, though, to be in our beds instead of in the cellar. Were we getting slightly blasé, living in constant danger? We could not understand why they kept shooting continuously. There was no sign of any German resistance. They must have already fled beyond Quedlinburg.

Heinz didn't come that day. I was glad, he didn't, it was too dangerous, because of the intermittent shelling. I was restless and edgy. I felt like a caged-in bird.

Next day the shooting gradually stopped. I went over to Heinz and we decided to get out for a walk. We had been confined to our homes for too long. We strolled towards the nearby forest, away from the main road. The weather was mild and the birds were practicing their singing. After all, it was spring.

As we were in deep conversation, we suddenly heard a shot and a bullet whistling past us. Both of us dropped instantly to the ground. My heart was pounding so loudly that I thought the noise would give us away. That bullet had certainly been meant for us. We lay there closely together, motionless, for what seemed a long time. I squeezed Heinz's arm, which pressed my head closely against his, reassuring him that I was as terrified as he. Then I whispered into his ear: "We won't move."

After a while we heard a sound.

"What was that?" It was his turn to whisper into my ear.

"Must have been a twig breaking, or something like that."

"Maybe they are coming for us?"

Slowly I lifted my head away from his and looked up.

"I can't see anyone."

A few minutes passed. We remained motionless, huddled together. There was another noise.

"I think I can hear someone talking."

"They're speaking German! I'm sure."

We both shouted across, at the top of our voice:

"Don't shoot! We are German boys."

We still didn't move. It seemed an endless time, before I saw a German

soldier appear about ten meters before us. He was holding in his hand a rifle, ready to shoot. Then another one emerged from the scrub on our right, and several more from the left. They had completely encircled us and were not amused to see two German boys emerging from the floor of the forest. We stood there looking very goofy.

"What the hell are you doing in this forest! There is a war on, you know?"

I said: "We just came here for a walk. There has been shooting going on since Sunday, and we were cooped up in the village."

"The shooting stopped this morning," Heinz added, "and we thought it was all over."

"You silly boys. Get home, quick march."

We ran home as quickly as our feet would carry us. As I was still feeling weak, Heinz slowed down. When we came to the village, Heinz said: "I'm going straight home."

"So am I."

I didn't mention anything at home about our experience.

Later that afternoon I went to the shop to get some milk. On my way home I suddenly came across a patrol of German soldiers in full battle gear, handgranades dangling from their belts and their rifles ready to shoot. They were walking in single file along the house walls. One of them asked me: "Have you seen any Amis?"

"No," I said, "They haven't come to this village yet."

"They're around here somewhere. You had better go inside."

I let them go past, and when they were out of sight I went straight home. Twice that day I had met some German troops! Was that an omen? What could it mean? The night was unusually quiet. It gave us all an opportunity to catch up on some sleep.

None of us dared to go out the following day. We heard some sporadic rifle shooting in the distance, but no heavy gun fire. The atmosphere was tense.

Early next morning a girl from next door called over the fence: "The Amis are here! A unit of large tanks, and the commander is throwing lollies to the children."

What relief! The tension over the last week had been tremendous. The shelling, the fire, the encounter with the German troops, it had all been almost more than one could bear. A strange calm came over me, a feeling of inner peace. After my talk with Heinz and Vater, I no longer saw a problem with a defeated Germany. I began to see new opportunities emerging from the new situation. I had to start a new life.

Before my convalescence leave was over, I was truly liberated from the power of the military, having de-mobbed myself just ten days earlier. I was very happy that for me the war was over. It was Saturday, 14 April 1945.

Heinz and I came together again, but neither of us wanted to see the American troops. We talked of the future, and what it would bring for us.

Both of us wanted to go on to university after school, I to study agriculture, he to do humanities.

Pastor Borchert gave a moving address on Sunday. He gave thanks to God for saving Westerhausen from the ravages of war, and for bringing peace to this area. He also remembered those that would not come back from the war, the millions that had died, and would still be dying, before the end. I thought again of Günter, was he among the dead, the prisoners, or still fighting somewhere? The uncertainty about him etched an indelible mark on my soul.

On Monday we received the surprise visit of Tante Margaret, Mutter's youngest sister. She had heard where we were and had waited for our area to be occupied by the Americans. She stayed with us for a few days. When I mentioned that I had to go to the Quedlinburg hospital, she agreed to come with me.

We left early, as the eight-kilometer-walk would take us quite a while. When we came to the outskirts of Quedlinburg, an American patrol stopped us. They wanted to send us back again.

"No, we want to go to Quedlinburg," said I in my best English.

"Where do you want to go?" the soldier asked us in the broadest American drawl.

"What did he say?" Tante Margaret couldn't understand.

"He wants to know where we are going," I said in German. To the American I said:

"To visit some friends."

"Friends???" He did not seem to understand, or did not want to understand. "No friends!"

I searched my brain for another word.

"Acquaintances," I remembered proudly.

"Oh, yeah, acquaintances. You may go."

"What does that word mean?" Tante Margaret wanted to know.

"Someone you know, but who isn't a friend."

"It worked like a magic pass word."

We laughed as we entered the town of Quedlinburg. Tante Margaret went her own way, while I went to the hospital. The specialist took my turban bandage off and examined me carefully.

"Looks fine to me. The doctor in Beeliz has done a very good job. You don't need another bandage, a band aid will do. If you get any problems with the wound, see your local doctor. You don't have to come back to me again."

That was great news for me. I waited for Tante Margaret, and we went back to Westerhausen with no further hold-ups.

Meanwhile, Frau Koggel had been listening to the radio. She was following with great interest the news about Hitler, whom she still adored. On the 20th, his birthday, he broadcast his usual address to the German people from his bunker in Berlin. According to Frau Koggel, he indicated

that for Germany it is five minutes before midnight — five minutes before victory. It is only days before a new weapon can be employed, then victory will be ours.

We were surprised at such credulity. To me this sounded now like empty propaganda promises. I realised how all these years I had been hoodwinked by such hogwash, and I thanked God for the change in me.

A few days later Frau Koggel reported, that Hitler was dead and that his bunker had been conquered by the Russian army. Would she now change her mind about the Nazis? I had my doubts.

As Mutter came back from her shopping one day, she said that she had heard that in the neighbouring village an old army depot was being raided by the people. Since I needed some clothes, we went to see what we could scrounge together. Most of the useful items had already gone by the time we arrived. So I roamed around, looking into different rooms, when I came across a cardboard carton with a lot of rubbish on top. I lifted the rubbish and discovered a pair of nice brown civilian low boots which fitted me perfectly. I was very happy with that find, as it was impossible to buy anything like that in the shops.

At the beginning of May I came down with severe stomach pains. I went to the local doctor, who sent me straight to the Quedlinburg hospital. Luckily I was able to walk, but only just. A woman surgeon examined me at the hospital: "Appendix," she announced in her rough manner. "Needs to come out tomorrow."

I had nothing to eat that day, as I had felt sick. The operation was scheduled for next morning, which meant no food that evening and of course the morning of the operation nothing either. When I came out of the anaesthetic, I vomited as I had done after all my previous anaesthetics. My whole stomach felt as if it wanted to burst. It was an excruciating pain and I worried that the clamps could come undone. Again, there was nothing to eat nor drink for me the whole day.

By the following morning the hunger pains were worse than those from the operation. The night sister came and asked: "Are you feeling better this morning?"

"I really can't tell you, because I am too hungry."

"I'll fix you," she said kindly, and came back with a drink.

Slowly I sipped the liquid through my parched lips and a swollen mouth.

"This tastes absolutely heavenly. I have never tasted anything like that before. What is it, sister?"

"Just ersatz coffee with some sugar and milk."

"Amazing what a few days of fasting can do to your taste buds!"

After that I felt better.

There were many friendly people in hospital, trying to talk to me. They usually asked: "And what are you here for?"

I would reply: "Appendix."

“Oh, just an appendix,” and they chuckled as they walked past.

I felt quite offended by that, for my pains were real, especially when after four days they made me get up and walk, with my clips still in place. I couldn't walk upright, and people would poke fun at me again.

As I was recovering in hospital, I heard in the news of the unconditional surrender of Germany. It was the 8th May 1945. The war in Europe had ended. Where was Günter? I couldn't help but think about the cost, so many deaths, so much destruction, it was beyond imagination. Had one person caused it all, or were we all involved? Hitler and the evil Nazi regime had finally been removed, but why did he come to power in the first place? Had people just ignored the rainbow, which God had set in the clouds as a constant reminder to live in harmony with him, with one another and with everything that lives on earth? There was no answer to this question, but I did thank God that the war was now over for all in Europe.



Cherry picking time in Westerhausen was great fun. It started in June and there was plenty of work for everyone. Heinz and I were also recruited.

“Let's get a ladder each, Heinz. We are both tall, then we can reach higher than everyone else.”

“There are more cherries here than further down. You'll see, our chip baskets will be filled much quicker than the others.”

“I'm not too sure about that,” I replied, shoving the most delicious cherries into my mouth. “They look so appetising here, that I find it hard to put them in the basket.”

“Me too. They are so sweet.”

“Did you bring any lunch?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Bit of a waste. I don't feel like eating anything after all these cherries.”

We agreed that tomorrow we won't need any lunch.

Standing on the ladders all day made us quite tired. We managed to pick quite a lot of cherries, besides eating a lot. We were looking forward to do the same tomorrow.

“You'll have to eat something,” Fräulein Lina admonished me when I didn't want to eat any dinner. “You'll end up with diarrhoea otherwise.”

“Heinz and I don't want any lunch tomorrow.”

“I'll give you some dry bread. You must eat something other than cherries. Just be sensible!”

I took enough dry bread to share with Heinz next morning. We didn't get sick, just slight diarrhoea. The bread must have done the trick.

This work went on for several weeks.

Meanwhile, the farmers in Westerhausen had been catching stray horses, which had been abandoned by the retreating German army. Towards the end of the war, most horses had been requisitioned by the army, and consequently there had been a great shortage of horses amongst the farmers. When my parents came to Westerhausen with six horses, the farmers welcomed them with open arms, not because they liked refugees, but they liked our horses. It was through our horses, in a way, that we were given the accommodation at Frau Koggel's.

When one by one the farmers were restocking with horses, they returned our horses to Vater. He had to go further and further afield to find places for them. On one such errand he came to an estate in Wegeleben, where he talked with the administrator. After hearing Vater's story, he seemed to have compassion with him and said that he would take the horses under the same conditions as the small farmers had, without even seeing them. He also told Vater about a vacancy for an administrator on the estate next to Wegeleben. It belonged to the Rimpau family who lived in Langenstein, on the other side of Halberstadt. Vater then found out that Tante Dorothee, the wife of Mutter's brother, Onkel Willusch, was related to that family and that her family had fled from Silesia after the Russian break-through just like we had. They had found refuge in the large family mansion.

When he went to Langenstein, Vater heard that Emersleben had become vacant because the former administrator had been taken by the Americans and summarily executed.

"Why would they do such a thing as that," he asked Mr. Berninger, who was running the Langenstein estate in Mr. Rimpau's absence.

"It is said that he had been responsible for shooting an American pilot, who had bailed out of his burning plane by parachute over Emersleben."

"Without a trial?"

"Yes, that was done in the first week of the American occupation."

"So, this position is vacant now?"

"You can have it, if you like."

"I would be delighted. I don't like sitting around doing nothing. I am truly fed up with this."

"The job comes with a large four-bedroom flat. It is right next to the yard, above the horses' stables. On the other side of the building is the park."

"That sounds too good to be true. I'm sure my family won't have anything against this. So, when can I start?"

"There is one problem, though."

"Yes?"

"The flat is not vacant yet. We have to find other accommodation for the widow. The family would have to wait, but there is a room for you. If you like, you can start as soon as possible."

Vater came home almost whistling. I hadn't seen him as happy as that since long before we had to leave home.

“I have not only found a place for our horses, but I have been offered a job as well.”

Then he told us about the administrator's position in Emersleben, and that it came with a flat.

“Oh, Alfred, to have again a place of our own, would be absolutely wonderful! With so many of us refugees around, we would never get a place for us. Let's go there, please.”

“I have already agreed to start there on Monday. There is only one snag: the widow of the former administrator still lives in the flat. As soon as she is out, you can follow me.”

Vater's new-found job changed our situation completely. From then on we were no longer considered to be refugees or second class citizens, who were barely tolerated, but we felt like normal people again, whose bread winner had a proper job.

Vater started work there on 12 May. The flat did not become vacant for another nine weeks, though. Until then he came to visit us over weekends several times.

We continued picking cherries. Apart from eating as many cherries as we could, we had also plenty of time to gossip. There had been a persistent rumour that our area would be occupied by the Russians. We just couldn't believe it. How would the Americans hand over to the Russians a territory which they had occupied themselves? It could not be true. But those rumours intensified. My parents became quite alarmed one evening, when they heard that some friends of theirs were getting nervous. They had fled from the Russians many years ago from the Baltic states. They didn't want to get into Russian hands now, so they packed their belongings and headed further west. Could it be possible after all? We were confused.

Where could we go to? Particularly, as Vater had found a job and good accommodation for us, the whole family under one roof, we would not be so lucky again. Vater and Mutter discussed these things with us all and we decided not to do anything for the moment. Should something develop in the future, we could always go then.

Next morning was Sunday, it was 1 July 1945. I was getting ready to go to church, when the 'Jeremiah' girl from our neighbour shouted over the fence: “The Russians are here.”

We hadn't noticed anything in our isolated corner. I just couldn't believe it. “Well, go and see for yourself.”

On my way to the main road I picked up Heinz.

“Let's go to the shops. We might see some there.”

As we turned into the main road, we saw in front of the pub a contingent of four or five Russian soldiers, talking together.

“This is outrageous,” Heinz could no longer contain his anger.

“The rumours were right then. I just can't believe it.”

“Let's go into the newsagent, he is open. He is usually on the ball.”

There was no other customer in the shop. When we told him that we had seen some strangers in the street, he only nodded. I think we were all surprised with their sudden appearance. The man told us that all of the province of Sachsen-Anhalt was now occupied by the Russians, and that the border was about 50 kilometers from Westerhausen.

"Have you heard what the situation is over there?"

"The border is closed, if that's what you are after. They are letting no one across."

"So we are really trapped!" I couldn't hide my feelings. "We have left our home to escape the Russians, leaving practically everything back, endured all hardships, then left again from south of Berlin to here, only to be caught up by the Russians here. It's not fair."

"What's fair these days?"

"Let's go home and tell our families."

At home they were as shocked as we had been.

"Do you think it is safe to go to church?" Oma was understandably anxious.

"Of course, the Russians are not doing anything. They were just standing around near the pub."

"I guess, life goes on as usual," said Mutter.

And that is exactly what happened. Life went on as usual. Heinz and I went back to our cherry picking, and from what we heard from the others, the Russians were no worse than the Americans.

Oma Beyme came to visit us. She had been very ill. She looked very jaundiced and needed some medical treatment. We managed to get her into the hospital at Quedlinburg, where I had lost my appendix a few weeks earlier. They operated on her, but when they found that her inside was all riddled with cancer, they didn't remove any of it. I went to visit her a couple of times together with Tante Margaret, Mutter's youngest sister. She also stayed with us for a while. Oma never recovered from her operation, and she died peacefully on 17 July, three days before we moved to Emersleben. She was buried later in the cemetery there.

On 20 July 1945, a horse-drawn carriage came from Emersleben to pick us up. I had to say farewell to Heinz. I did this with a heavy heart. It seemed my fate: no sooner had I gained a close friend, I had to lose him again. I invited him to come and visit us, but he never came.

Mutter, Oma, Gerda and Fräulein Lina were sitting in the back of the coach. Our luggage had been sent ahead with our wagon. I climbed on the front seat with the driver. As the road was winding through the valley, I looked back on Westerhausen. There was the 'camel' range and the village, the place where the war had ended for us with so many adventures. I would also remember Westerhausen for the change within me.

The road went up a hill of another range. It was a rather desolate place. Great boulders here and there, sparse vegetation, and some sheer rocks

reaching for the clouds. The horses went slowly, pulling the heavy coach steadily up the hill. Suddenly I saw a couple of rough looking men jumping out from behind a boulder and running after our coach.

“Quick, get your whip out and get those horses running”, I shouted to the driver. “Robbers are running after us.”

The driver got out his whip and began to work on the horses. Slowly, ever so slowly, we gained some speed, but I could see that the robbers were closing in on us. They could run faster than the horses pulling the coach up hill.

“Faster, faster,” I shouted, but the robbers were now only a couple of meters away from the coach. One came running on the driver’s side, to get the reins for the horses, the other came for me. I could see a fury in his eyes, that made me even more scared. He was trying desperately to grab the top of the coach where I sat. The sweat was running down his face in trickles, ending in a filthy beard. His hand reached out for the side, grabbed it and clung on to it with all the strength he could muster after this long chase. With all my might I let down my fist on his four fingers. He lost his grip, stumbled, tripped over a stone, and fell on the ground.

I had been concentrating so hard on this fellow, that I missed the struggle on the other side of the coach. The driver had taken a good aim at the other fellow with his whip and with a loud crack hit him in the middle of his face. He too fell behind, and as we had reached the top of the range with the road levelling out, our horses galloped at top speed. Our pursuers could not catch up on us. We had left them behind, swearing and gesticulating.

That was a close shave! Our family was in a state of shock. No one said a word. I thanked God for our lucky escape.

After the war had finished, many people were released from jail. Also many displaced persons of other ethnic origins, those that had been forced to work in German factories, and those from concentration camps, had been allowed to go home. But with no public transport, and no means to buy food, a number of them resorted to violence and highway robbery. Conditions in Germany had become quite chaotic and remained so for some time to come.

CHAPTER 13

EMERSLEBEN

Back to School

The horses had settled to a regular trot, whilst the occupants of the coach were still shaking from the experience of a near catastrophe. It was left to each one's imagination to fill in the sequence, had the hold-up succeeded. Oma and Gerda, the oldest and the youngest, may not have been fully aware of the danger, as the events unfolded in quick succession, but for Mutter and Fräulein Lina it must have been terrifying, to watch the men coming closer and closer to the coach. The coach driver and I had to concentrate so hard on the robbers, that there did not seem to be any time to worry. Only after the danger had passed, in retrospect, it had caught up with us, and we were in shock for quite some time.

No one spoke, until almost two hours had passed. We had to cross the main road which went from Halberstadt straight to Magdeburg. From the other side we could see the village Emersleben, which we were heading for, nestling around the tall tower of the village church. The road went slightly down hill, and eventually another tower became visible in the distance. On top of it, like a halo, was the untidy structure of a stork's nest. I could see two young storks hopping up and down on their legs, while they were exercising their wings.

The coach entered the village from the south. There were no shops on that road, just the homes of people living there. On our right a stone wall meandered, surrounding a baroque church. In the church yard trees of varying sizes and shrubs separated the large area into smaller, more secluded ones where the graves were located. About fifty meters further down, a wrought-iron gate admitted our coach to an ancient yard. On our right was a duck pond, said to be the remnant of a moat. On our left, looking through a wrought-iron fence was the manor, which ended on the yard side in an arch way with four windows above it. Immediately attached to this structure was a square tower house, made of mortar and stones. It was four storeys high, and its roof line started where that of the manor ended. On the tip was the stork's nest, which I had already seen from afar. The tower house looked ancient, and I could well believe that it was, as people claimed, over one thousand years old.



Emersleben, Tower House with stork nest

Next to the tower house was a three storey building. The ground floor consisted of the horse stables, the first floor was to be our new flat, and the second floor had another flat with a row of dormer windows.

Vater stood at the entrance door and greeted us all with a very happy face.

“Welcome to Emersleben. I hope you had a good trip?”

I looked at the driver before I jumped down from the front seat and said: “Not so good.” I had to tell him in a few words what had happened.

Vater looked anxiously at Oma, but she seemed to look all right.

“Well, I’m even happier now, that you have all arrived unharmed. Come upstairs and see where we are going to live.”

We walked up one flight of stairs. At the top was a door to the left which led into the office. The door on our right stood open and Vater motioned us to enter.

Directly opposite was the kitchen, but Vater showed us a long corridor with several doors on the right and left.

“The first door on our left is the room for Gerda and Fräulein Lina, then comes Oma’s room, and the last room is going to be our lounge, where you, Dieter, are going to sleep. The door on the opposite side leads to the bath room, and next to it is Mutter’s and my bedroom. This door here leads to Fräulein Rimpau’s bedroom, and the other door to her lounge/dining room, where she is also going to cook. As I’ve told you,

Gertrud is the sister of Mr. Rimpau, the owner of Emersleben. He is still in an American prison camp, but is soon to be released."

The large kitchen with pantry made Fräulein Lina very happy.

"This is a lovely area to work in. A sink with running water, but where is the stove?"

We needed to call Fräulein Rimpau, who was introduced to us all.

"I hope we are all going to get along well here in this flat. I'm sharing the bathroom with you, but this kitchen is all yours."

"I was going to ask you about the stove."

"Oh, yes, I can imagine that you have never seen a stove like this." She opened what looked like a cupboard with a double door. Inside were two shelves. Below the double door was a drawer full of ashes.

"This is it. We call it 'Grude'. It's a stove and oven at the same time. The ashes contain glowing coal. If you want to cook, you just remove the ashes from the top and expose the layer of red-hot coal. Sometimes you may need to add a shovel of this finely ground coal by just sprinkling it over. It keeps burning all the time. You keep the kettle here and you have always hot water. It's a wonderful stove."

Fräulein Lina shook her head, "I'll have to get used to that first, and it may take a while."

"Just one thing you need to remember: cooking is very slow with the grude, you need to start much earlier than you would be used to. Another thing, there is always a little dust around, so keep the lids on the saucepans."

Fräulein Lina did not get used to the grude. Mutter agreed to keep the fire going, but Fräulein Lina did most of the cooking, as she had done at home. None of us liked the grude, as the food always tasted slightly acidic.

Gertrud Rimpau introduced us the following day to Mally von Versen, the secretary of the farm. She had a room in the flat upstairs. She was young and very cheerful, and we felt that we would get on together. She had already been of great value to Vater during his settling in time. She knew practically everyone and everything concerning the farm.



Irene Lucht with her parents and brother's family had travelled with my parents all the way from Sapowice to Gross Marzehns, near Berlin. They had stayed there when our family moved to Westerhausen. As there was no border between us and them after the Russian takeover, and there was room in the flat upstairs, Vater sent a letter via a courier, inviting them to come over. They came soon after we had arrived. This meant more workers for the farm, particularly as Irene's brother was a mechanic, and as harvest had started, the farm needed all available labourers.

Every able-bodied person was drawn into the workforce to help. The

farm was propagating wheat for seed purposes. The soil in that area was known as the best in Germany for wheat, it looked black and very fertile. The wheat crop looked magnificent. I had never seen anything like it before. On our property in Poland the wheat was always sparse and thin, whereas here it stood as dense as a table top, full of ripe ears.

I was also given work on the farm, and I enjoyed it. After my long illness my muscles had rather weakened and I felt quite out of condition. This was a good opportunity to build up my body again and earn some money at the same time. My future began to look brighter again.

During our early days in Emersleben, when life was still chaotic, and none of the public services, like trains, buses, telephones or mail were working, we received a letter via a messenger from Onkel Werner and Tante Margaret. It brought us the very sad news that my cousin Horst had been killed by the Russians in Potsdam. He had been wounded and had come on leave to Potsdam, where Tante Margaret lived at her sister's. About three days after the Russian occupation, on 28 April 1945, he had stepped outside their house to fetch some water, when a Russian sniper shot him dead. He died in Tante Margaret's arms. Onkel Werner had been drafted into the reserve army a few weeks before the Russian onslaught on Berlin and had been taken prisoner of war, but was released now. My cousin Bernd had escaped on a bicycle a couple of days before the Russians came. The three of them were now living in Rittmarshausen, near Göttingen. They had been allocated two rooms in a farmer's house.

"How will we ever be able to visit them?" asked Oma with great concern. "We are under Russian occupation, and they are under American."

"Surely they must open the borders for people, as soon as things go back to normal. They can't just divide Germany into four parts!" Mutter was convinced that the division was to be a temporary one.

"It doesn't look like it now, if you consider how the Russians are guarding their border." I had heard that some Germans had been shot dead trying to cross into the American zone.

"They are doing it now, just because there are some people who are still trying to flee over to the west. Once that has stopped, everything will be all right."

"I don't think so, Mutter. I don't trust the Russians. Look how long it takes for everything to go back to normal here. And now this letter arrives. Horst shot down, as if he were a dog. I wonder what they have done to Günter?"

"Don't talk like that, Dieter. You are just being angry."

"Of course, I am."

"You know about this rumour, that he was seen in Sapowice by someone there, don't you? It could be possible, you know. Perhaps it was Maria who saw him?"

"Well, I don't believe it, until we receive a letter from him or from

someone who knows him.”

When the mail was restored in October, Vater filled in a search request through the Red Cross, giving our name and address, Günter's name and his former unit. The Red Cross served in those turbulent days as an agent through whom people, separated by the war, were able to find each other again. We hoped that he was taken prisoner by the Russians, and once released, he would be able to find us through the Red Cross.

Meanwhile, our life in Emersleben settled into a normal rhythm: work during the week, and rest on Sundays. The beautiful village church was close by and each Sunday we would walk to church. I walked with Oma ahead of the others, as she walked slower, with her stick in one hand, and my arm steadying her under the other. By the time we had walked past the wrought-iron gate, the bell in the church tower started calling the worshippers to church, with its beautiful deep tone.

“We have plenty of time, Oma. Let's enjoy the ringing of the bell while we walk. It always gives me a special feeling.”

“I like it too. God is preparing us to tune in with him. When we listen later to Pastor Begrich, our minds will be set on spiritual things.”

The minister was rather old. He was somewhat aloof, but his sermons were very good; challenging with relevance to our present situation. By the time Oma and I had arrived in church, Vater had caught up with us. Mutter usually came later, as she was not too keen to listen every Sunday to the liturgy. She thought it was repetitious and she therefore skipped it quite often. I found it enjoyable, especially the singing, and the introductory prayers, and I was glad that we had the freedom to come to worship when we wanted.

Pastor Begrich was a great gardener. One day he asked me to call in, he wanted to give us some of his prize tomatoes.

“Did you know that the schools are re-opening this coming Monday?”

“No, Mr. Begrich, I hadn't heard anything about that.”

“Do you want to go back to school?”

“Yes, I do. I want to finish high school with matriculation. Perhaps I might be able to study agriculture afterwards.”

“To follow the footsteps of your father, eh?”

“Not really. I'm still a little vague, but I want to learn proper farming methods, modern ones, with the necessary scientific background.”

“Would you like to become a farmer, then?”

“Yes, as soon as we can go back home. But if that is not possible, I could become an adviser or something in that line.”

“I can see you have it all worked out, but to do that, you will have to finish your schooling. So, don't forget, schools go back again on Monday.”

“What school do you think I could go to?”

“The Martineum in Halberstadt is a very good one. I'm sorry, I keep using the old name. It is now called: ‘Dom und Ratsschule’; it's a high school for boys. I believe they accept students like you, who had been

away from school for some time due to the war or have lost their home. Get your father to enrol you in Halberstadt. You'll see, there should be no problem."

I went home with the tomatoes and full of enthusiasm about the prospects of school. I told Vater about my conversation with Mr. Begrich, and he agreed to come with me on Monday.

On 1 October 1945 we left home about 6.30 am. We had to walk for twenty minutes to the nearest railway station Quenstedt, about a kilometre and a half. From there we caught the train to Halberstadt, just one station away. In Halberstadt we had to walk another kilometre to school.

The station in Halberstadt had not been damaged by the bombs on that fateful 8 April, which we had seen from Westerhausen. We turned into the main road. From there on we could see only rubble on both sides. The road had been cleared and we walked for ten minutes before we left the piles of rubble behind. It looked terrible, not one house even only partially destroyed, nor a wall left standing. Traffic was practically non-existent, the odd truck, but no cars, nor any other vehicles. In the centre of the road were tram lines, but the overhead electricity grid had been destroyed, so there were no trams going either.

Eventually we came to an area where a skeleton or two of former homes stood, half a wall here, and a chimney there. Then there was a house, somewhat damaged, but I noticed that people were living there. I thought to myself, it wouldn't be very nice to live in such a place, surrounded by rubble, but then it was better than no roof over ones head.

A side street had been cleared, with a few more houses standing. There was a fork in the road, and from here on most houses on both sides of the road were still in tact. Like a miracle, the cathedral stood undamaged. The area surrounding the cathedral, and from there on towards the other part of the city, most of the old Halberstadt still remained, with its beautiful Tudor houses. That's where the boy's high school was situated. The building was not damaged, only new windows had to be put in.

It was a strange feeling to sit in a class room behind a desk again, with a number of older young men. Most of them were still wearing old uniforms, minus the trimmings, of course. When the teacher entered, some of the younger ones stirred and made a half-hearted effort to stand up, but 'we oldies' remained in our seats. The teacher motioned those who had stood up to sit down again and began: "These are indeed difficult times for all of us. I don't know what most of you have come through, but I could imagine you would have had some traumatic experiences which nobody would like to be reminded of. We too here in Halberstadt have experienced the ravages of war first hand and we are glad that we have survived. Under these circumstances we will dispense with normal school discipline and routine. We will treat you as adults, and we expect you also to behave like adults. Together we will work towards your goal to obtain

your leaving certificate.”

I was impressed, so were the others in the class. There would be no school pranks, no larrikinisms, but a more serious approach towards learning in the knowledge that we were privileged to be able to finish our school education in such a conducive atmosphere.

The other teachers were also fine. They all treated us as adults, and we all put a special effort into catching up on a year, for some, several years, of lost learning opportunities. It was difficult for the teachers to shape us into one unit, having come from such diverse backgrounds, but they managed very well. We were being prepared to sit for our leaving in 18 months time, and they pressed together the curriculum of at least two years into that period. Being under Russian occupation meant that we had to take Russian language, without exemption. It turned out that neither the teachers nor we were very enthusiastic about this subject, but there was nothing they nor we could do. We also knew that it was not going to be examined, as we had started too late in our school life on this new language. As it turned out, I picked it up rather easily with my prior knowledge of Polish and like with anything in life, what I did learn became rather useful later on.

Gradually the Russian influence became more noticeable. Where political parties had formed, the regime wanted to interfere. They forced the Social Democratic Party to join with the Communist Party to form the German Unity Party. Members had not been consulted. The teachers made very astute comments about it, drawing parallels with the Nazi regime before. They had also ruled by decree. They were very courageous in those days. There was one teacher in particular, who was not afraid to confess that he was a Christian and that he was opposed to the way the Communist Party ruled. His lessons taught us to become more aware and more critical of current events.

Unfortunately, we had to learn not just from theory.

The trams had been restored again. One day I was returning by tram to the station, when it was stopped by a group of Russian soldiers in the middle between stops. They blocked both entrance doors and shouted: “Davai, Davai!”

They shouted again, motioning us to leave the tram through the front door. As I stepped out they pushed me towards a group of men. We had to wait there until everyone from the tram had come out. Our group had to remain, whereas the others were allowed to get back into the tram and leave. They had selected all able bodied men from that tram. When an army lorry arrived, they again shouted: “Davai, davai!”

The soldiers pointed to the top of the lorry and began to push. It was clear, they wanted us to get up there.

“Where are you taking us?” I wanted to know.

With an angry “Nyet,” he ripped his rifle off the shoulder, and pushed me against the wheel. There was no doubt in my mind, these people meant

business. I climbed up to the rest of the group, mumbling: "No point arguing with them." The soldier mounted the lorry directly after me and stood there, watching us with not a trace of humanity showing on his face.

When the lorry started to move with a jerk, we had to hold on to the frame. It took us out of Halberstadt, into the direction of Wegeleben, due east, about 10 km from the town. Arriving at the district's sugar factory, we were ordered to jump off the lorry. Then we were marched into the yard of the factory, which had been completely sealed off with barbed wire. A German man under Russian orders, took our I.D. cards, and wrote down our names and addresses in a big book. After that was finished, he explained: "You are all ordered by the Russian occupation forces to work here in this factory. It is to be demolished. The machinery will be shipped to Russia as reparation for all the destruction the German occupation forces had inflicted upon the heroic Russian people. You will be working the night shift here, which starts at six. As it is already nearly five, you can't go home. Your shift starts now. Tomorrow morning at six a lorry will take you to your village, where you can stay at home and sleep. Another lorry will come again in the afternoon to pick you up for the night shift at six. The driver will tell you where he will pick you up and at what time that will be. If you don't turn up, a special lorry will come and pick you up, only that time you will be on your way straight to Siberia. Is everything clear?"

"What about my school. I have to attend there, or else I will be punished." I was so angry!

"You can go back to school after this work here is finished."

Only later I remembered Jesus' saying in the Bible: 'If one of the occupation troops forces you to carry his pack one mile, carry it two miles.' It was by no means an easy saying. I didn't want to have anything to do with the Russian occupation forces nor with this demolition.

I was completely shattered. How would I be able to let the school know where I was? I felt sure that they could get me out of this terrible place, somehow. But there didn't seem to be any way. Then I thought of my parents. They would be terribly worried, if I didn't turn up that afternoon. But what could I do?

Feeling most depressed, I grabbed a pick and started attacking a semi-collapsed brick wall. The big boilers were to be pulled out through the break in the wall. Soon I was tired, and hungry, and I looked around for the Russian guards. Luckily, in the section where I was working, they were pretty thinly spaced. Other fellow workers, who had been recruited in a similar fashion, were trying to sneak off.

"Can you risk it?" I was a bit anxious after my experience earlier that afternoon.

"We'll hide just for a couple of hours somewhere here. I need some sleep."

"So do I."

“Why don’t you find a hide-out for yourself?”

“I might do that.”

I waited for a while. Then I followed them in search of a deserted place, where I could hide, and get some sleep. It was not easy, though. I carried my pick, as if I had orders, across the main floor of the factory. On the other side a lot of machinery was still in place. I found a spot right under a cylinder, but it was not easy to get to sleep. The worst thing were my hunger pains. Also, the constant noise of the demolition droned in my ears. I must have dropped off for a little while, though, for I woke with a start. There, nearby, I could hear someone yelling. I peeped around the corner and I could see a Russian guard beating into one of my fellow workers mercilessly with a piece of iron pipe. Shivers crept down my spine. It could have been me. He probably tried to rest, just as I did, but he got caught. Phew, that was a close shave. A great fear gripped me, and for the rest of the night I worked steadily, the screams of the other still in my ears. The brutal force of our slave drivers appeared to be absolute. Is this how real slaves have felt in the days of slavery?

When morning came I was totally exhausted. No food since my school lunch, and practically no sleep, the dust and the noise, in addition to the unaccustomed hard physical work! All this seemed to have attacked my body, but worse still was the extreme fear and hopelessness, which had attacked my mind. The lorry took a group of us to Emersleben. What would my parents say? Wouldn’t they be half dead with worry?

“Where have you been, my boy?” It was Vater, who met me in the yard. “We have been so worried about you.”

I told him.

“We had hoped that it was nothing worse than that,” he conceded. “There have been other instances of the Russians taking people to Siberia or forcing them to do some work. I’m glad that you are back again. What about this afternoon?”

“I have to go again. 5 pm with the lorry.”

“Have you had anything to eat?”

“Nothing since my lunch yesterday.”

“You must be starving. Mutter will make you something, and then straight to bed.”

“My word. I’m dog tired.”

A quick meal, and then bed — what bliss!

I was dead to the world for the first two hours, but then I tossed and turned. Sleeping during the day had not been invented for me. I began to think of the coming night, and reality and sleep turned into a dreadful nightmare, or rather ‘daymare’.

The lorry came just before 5 pm, and left at five sharp. There was the same group on board as this morning, no one was missing. On arrival at the sugar factory, we were allocated similar work as the night before. There were again ugly scenes of brutality, inflicted upon ordinary human beings.

How could anyone be so cruel to another human being?

The hours dragged. A hooter went at midnight, indicating an hour's rest. I must have slept through that yesterday, I thought, for I could not remember a break. I felt much better this time, though, as Mutter had cut sandwiches and packed some fruit. I didn't have to starve as the night before.

Back at home for the day, I could only sleep for a couple of hours again, in spite of being terribly tired and worn out. Night shift was definitely not for me.

The third night was spent again on the factory floor. I became more skilled in dodging work, as the night dragged on. Then there was a lucky encounter. About 10 pm I saw Udo, a class mate of mine, crouching outside the barbed wire fence. I recognised him immediately, in spite of the darkness, and yelled to him: "Hey, Udo, over here!"

"Is that you, Dieter?"

"Yes, I'm here. Have you come to rescue me?"

"We've heard that you got caught. The Head Master has asked me to make sure that you are here, before he can make a submission to the authorities."

"Well, tell him that I am here, and please, please, get him to do everything possible to get me out of here. I don't know how long I will be able to survive this here."

"Am I glad that I found you. You poor devil, being caught in a place like this! Be assured, we will get you out of here."

I nearly cried. A huge weight seemed to have dropped from my shoulders. What absolutely wonderful news! I didn't mind working that night, hoping all the time, that it would be my last one. When I arrived home the next morning, I told my parents that I had talked to Udo through the barbed wire fence, and that he had promised that the school would get me out of this slavery. I was determined not to go back that night.

I slept very little again during the day, as to my usual woes the anxiety was added about what would happen if I didn't turn up at the factory. The lorry came again in the evening, to pick us up, but it left without me. I was sure that our Head Master would succeed in getting me out of this mess. It had to be. No one saw me in the village that night, nor at home. Mutter had organised a bed for me at Frau Kleinschmidt's, our neighbour who lived in the mansion. The risk was too great. To be carted off to Siberia was the last thing I wanted. In spite of my anxiety, I slept better that night than all the days put together since my enforced labour.

Refreshed, I left the next morning for school and reported immediately to the Head Master.

"Dieter, come in. I'm so sorry about this whole affair. Please, take a seat."

After I sat down gingerly, I asked: "Were you able to get my release?"

"Oh, you don't know yet!? Yes, I had the okay yesterday, but there was no way to let you know. I'm pleased to see you. I thought you might have gone back to the factory last night."

"I was too tired. I don't want to go there, ever."

"Poor chap. But I must say, you have courage. What if I had not been able to secure your release?"

"Couldn't bear the thought. They threatened us with Siberia."

"Really!" His mind seemed to wander, as he walked slowly to the window. "Siberia," he repeated, as if in a trance.

I stood up and left quietly.

This encounter with raw Russian power did not enhance my feelings towards them. I resolved there and then to resist this power, wherever I would come across it and if at all possible.

I did not think that an opportunity to follow my resolve would knock at my door so soon. One afternoon, when I had just come back from school, Vater was standing in the yard near the horse stables. A car pulled up. As we hardly ever saw cars, I was curious and looked out of the window to see who could have come to visit us in a car. I saw two Russian soldiers arguing with Vater, and trying to get him to come into the car with them.

Like a wind I flew down the stairs and opened the front door, just as one soldier was pulling Vater at the sleeve towards their car. I grabbed Vater's free arm and pulled him the two meters towards our front door. He was able to shake himself free from the Russian's grip, as my sudden appearance must have surprised him. Once inside, I shut and bolted the front door, still puffing and panting, and waited to see what they would do. We could hear them swearing outside, but after what seemed to us a long time, we heard the motor of their car starting. They left.

"What on earth did they want from you?"

"I have no idea. All I know is that they wanted me in their car, and I didn't want to go with them. Thanks for rescuing me."

"I was terrified. Once in their hands, there would be no bounds where they could have taken you. Your life was in real danger."

I had another encounter with a Russian soldier. I walked to Quenstedt, to catch my usual train. At the station I was told that all trains had been cancelled for the day. If I wanted to go to school, I would have to walk the 7 km to Halberstadt. I felt that I could not afford to miss school, so I set out on my own. Not long after I had left the station, I heard a bicycle coming from behind. A Russian soldier was trying hard to stay on top of the bike as he was pedalling. On first sight I thought he was drunk, but then I realised that he couldn't ride a bike properly. He probably had never even seen a bike before in his life. He was wobbling from one side of the road to the other, falling off several times in the process. When he reached me he stopped and called out: "Uri, Uri!"

At first I didn't know what he meant, and I looked blank. Then he

pointed to his left wrist which had already about five or six watches there, demanding my watch. Evil tongues said the Russians needed a watch a day, for they didn't know how to wind them up. I pointed to my right wrist, which of course did not have a watch, and said: "Nyet!" I was not going to give him my watch, but I was uneasy, because Russians were known to be unpredictable. This one, however, seemed good natured. He wobbled away, as I looked at my watch on my left wrist.

I arrived at school that day having missed only the first period. My favourite subject was mathematics. Mr. Wesche, our teacher, had the gift to make mathematical problems relevant to everyday life. He would give us problems like these for instance:

- A publican bought Rhine riesling for M 90 and Moselle for M 60, a total of 110 bottles. How many bottles of Rhine riesling did he buy, if he received a bottle of Moselle for 30 pf. cheaper than the Rhine riesling?
- A train would gain 40 minutes travelling a distance of 180 km if it went faster by 9 k/h. What time did it actually travel the distance?

I also liked biology. With chemistry I had some problems, never having grasped the basics. My teacher, Dr. Schröder, whose son was also in my class, gave me some coaching, after which I improved. English did not seem such a problem any more, nothing in comparison with the problems I had in Posen. Times had been hard for teachers as well as students, and this, no doubt, contributed to an atmosphere of tolerance and respect on both sides. Also, our year was the senior year at school.

Getting home after school was a problem. There was no train to Quenstedt in the early afternoon. I would have had to wait until 5 pm or hitch a ride with a truck or lorry. I chose mostly to hitch-hike. The long approach to the railway bridge, on the main road to Magdeburg seemed to be the best place to wait, with two or three others. Sometimes I stood there for an hour or longer, with terrific stomach pains. It seemed to me that these were due to hunger. Although we had still plenty of basic food, living in the country, none of it was very substantial. My breakfast consisted of a wheat porridge with home-cooked syrup. My sandwiches were usually filled with some concoction of flour, bacon and onions, obviously not enough to last until late afternoon. Food was still scarce in 1946.

When I came home after school, I would have my lunch first and straight after lunch I would visit Oma regularly to unwind a bit. This daily talk with her became very important to me, as she had time to listen to me, and she also showed a great deal of understanding of human nature. She would never gossip, was always constructive, and I could confide in her things that I wouldn't confide in my parents. I had also asked her to

write down for me some of her memoirs. She must have done it for Christmas 1945, but I have no recollection ever reading it before starting on my own memoirs. I could well imagine, that being so extremely shy, she left it in her drawer until she died, where Mutter had found it and had intended to give it to me, but because of circumstances had forgotten all about it, until I found it in her things, after she had died.

One day Fräulein Lina's niece appeared in Emersleben. She was a trained teacher, and was immediately offered a job in Quenstedt. She moved there and wanted her aunt to stay with her. Thus we had to say good-bye to a most loyal person whom I had known ever since I can remember. It was hard for Oma, but we resolved that we would visit her from time to time.

Mutter was now in sole charge of the kitchen. Her cooking skills improved as she gained more experience. She was, however, a great improviser, quite unconventional. She would cook stinging nettles for vegetables or make jam from elder berries. Unbeknown to Vater, she would go to the grain store occasionally, to fetch a bag of wheat. This was ground in a coffee grinder and cooked as porridge. All this unconventional food didn't taste nice, but at least it filled our stomachs. Living on a farm had its advantage, as we had enough potatoes and vegetables, and wheat, but meat was very scarce. Occasionally we could supplement our rations with eggs, a chicken or a duck, or for Christmas with a goose.

Christmas 1945 was to be the last time we saw the Rimpau family. Vater had enjoyed working with them, especially with Mr. Rimpau, after he had been released from prison camp. Gradually the Russian system of farming being run by the state took hold also in Germany. Mr. Rimpau lost his farm to the state, but at first he was allowed to continue working there. After Christmas he and his whole family were given 24 hours's notice to leave. Fortunately, they had foreseen this and had rescued some of their wheat varieties and important records which they took across the border to West Germany, which then became the basis for a successful business there. As Gertrud Rimpau had to leave too, we were able to take over her two rooms. Gerda received her bedroom and her lounge became our lounge room. From then on I had my own room, but not for very long, as Onkel Helmut, Mutter's brother, moved in with us soon, and I had to share the room with him. He had had polio as a boy and walked with a heavy limp.

After the Emersleben farm had become state property, Vater became a government employee, administering Emersleben as he had done before. He was not at liberty to take any produce for himself, unless he had the express permission. In his upright way, he would never cheat, neither the Nazis during the war, nor the Communists afterwards. Mutter took it on herself to supplement our food rations behind his back. Apart from the occasional bag of wheat, she would also go into the cow shed and get

some milk for the family. The employees always gave it to her with a twinkle in the eye, and never told Vater anything about it. They knew he would not have approved.

I didn't know how well off we were compared with others until the son of a friend of Mutter's visited us from Berlin. His name was Rolf Nissen. He was about my age and we became friends. Although his father was a doctor with a private practice, he was thin and almost starving when he arrived in Emersleben. Mutter was determined to fatten him, and I think she succeeded, considering the short time he stayed with us. He absolutely adored the wheat porridge with syrup and milk and couldn't get enough of it. I would have loved to get to know him better, but he stayed with us only a week at a time during some of the holidays.

During that time the trains would be crowded with people from Magdeburg or Berlin, all carrying heavy bags with potatoes, wheat or vegetables on their homeward journeys. For many these trips were a matter of survival. People could not live on the rations alone. As the Reichsmark, the old German currency, lost more and more its value, people came to the villages with goods to swap, some antique rug, a porcelain dish, or some silver spoons. American cigarettes were also very popular in those days. All such items were being converted into food.



Onkel Wilhelm von Beyme, Mutter's elder brother, had recently returned from a Russian POW camp a mere skeleton. He and his wife, Tante Dorothee, were able to stay in the Rimpau mansion in Langenstein with their family, although they were related to the Rimpaus. In April 1946, their eldest son Klaus had started high school in my school in Halberstadt. We would often talk together, or I would take messages to him for his mother. As I heard later, he was envied by all his class mates, to have a cousin in senior year. Our family and his family would also visit each other on a fairly regular basis. It was good to have an extended family again nearby.

The social life in Emersleben also started to develop. The old Pastor Begrich retired at the end of the year. His son Siegfried was inducted after a short vacancy into the Emersleben church. He and his wife became great friends of the family. Vater was particularly fond of Siegfried, and he became god father of one of their children. They came to all our birthday parties and other celebrations.

Frau Kleinschmidt in the mansion next door made a living from a chicken hatchery. She had always been very friendly to us and most helpful, particularly with Oma. Her daughter-in-law, Annemarie, also lived there with her four daughters who were about Gerda's age. They all went together to the Emersleben Primary school and became great friends.

Annemarie's husband had been killed during the War. She, Vater's secretary Mally, and I decided in spring to start a literary circle, to read classical and modern plays in parts. We invited Heinz Wenske, who also worked on the farm, and met Saturday nights in Annemarie's home. At that time I had longed for company other than my family, and this reading circle fulfilled this need. Apart from stimulating discussions we had adult talks, which I enjoyed very much.

From some of my friends I heard that dancing classes were going to start in Halberstadt towards the middle of 1946. As they were to be in the evening it meant that I had either to stay back after school, or come back for the classes. I joined and tried out both, but neither was very successful. Vater came several times to pick me up by horse coach, which of course was real luxury.

Dancing classes were a typical teenage occasion in those days. Boys were seated on one side of the hall, girls on the other. When the music started playing, the boys would rush across and choose a partner. I picked up dancing fairly easily, but my partners would often be rather slow and heavy to move around. The final ball was set for Tuesday, 29 October 1946. I had to ask a girl to be my partner for the evening. As I tended to be rather slow with such things, I had left it too late to get a girl who could dance well. Instead, I had to take whoever was left. I can't say that I had been looking forward to the ball. But as Vater and Mutter both wanted to be present I got driven both ways that night at least.

During the ball some appropriate poems were read about everyone who had taken dancing lessons. The poem for me was:

Confession of a Noble Soul

I am young, but sins there are a plenty.

They burden me as heavy as lead.

I may strive earnestly to do good,

but I might as well be dead.

So now with courage I confess and hope
that through it I'll feel freed.

The first one here on my note:

I was cool to a good girl.

I didn't consider her hearts deepest feelings,

and didn't escort her home after a party.

I let her standing amidst the crowd,

and drove off by coach in a cloud.

Even at a ball I was not nice to her,

and took no notice of her all night.

But my conscience tells me: Dieter,
don't ever do that again.

To my surprise, the ball did not turn out a total fiasco. On that night I

met a beautiful girl from the Lyceum (the girl's school) in Halberstadt. Her name was Thea. She had long black hair and was a very lively person. And she danced like a feather. I fell in love with her, head over heels. After the second dance with her, Thea and I just had to be satisfied with exchanging glances. Our hearts were pining for each other, without being able to be together. The ball took its formal course. I couldn't even take her home, as duty bound, I had to stick to the previous arrangements. Had I learnt from the occasion the poem spoke of?

After that, Thea and I saw each other quite frequently, but it wasn't all smooth sailing, as I had to rely on trains or hitch-hiking to get home. This was to change, however, soon.



Mally had a cousin in Berlin. His name was Walter Grube. I met him on one of his trips to Emersleben to get some provisions. He invited me to spend a few days in Berlin over the New Year holidays. To get a travelling permit, I had to obtain a certificate from our village chief, who verified that I was a resident of Emersleben and that I had to attend urgent family matters in Berlin. The ticket was issued to Potsdam as it wouldn't have been possible to go directly to west Berlin, where Walter lived. So I stopped a night at Mally's mother near Potsdam, and then travelled on a local ticket to Berlin-Wilmersdorf.

Walter had already booked a place for New Year's Eve, where we went together with Martha, a girl friend of his, later to become his wife, and his mother. For a country boy, Berlin was all glamour and glitz. I was very impressed, but not so sure when we had to walk home in the early dawn. Walter showed me around the western sector of Berlin, which looked so different to the time I had seen it as a FLAK helper towards the end of the war. After a week I returned home, still somewhat dazzled by the glamour of Berlin. For people living in the eastern zone, Berlin with its thriving black market was a shoppers paradise.

In Emersleben, Vater and Mutter had decided that it would be too difficult for me to travel daily back and forth in view of the forthcoming leaving certificate examinations. They found a place for me to board, with another class mate of mine, not far from school. When I heard this I was of course delighted. My first thought was Thea. I would have more time to spend with her.

Frau Starck, our landlady, was very kind to us and tried her best to feed us. But it was still late winter, and there was very little food about. The watery pea soups, with the odd green pea floating about, or its equivalent in the carrot variety, had very little substance. Although my parents would have sent some food to her, it must have been too difficult to fill our empty stomachs. This was the one and only time in my life when I

experienced real starvation, at a time when we would have needed all the nourishment to keep our minds alert for the exams ahead. We tried to study hard, and we did, but our minds would often wander.

It didn't take long before Frau Starck found out about my relationship with Thea. She started to tease me abominably. Although it was done in a nice way, I felt somehow restricted. I had come to Halberstadt mainly to study, and not to spend all my time with Thea. How could I justify the expenses my parents paid for my full board, if I didn't take my studies seriously? I was in a dilemma. The times we saw each other were precious. We went for long walks, holding hands, and I felt really happy. But it was not to last for long. Pressures of study and sickness intervened.

Onkel Helmut, who had polio when only twelve, has been severely handicapped since then. He managed to get around with his stick, limping heavily. He was always cheerful and full of jokes. Mutter had promised her mother on her death bed, that she would always look after Onkel Helmut. After settling in with us, Vater secured him the job of looking after the farm's quite substantial chicken yard. In May of 1947 he came down with hepatitis.

As I shared a room with him when I was at home, a fortnight later I had a severe attack of pain in my liver region, just at the time when our class was inspecting a power plant in Halberstadt. I could hardly move and I don't remember how I got home that day. I was terribly tired, had this terrific pain, and all I could think of was lying down. The doctor diagnosed hepatitis for me too, and ordered strict bed-rest for four weeks.

"Four weeks! I can't do that! My written exams for the leaving certificate are due to start in two weeks time."

"I can give you a medical certificate?"

"I'm sorry, but that won't do. I have to go."

"If you are very sensible and adhere to a strict diet, we might get you there."

"I'll do anything you say, Doctor."

"First of all, total rest. Absolutely no getting up, is that clear?"

"Okay."

"Then a strictly fat-free diet, no alcohol for at least six months, and no eggs, meat, or milk for six weeks."

"There go my celebrations after the leaving certificate."

"Yes, you can forget about that completely."

Mutter was worried what she could cook for me. All I was allowed to eat were cereals, potatoes and vegetables, all cooked in water only. But at first I had no appetite whatsoever, and those terrific pains stayed with me for a few days. Gradually the pains subsided, and adhering strictly to the diet, I did get better gradually. I was still extremely tired, though, and I could see the doctor's wisdom in keeping me in bed. All day I lay there, thinking about the forthcoming exams, but I couldn't do any studying. That was too strenuous. On Friday before the exams were to start, the Doctor came

to see me again and he seemed quite pleased with me. He allowed me to go to Halberstadt and sit for the exams, but he warned me that if I didn't let my liver heal properly now, I could be left with a damaged liver for the rest of my life. I promised to be sensible.

The Sunday before the exams my parents took me by coach to Frau Starck in Halberstadt. I was only allowed to go to the exam and back to bed again. Frau Starck took over from Mutter and saw to it that I kept my promises. I passed on to her all my nervousness and excitement before the exams. She felt more jittery than we. We thanked her that she took over our nervousness, and laughed about it, but there was truth in it.

The strain of sitting for the written papers was almost unbearable. We had to sit for all subjects.

On Monday was a five hour paper for German, Tuesday four hours in Mathematics, Wednesday two hours only for Latin, Thursday three hours English. The rest of the week was free. The following Monday started with History (two hours), Geology (two hours), Physics (three hours), Chemistry (three hours), and a three hour paper in Biology on Friday. After I was through with the last paper I went home immediately and stayed in bed for another week.

But school was not over yet. There were still the oral examinations to come. We were told to expect an oral examination in about three subjects, but we were not told which subjects to prepare. The scout motto 'be prepared' was definitely for us!

Our teachers were terrific. The examiners were appointees from the city council, from the government department, as well as our own teachers. It was in their own interest to help us as much as they could. Eventually they told us how the system worked. Each student was given an assessment mark by his own subject teacher. Then the marks of the written exams were added. If they varied from the assessment marks, the student would be called for an oral exam in that subject. Having discovered that important information, we went to each subject master and asked, whether our marks were the same as their assessment marks. They were not allowed, of course, to tell us the actual marks, but this information helped. However, by the time we knew that, there wasn't much time left for extra studying anyhow.

Only in Maths I had a lower mark than my teacher's assessment. So I concluded that I was going to be examined orally only in Maths. As this had been my strongest subject, I could look forward to the exam with more confidence. I was determined to do well, as I wanted a credit. In all other subjects I had received the same marks as the subject masters had given me.

On the day of the oral examinations, we were all assembled in a classroom next to the examination room, nervously hopping from one leg to the other. Every time a poor victim came out of the room he was bombarded with questions by us.

“What sort of questions are they asking?”

“Who asks the nastiest questions?”

It didn't help our concentration, but everyone was so nervous, that it provided an outlet for us.

Then my name was called. I entered the room and stood before four stern looking men. One was said to be from the communist party, to check whether we were all ideologically sound. I was pleased that my subject was going to be Maths and not history or German literature. Mr. Wesche stepped forward and started questioning me. After several correct answers, he gave me a formula to work out on the blackboard. I was in my element, I knew it all and finally wrote the answer: $\sqrt{-1}$.

“That's it,” I said proudly.

“And what is the square root of -1 ?” came the perplexing question from one of the other examiners.

That felt like a hit below the belt. I stumbled and stuttered: “Square root of -1 is ... square root of -1 ,” I fumbled under my breath, sensing that there was something I should know, but at that moment for the life of me, I couldn't think what it was. He gave me plenty of time to think, but there was still no inspiration. My mind was a blank. I gave up.

“It is: ‘i’,” said Mr. Wesche with a sad expression on his face. Had I been able to answer that, he would have given me a 1 (very good) for my oral and a 2 (good) in my final mark, but for this little letter ‘i’, almost just the dot of the i, I missed out on what I had tried so hard to achieve. I was very disappointed.

The next day, on 17 July 1947, was the presentation of our leaving certificates, a brief ceremony with a few speeches, and then it was good-bye to school. I opened my leaving certificate and found that I had a pass mark in all subjects, except in Art and Music, where I had a credit. On the back page was written: “He passed the leaving certificate.” Remark: “Tiemann wants to become a farmer.”

On our application form we had to nominate what we wanted to do after leaving school. By then I had made up my mind that I was not going to stay in the eastern zone under the Russian system. I had experienced some of it and I didn't want any more of it. It meant that I would have to look for a university in west Germany which taught Agricultural Science. As Onkel Werner and Tante Margaret lived near Göttingen, I chose the University there. Onkel Werner had subsequently made some enquiries for me and he was told that I needed two years of practical experience with a registered farmer before I could start academic studies. He booked me in with a farmer nearby.

The prospect of working on a farm for two years looked rather attractive to me. For the time being I needed a rest from mental work. My body also needed building up, as I had lost a lot of weight due to my illness and poor food. Good food and physical work on a farm would restore my body to its former constitution and add some more strength. After all, I was only

18 and a half years old, and in 1947 food was still in short supply everywhere.

But for the time being I was a 'mulus', the Latin word for mule, meaning neither horse nor donkey, or in my situation, neither a school student nor a university student, and I was going to enjoy this status of freedom. No more exam pressure — oh what bliss! I felt free like a bird! There was time now to do the things I had wanted to do.

Unfortunately, Thea had found another boy friend. The time of my sickness and the exams was too long for her. So, no romance for me. I persuaded Annemarie Kleinschmidt from our reading circle to come for an extended hike in the Harz mountains with me and a girl friend of hers joined us. We caught the train to Schierke, the terminus of the train line. With our packs on our backs we set out to climb the Brocken, the highest mountain of the Harz, 1140 m above sea level. As this was still inside the Russian zone, we could go there but had to be careful not to cross the border inadvertently. It was not very well marked, but we would not have minded, having a peep at west Germany. The borders in those days were only sporadically guarded, and it was not such a challenge as it would become a little later on.

The weather was perfect. We had taken plenty of food and drinks for the day. The fir trees of the Harz Mountains stretched over large areas, occasionally interspersed by deciduous trees. These already had a hint of the coming autumn tint. An absolutely magnificent scenery. We never saw another tourist for the whole day. Soon we started to sing old German folk songs. One of these, "Das wandern ist des Müllers Lust", recalls the old German tradition of young tradesmen and craftsmen — in this case the miller — to go out into the world and to learn in the 'school of the world'. How appropriate for me, I thought. "World, here I come! This is for me!" Having been under severe pressure and strain for such a long time, I suddenly felt that those shackles deep inside me had been removed. I experienced a sense of freedom never known before. Wanderlust, adventure. High up on the mountain, the lowlands of Germany all around me, with a view almost to infinity, there could be no border for me, anywhere. Borders are man-made. God had made the whole world for us to enjoy, not to put up barriers and to destroy each other at will.

This mountain top experience high up on the Brocken implanted itself deeply in my soul. The world of freedom and adventure had beckoned me. I walked down, back to the station, as if on air. I was happy and inspired.

My days in Emersleben came rapidly to an end. This was the first time that I would voluntarily leave my parents and step out into the world as an adult, being responsible for myself.

But wise as my parents were, they must have known that to be responsible for oneself did not have to mean that I should be all on my own. I would be near Onkel Werner and Tante Margret, and should I be

needing help, I could always go to them.

The border between East and West Germany had not been strictly patrolled during 1947. As it was not possible to obtain any official permission to cross the border, people were forced to do it illegally. There was a steady trickle of people coming and going in both directions. I met some of them on stations and in the train, and they were usually quite open about their adventures. From these reports it was easier to decide where to cross.

The farewell from Emersleben was taken with mixed feelings. I loved my family and friends dearly, but I also knew that I had to start a life on my own. The uncertain part was the border. No one knew for how long these illegal crossings would be possible. If the border were to be closed, what then?

Before starting to work on the farm, Mutter wanted me to see my cousin Jetty Oboussier, who lived with her mother Marthe in Hamburg, and to meet some of her relatives there and in Gettorf, near Kiel. We decided to go together. We packed as little as possible and caught the train to Dedeleben, the border town where it terminated. There was no one at the station to look at us suspiciously. Encouraged by this we made our way to Jerxheim, the next town which was already in West Germany. We had to make a quick decision, though. Should we take the long way around, covered by trees and low growth shrubs, and having to cross a creek — as most people did — or should we just walk beside the train line and cross over the railway bridge, a much easier way? Mutter, the daredevil, suggested the easier one, and I agreed. We had to walk for 6 km and were glad not to be loaded with too much luggage. In those days the motto was: travel lightly! We never saw a border guard along the whole stretch. Stepping onto the other side of the creek was a strange sensation: freedom, another world.

Jerxheim was the terminus of the train-line coming from west Germany. There we caught a train to Braunschweig, where we spent a couple of days with Tante Alice, Mutter's sister, and met all her family there. Then, via Hannover to Hamburg, where we stayed at the Oboussiers. In Hamburg, we also visited the Forstmann family, relatives of Oma Beyme. To go further north by fast train, we required a special permit. Jetty organised this through her work place, the State Institute for General Botany and the Botanical Gardens. In Gettorf, via Kiel, we visited Mutter's other sister Annemarie von Bonin with her family. Mutter also showed me her father's grave in Eckernförde. He had died in 1922. The mansion there had been in the family for several generations, but with so many refugee families living there, the house and the farm looked rather neglected to me. Back in Hamburg, I said good-bye to Mutter and caught the train on 30 August 1947 to Göttingen, via Hannover.

KERSTLINGERODE

Unpaid Farm Worker

After having been on an express train from Hamburg, it was rather a come-down to go on the narrow gauge train from Göttingen to Rittmarshausen, where Onkel Werner lived. This train was a bit of a museum piece. It was called the Gartetal Kleinbahn (Garte Valley Narrow Gauge Train). Its narrow tracks wound along the pretty valley of the Garte creek. It stopped at nine villages: Landwehrschenke, Garteschkenke, Diemarden, Klein Lengden, Steinsmühle, Eichenkrug, Benniehausen, Waterloo and Wöllmarshausen, before it reached Rittmarshausen, its terminus. It took about an hour to cover the distance of 19 km and my single trip cost RM1.60. At times the tracks went along the road, at other times it seemed to go through people's back yards. If a cow was standing on the tracks, the train driver would ring his piercing bell, and if he was lucky, the cow would move slowly away. It has happened that the driver or someone else had to chase an animal away before the train could proceed. Arriving at Rittmarshausen, the train would blow its whistle and sound its bell, before it eventually came to a heavy, tired stop, with steam rushing out from the engine, and black smoke billowing through the chimney. The noise was that of a great steam monster, but alas, it was only a very small engine.

The reunion with Onkel Werner, Tante Margaret and cousin Bernd was a very warm one indeed. We had not seen each other since Berlin, where they had visited me once in hospital, before the end of the War. I had not seen Bernd since we had said good-bye to each other in Berlin. We talked and talked. I wanted to know all the details about Horst's last days in Potsdam before he was killed, and how they had escaped from Potsdam, how Bernd had made his escape, and how Onkel Werner eventually came to be discharged from the POW camp. We talked till the early hours in the morning.

Next day was Sunday and Bernd didn't have to catch the 7 am train to Göttingen as usual. He was apprenticed there to become a carpenter. We all had a long sleep and a leisurely breakfast. Then Onkel Werner and I walked to Kerstlingerode, the next village, about one-and-a-half

kilometers from their home, where Onkel Werner had found a farm which would take me. Herr Hoffmeister's farm was the first in the village. We walked through a large double gate to a pretty Tudor style farm house. On the opposite side was a barn, and the stables were joining the two buildings, making a rectangular yard, with a dung heap in the middle.

Herr Hoffmeister opened the main door and cordially welcomed Onkel Werner and me.

"So this is your nephew Dieter. I hope he will be happy with us." Addressing me he said, "Have you ever worked on a farm before?"

"Not on one like this. I have worked on a large farm with many other workers, on the one my Father is managing now."

"This is a small farm, and everybody is expected to chip in. We can't afford any loafers."

"No, I'm happy to work and at the same time learn something about farming methods."

"You won't learn the latest methods with the most modern machines here, you know. We are only a small farm."

"That's fine with me. I'll be happy to work here."

Herr Hoffmeister seemed a kind person, and I felt that we would get along together.

"I can't afford to pay you a salary. You'll have full board here, and some pocket money of RM.3 per month. The second year I'll give you RM.5. You'll be able to attend any courses in connection with your training."

"Thank you, Herr Hoffmeister."

At that time I was not too concerned about the low pay, although I had hoped I would get more. It seemed to me that it was more important to get full board, rather than proper pay. Farmers' food was good and substantial in those days, and through my hepatitis I had become rather thin. My body needed building up again.

Onkel Werner and I left.

"I'll be back tomorrow morning with my things," I promised.

I started working there on Monday, 1 September 1947.

My room was small, but I was glad that I didn't have to share it. After leaving my things there, Herr Hoffmeister introduced me to his wife. She had a stiff knee from a previous accident and couldn't work the fields any longer. Then he showed me around the yard.

"We have 80 morgen (roughly the same as acres) on this farm," he explained. "Six cows, which are presently in a paddock. They are being milked twice a day. The two horses in that stable are ploughing at the moment, and two oxen are working with the potato harvest. The pigs are mainly for home consumption, so are the chickens, ducks, and geese."

Then we walked to the nearest fields he owned.

"Our land is very scattered, bits and pieces everywhere," he explained. "You will get to know where they are, after a while."

The first worker we came across was Herr Kothe. He was ploughing with

the horses.

"This is our new apprentice: Dieter," said Herr Hoffmeister.

"Na, let's hope," was his cryptic welcome.

I didn't know what that was supposed to mean, but I kept my mouth shut.

The other people were all working in the potato field. There didn't seem to be any machinery for the potato harvest, as we had them at home. They were dug with a hoe, collected in bags and put on a heavy cart which was pulled by two oxen. The man in charge of the oxen was Heinz. He looked a little younger than I.

"Let's be on our way again. I want to show you some of the other fields and the paddocks where the cows are."

It was a long walk and I was glad I didn't have to get my hands dirty on the first day. Then we walked down the hill again, and towards Rittmarshausen. In one of the fenced-in paddocks along the road were the six cows.

"You can help me to get them back into the yard. It's nearly dinner time, and they need to be milked."

When we arrived at the yard each cow seemed to know her spot in the shed. After tying them up we went inside. Herr Hoffmeister showed me a map of the farm. Several patches surrounded the village in irregular patterns.

"These fields in red belong to me."

"They are all over the place!"

"Yes, I told you that they are rather scattered. They have been divided by my grandfather, and some have been purchased later on. It's not a good situation, but ..."

"I guess, I'll just have to memorise them."

"Oh, don't worry, you'll soon learn. The others know them."

Sitting around the dinner table was somewhat hierarchical, I thought. Herr Hoffmeister sat at the head of the table. Then along the wall was a bench where Herr Kothe, the horse man, sat, then Heinz, then I and Gustav, a day worker from the village came last. Frau Hoffmeister sat on her husband's right, and then came the three girls, in order of seniority. The girls had to help with the serving, and they kept jumping up and down, whilst we were stuck on our bench behind the table. The meal was plain but nourishing. There would always be some meat, plenty of potatoes and vegetables. As much as you could eat! I noticed the other men had all good appetites, so I knew I would be right here as far as food was concerned. After the meal the men excused themselves. Kothe and Gustav went home, Heinz and I went to our respective rooms. The girls had to wash up and clean the kitchen, and then they too were free.

"I will call you tomorrow morning, Dieter, about 5.30 am. We'll start work then," said Herr Hoffmeister, when I said good night to him.

My room was tiny. Just enough space for my single bed along the wall,

a wash stand and basin, a chamber pot, a bucket, and a chair. The bed had a large feather doona, not quilted, but the feathers were all in a heap. To regulate the temperature one could either shake the feathers all down towards the legs, this would keep one cool in summer, or one spread them all evenly to keep warm in winter. I thought I would have to get used to this type of bedding. We always had blankets or quilted bed covers at home, with a feather cushion for the legs only. But ... I was now on a small farm. During the night I woke several times like emerging from a sauna. I would have to shake the feathers down completely, even then in autumn.

"Get up, Dieter," was the early morning call. There was just enough time to clean my teeth and wash my face and get dressed. Downstairs Heinz was already busying himself with cleaning out the oxen shed.

"What do you want me to do?" I asked him.

"Don't know, suit yourself," he said rather grumpily. "I'm not your boss." And out came another pitchfork full of manure.

"Okay then, I'll start cleaning out the cow shed," I said, grabbing another pitchfork.

"I'm not here to give you any orders. If you want to know what to do ask the boss."

I thought it was pretty obvious what had to be done, so I just went to where the cows stood and began to drag out the dung. It was heavy and wet, but I didn't have far to go. The dung heap was just outside the stable door. I was sweeping with an old broom, when Martha and Helga appeared with their buckets.

"Come on, Dieter, you haven't even finished yet. Get some dry straw from over the barn there, so that we can start milking," Martha said. She seemed to be in charge of the girls.

When I brought in the dry straw, Helga said, "That's nice to have a clean place for milking. Thanks."

Meanwhile Herr Hoffmeister was putting some feed into the troughs for the oxen and cows, whilst the two girls were milking. Herr Kothe was looking after his two horses, and no one assisted him. Once the cows had been milked and fed they were herded into the paddock where we had picked them up last night.

After that was done, Martha said, "Go inside and have something to eat before we leave."

Heinz was already sitting at the table, munching on a slice of home-made bread and jam, with a pot of steaming hot coffee-ersatz before him. He managed to put away two or three slices of bread and jam, and I tried to catch up with him.

While I was helping Heinz to harness the oxen, Gustav appeared, with his jacket under his arm. We were ready to go, but the girls were not.

"I guess, we are going to harvest potatoes again?" I asked, just to break the silence.

“You’re a smart-arse.”

Maybe Heinz and I were not going to get on too well, I thought. What could be the matter with him? I just stood there and said nothing.

Eventually, the girls and Frau Kothe appeared, and when we were all sitting on top of the cart, Heinz got the oxen going. They seemed to know the way. Up a fairly steep road and along a field with sugar beet. After that our slow moving cart arrived at the potato field. Each man grabbed a three-pronged hoe and started to attack one row at a time. The women collected the potatoes into bags. Once a bag was full, the top was tied up and left for the men to load on the ox cart. It was back-breaking work, and my poor body did not know how it would last until lunch time, let alone until the end of the day.

But there came a pleasant surprise.

“Breakfast!” Martha shouted. We all dropped our tools and crowded around the ox cart. The girls had cut some sandwiches earlier. Everyone received four slices of bread with real meat inside, like salami, liverwurst, or brawn, sometimes also home made cheese. These sandwiches were most sustaining and after about half an hour’s break I felt refreshed and ready for some more potato digging. I was much slower than the others, but I felt with some practice I would be able to do the work as the others did. Nobody seemed to be too worried about the ‘new chum’, but nobody tried to make friends with me either. They more or less ignored me in a kind of wait-and-see attitude. They knew that I had my leaving certificate, that I wanted to go on to university after my two years were up, and perhaps they sensed that we didn’t have much in common.

What worried me most was their language. It was not ‘bad language’, although that was common too, but the dialect they were speaking. It was a type of German I had never heard before. They called it Platt-Deutsch, a form of Lower Saxony dialect peculiar to Göttingen and its surrounding. Most words were pronounced completely differently from what I was used to. I sometimes wished they would speak Polish, for I would have had a better chance to understand than their dialect. However, slowly I also got used to that.

At lunch time we had a break of about one hour. There was a hot stew with some meat in it, and again a couple of slices of bread and cheese.

“Come on, don’t be tired, we still have a lot of work to do,” said Martha, and work began again as in the morning. By the time it was five o’clock and after a short break for afternoon tea, I was thoroughly tired, had a back ache, and did not think I could dig one more potato. The others were tired too, and we all enjoyed the rest on top of the ox cart, as Heinz was driving us slowly back home.

At the farm everybody seemed to be going to their assigned jobs. I was not too sure what I was supposed to be doing. I ached and was longing to sit down and rest, but it was obviously not the time yet for resting. The girls were getting the cows in, while Heinz and I filled their troughs with

some ground oats and barley, fodder to improve their milk production.

When the cows were tied to their places, Helga came with her bucket and stool to milk.

“Could I try to milk a cow?” I asked tentatively.

“I can show you how it’s done,” she said, “but I don’t think you’ll be able to milk the cow first time around.”

I sat down on the stool, put the bucket between my knees and started to pull at the first available teat.

“You forgot to clean the udder and the teats,” she said, and handed me a rag.

After they were clean I started to pull at the first two teats right in front of me. I still couldn’t get any milk out, when suddenly — whack — I was hit by the cow’s tail right into my face.

Helga laughed. “You have to tie the tail to the leg. Here is some string. And don’t pull the teats like that. You have to squeeze them, beginning from the index finger down.”

I tried it a second time. There was a trickle of milk coming out, but it was hard on my hands.

“That’s better than nothing. You’ll learn.”

After about a minute I gave up.

“I don’t think milking cows is for me,” I said and handed Helga the bucket and the stool. She just sat down and away she went, in strong rhythmic streams the milk came flowing out into the bucket.

“I must have another go some other time,” I said, not wanting to appear defeated at my first attempt.

“I’ll help you,” she said with a broad smile, and I knew then that Helga had already accepted me.

By the time we sat down for dinner, I was hungry again, and very tired indeed. I looked at the clock and was surprised that it was already after 7 pm. I had been up on my feet for more than 13 hours, with half an hour for second breakfast, one hour for lunch, and perhaps a quarter of an hour for afternoon tea, the rest of the time working very hard. My body ached, and I was longing for my bed. As soon as dinner was over I went up to my room, this time sleeping through until Herr Hoffmeister called me again in the morning.

Herr Hoffmeister would often stay at home when we were out in the fields, doing some office work, since he was the Bürgermeister, or mayor of Kerstlingerode. There was quite a lot of paper work attached to that office.

Life on the farm was pretty monotonous. There was never much change in routine. From potato harvest we went to sugar beet harvest, the last crop before winter. After that the dung heap in front of the house was carted off to the fields, spread and ploughed under. It was steady work, but not as hard work as harvesting time. The hours became shorter. Herr Hoffmeister called me later and later in the morning, until in mid-winter I had to get up at about 7 am.

Meanwhile I did learn how to milk cows. There was a course in the neighbouring village on caring for cows. Herr Hoffmeister suggested that I should attend it. Apart from teaching us how to milk cows, the course included total care of cows, recognising symptoms when they are sick, and good feeding methods. At the end of this course I received a certificate. From then on I had more confidence in handling cows, and Helga was happy to hand over to me her three cows. Martha kept hers, and from then on, my first job each morning was to milk the cows.

There was one mishap, though, before I felt more confident. One cow of mine gave a lot of milk, usually more than a bucket full in one milking. She was also a bit nervous, and at first she was not used to me. One morning when I had milked almost a bucket full, she suddenly kicked out with her left foot and stepped right into the bucket with the milk, tipping it all out. I was very upset, but Martha said, "you need to put your head right into her side so that she can feel you there. Also talk to her occasionally, that way she won't do it again."

It was true, from that time on I had no more trouble with any of the cows.

I especially liked milking the cows in summer, when they were left outside in the paddock over night. To sit there and look at the pretty scenery, the cows contented and chewing their cud, was a lovely peaceful activity which I enjoyed.

We usually didn't do any work on Sundays in the fields, but the animals still had to be cared for. I didn't mind the mornings, but it grated me to have to come back from Onkel Werner's each Sunday afternoon, just for milking my three cows and feeding them. I felt I never got away from my work. I suggested to Martha that on Sunday afternoons one of us could milk all six cows while the other would be free. I also made a similar arrangement with Heinz to feed the cattle. It was great to leave the farm on my days off in the mornings, about 10 am, and come back sometimes late on Sunday nights. I always loved my fortnightly free day and most of the time I would go over to Rittmarshausen and spend it with Onkel Werner, Tante Margaret and Bernd.

All three of them were heavy smokers, and one day I tried it too. As real cigarettes were still very scarce, they usually smoked their home grown tobacco, either rolled into cigarettes, or just from their pipes. I didn't really enjoy smoking, and I would only light up the occasional cigarette for company. One evening I observed Tante Margaret cleaning her pipe. There seemed to be a filter there, but that one was completely black, and a lot of black thickly gooey guck came out of the stem of her pipe. I felt almost sick when I saw that.

"Is that the stuff we inhale when we smoke?"

"It does look horrible," she admitted, "But then smoking itself is really very nice."

I didn't agree with her. "It can't be good for us if we inhale all that black

guck there when smoking. It makes me really sick and I don't want to ever smoke again. So please don't offer me any more of your cigarettes."

And that was it. From that day I never touched another cigarette again.

Christmas was approaching and I badly wanted to visit my parents. I asked for a couple of weeks off, and Herr Hoffmeister was happy to give them to me, "There is not much to do here on the farm in winter anyway. You just go and visit your parents."

Kerstlingerode was only about 3 km from Bischofshausen, the last village before the East German border. From there it was only 2 km to East Germany. We had heard a lot about people crossing the border there, so I decided to try it for myself.

They said it was better to cross at night. I waited until about 5 pm before walking to the border. I carried only a rucksack with a few Christmas presents and my personal things. About 6 pm I arrived at the border and by then it was pitch dark. How would I find my way? I had to keep due south, I was told, but I didn't have a compass. Luckily the stars were out to guide me. The first village in the eastern zone was called Siemerode, and I was to head for Heiligenstadt, another 6 km after that, and catch the train from there. There was no river to cross, and it was difficult to know where the actual border was supposed to be. I just kept walking across an open field. Suddenly I heard some voices. I threw myself down on the ground and listened, my heart pounding.

I heard the voices again, but they seemed to be whispering. They could not have been guards. It turned out that they were a group of people also trying to cross the border.

I joined them, about eight or ten women and men, quietly walking towards Siemerode. We could see already a light in the distance.

"That must be the village," I thought. There were more voices. I couldn't see a thing, but those voices came closer and closer. Our group scattered and all threw themselves flat on the ground.

"Here, come here Tieras!" I could distinguish a commanding male voice giving orders to a dog. My heart sank. With a tracker dog, we had no chance of escape. There was a short bark.

"Get up you filthy swine, and you too!"

In no time the dog had rounded us all up with the man following him. He swore at us and commanded us to walk ahead towards the light in the distance. We still couldn't see the ground. It must be someone from the police, I thought. Who else would be ordering us around like that? It crossed my mind to make a dash for it, but then I changed my mind. There was no point with the dog behind us. We made our way, stumbling every now and then over the dark, uneven surface of the ground. Eventually we arrived at the village. There were only two or three lights.

"In here, all of you!"

We were pushed into a barely lit room which must have been in a school. When we were all inside, the door was slammed shut and we

heard a key turning from the other side. It gradually dawned on us that we were locked up, we had been arrested! But nobody charged us or told us anything. There we were, all strangers bound together by the common aim of reaching some place in East Germany before Christmas. We tried to make it as comfortably as we could for the night, for we didn't think that anything would happen to us before daylight. Sleeping on the hard floor, with the cold of the night creeping through the floor boards, was not very comfortable, but we managed.

The worst was the uncertainty. What would happen to us in the morning? Would we be able to continue, or would they keep us locked up over Christmas? These were some of my thoughts as I drifted into a very tentative and uneasy sleep.

The following morning we were roused at day break. Each one of us was called separately to another class room where two police officers interrogated us.

"Name, where from, where to, why?" were some of the questions asked.

I stuck to my story. "I work near the border here, and I want to go to my parents for Christmas."

"Have you heard that there is a border here now, young man, and that no one is allowed to go from one side to the other?"

"But I want to spend Christmas with my family," I replied. "There is nowhere I can get a permit, can I? So how can this be a crime?" I hoped that I could appeal to their human heart in some way.

"Shut up, you, and be careful what you say, or else we will lock you up for good!"

That was not the answer I had expected, but at least I knew where I stood.

"I'm feeling very generous today, so I'll let you go. And I advise you not to be a smart-arse. Go back to where you came from, and don't let me catch you again. Otherwise you can spend Christmas and the New Year here behind locks. Get out of my sight, quick smart."

I was not going to let that policeman intimidate me. I was determined to try it again, but of course, I wouldn't be so stupid to try it here. I walked about 13 km to Duderstadt station and caught a train to Hornburg. From fellow travellers I had heard, that it was supposed to be easier to cross there, and on the other side was a train that went to Halberstadt. Instead of being disheartened, I was even more resolute to be home for Christmas.

Another long walk awaited me at Hornburg. On the road it would have been 6km, but I chose to go cross country along a creek, which added at least another 2km. It was still broad daylight when I set off, all by myself. I had become more skilled in border crossing. Hiding behind bushes, walking quickly across open fields, and waiting intermittently to watch the area, were all part of the strategies of a seasoned border crosser. This time all went smoothly. I never saw a guard or any person for that matter. I was glad I had been on my own, and was even gladder when I walked

into Hoppenstedt, already in the eastern zone. I caught the next train to Halberstadt, and on to Quenstedt. The last kilometer and a half was almost a pleasure to walk, although I was tired by then. The village of Emersleben greeted me from afar and I knew then that I had made it. I would be home for Christmas after all! It was a happy family reunion, when I stepped into the dining room, where all were eating their evening meal.

On 1 January 1948 we heard through the news that the British and the US zones had amalgamated to form one economic zone. They hoped that the French zone would be joined later. Meanwhile an administrative council had been created to normalise the economy in occupied Germany. Food supplies until that time had been so precarious, that had a supply ship arrived late, it would have resulted in mass starvation. This administrative council eventually organised an election of delegates to Bonn, whose main task was to formulate a constitution for Germany.

"This can only mean, that the border between East and West Germany will gradually be closed off completely," said Vater, who usually saw things rather pessimistically.

"I hope not. How would I be able to visit you then?"

"Maybe that's just it, you won't be able to come here again. It seems so terribly unjust, to divide a nation, and to divide families in the process."

"But I would much rather be in the West than here!"

"Of course, but that's not the point. Germany must remain one nation. We are one people, one culture, one language."

"You wouldn't think so in Kerstlingerode!"

"What do you mean?"

"The accent there, it's terrible. At first I couldn't understand what they were saying. But it's better now, I am more used to it."

My holidays came to an end only too soon. I wasn't really looking forward to working on the farm again, but duty bound, I went. I decided to go back the same way I came. It seemed a good crossing with nobody guarding the border, and I was lucky again. No one stopped me.

Back at Kerstlingerode life went on in a most monotonous way. I did not enjoy the life of a small farmer. It was dreary and uninteresting. But it had one good point. There was plenty of good food available, which at the age of 19 was still important, and my body had become much stronger over the past months. It had not been always easy, though.

Sometimes our farm was called upon to help out a neighbour with the threshing of corn. There were never enough workers on one farm to man the threshing machine, so this was done on a co-operative basis. Herr Hoffmeister sent two or three of his men, and the other farmers would do the same when our turn came.

Threshing time was like a big feast. The farmers' wives would try to out-do each other by providing more and better food for the borrowed workers. There was so much of it, that we all ate too much, but then again

the work was so hard that we needed the extra food to sustain us. One particular day I had to lift pressed straw bales onto a wagon. The bales were so heavy that I could hardly get them onto the end of the pitch fork, let alone lift them onto the wagon. It was by sheer perseverance that I managed.

Another day, threshing at Hoffmeisters, I had to carry bags with freshly threshed wheat up a flight of very crooked and rickety steps to the store room above the cow shed. They filled the bags deliberately so full, that they weighed more than 100 kg. Two men would place them on my back, and I had to carry them up those stairs. The heaviest weighed 118 kg. My knees nearly gave way. They felt like jelly and I don't know how I managed.

The worst part about threshing was the dust. Sometimes the corn was so dusty, that I could not see further than a couple of meters in front of me. And there were no protective masks available!

On the religious feast days, like Easter and Pentecost, the women would bake a lot of cakes, plum cakes, apple cakes, crumbed cakes, and almond sugar cakes, at least two trays of each. These trays measured about one meter by half a meter each and were carried to the baker. We virtually stuffed ourselves with these cakes for breakfast and afternoon tea. I never knew I could eat so much!

Occasionally I went to the village church in Kerstlingerode, but it wasn't the same as in Emersleben. I didn't know anyone and the pastor seemed aloof and unapproachable.

At the beginning of April 1948, Bernd and I received an invitation for a reunion of old Siebenbürger boarders. It came from Ernst Wenski, who had become administrator of a government estate in Varenholz, near Holzminden. He was one of the original boarders, and had been a good friend of Tante Else's son, who had been killed in action in Russia. He had taken care of Tante Else. They had put their heads together, searched addresses and then invited us all to come to the pub in Varenholz. All the men slept together in a large room, whereas the women were able to get rooms in the pub. Bernd and I went by train, quite excited about meeting up with some old friends again. But we were also acutely aware of the fact that from our group some had not returned from the war, like Horst, Günter and Tante Else's only son.

The reunion took place over the weekend 17/18 April 1948. It was absolutely wonderful. We had a nice dinner, and afterwards there was dancing and talking. In fact, the most important part for us was talking, reminiscing, wanting to know what each of the others had been through, how they had managed to get to the west, and how they all were making a living these days. Nostalgia reigned. Tante Else was happy to have her former protégés around her again. No one wanted to go to sleep that night. Next morning we met again for breakfast and talking, sitting in lovely weather outside in the garden and enjoying a leisurely day. It was

hard to leave the group, but before we all departed we promised to meet again the following year.

Coming back to farm work after such a wonderful weekend was bad enough, but the worst type of job was awaiting me there. Herr Hoffmeister called me to help with the most unpleasant job of emptying the toilet pit. He would always be present personally, so no one could complain. The slop was ladled into a carry trough. When it was full, Heinz and I had to carry it for about 50 meters and empty it over the compost heap. We had to carry about five or six of those filled troughs before the pit was empty. The smell was horrible, and I disliked the job most intensely, but it had to be done.

A much more pleasant job was to watch over a sow who was to give birth. It usually happened at night, and I spent a few nights up playing the role of a midwife to the sow. I had to make sure that there was enough dry, clean straw in the pen. When the first piglet was about to be born, I had to get ready to catch it with my hands and immediately transfer it into the pen next door. The sow could easily crush it while giving birth to the next piglet. There were about 8 or 9 piglets to one litter. These had firm bodies, were beautifully pink, and looked rather sweet. When the afterbirth had come out I knew that this was the end. I removed it and then I could go to bed. The little piglets were brought to the mother only the next morning. I had to watch again that she would accept them. When they were all sucking happily, I could leave them alone. Although I had spent half the night with the sow, this did not mean that I could sleep in next morning. I had to go back to work as usual.

When the piglets had been weaned, the local vet came to castrate the males. He asked me to hold the piglet on its hind legs, face down. When he produced his scalpel and started cutting into the scrotum, I suddenly felt faint. I had to hand the piglet to Heinz and sit down. They all laughed at my squeamishness and thought that I was a sissy. I had never been able to watch operations or see blood, animal or human.

Another night job was cooking syrup from sugar beets. The sugar beets were shredded and put in a press to get the juice out. Then the juice was placed into the copper of the laundry, a fire lit and the juice brought to boil. It had to be stirred frequently so that it would not burn at the bottom. It took often eight to nine hours until the syrup was finished. The girls, Heinz and I would spend all night watching the fire and stirring the syrup. Sometimes we skylarked a bit to while away the boredom. By the time it was finished it was daylight and time to go back to work, without any sleep at all. Was that to toughen us up? I could not stand too much of this. The following afternoon, especially if riding in the ox cart, I would invariably nod off to sleep and let the oxen go their own way. It was a miracle that we didn't end up in a gully and kill ourselves.

In June 1948 the military administration of what was by then known as West Germany, ordered the devaluation of the Reichsmark, the old

German currency. Over night our savings had shrunk for each RM10 to one Deutsche Mark, or DM. As a sop, each West German citizen received DM100. It turned out to be a severe blow to me personally, as with the devaluation I was not going to be able to carry on my plans to study agriculture at Göttingen University. At that time, however, all these implications had not dawned on me yet. All I could see was that the black market had disappeared over night and one could walk into any shop and buy goods which hadn't been seen for years.

As Onkel Werner and Tante Margaret were going to celebrate their silver wedding anniversary on 8 August 1948, Mutter was intending to come for a visit. She planned to come illegally, like I had at Christmas. This was known as 'black crossing of the border'. It had never become legal, nor were permits issued in those days, and at times it was quite dangerous. We were glad when she arrived safe and sound.

The silver wedding anniversary was a memorable occasion, especially as Mutter had come. She and I represented the wider family. It was very sad though, that Oma and Vater were not there. Bernd and I each spent the DM 100 from the devaluation on two easy chairs for Onkel Werner and Tante Margaret, which pleased them no end.

After Mutter had returned to Emersleben, my parents must have received a letter from a Klaus Henning, who had gone to school with me in Posen. He had just returned from a Russian POW camp and had mentioned that he had some news about Günter:



Günter, October 1944.

“Dear Mr. Tieman, Today I have finally received your address through the search services of the Red Cross. I would love to hear from you whether you have heard anything about your son, who was drafted into the Grenadier Reserve Battalion 96 (Krotoschin) in December 1944. I used to live in Posen and knew your sons before the military service. As we were together in camp I remember him telling me a lot about the property you had, that he had lived in Poland before the war and that he could speak Polish. To describe him, he was about 1.72 m tall, slim, oblong face, dark hair. As I know both your sons (I was with your younger together in the FLAK, I can’t remember his name. Was it Horst? or Günther? I had gone through three years of imprisonment and suffered heavy, soul-shattering experiences, that I do not remember his name any more, but so that you see that it is your son I am talking about, I have written all the above. In any case, please let me know if you have had news from your son. I may be able to give you some information. I have returned from Russian POW camp in February 1948 and looked upon this as my duty to let you know about this. Yours sincerely, Klaus Henning.” Güglingen Kreis Heilbronn, Maulbronner Str.1., 19.7.48

After Vater had written to him, my parents had received the sad news that Günter, in all probability, had been killed by the Russians in January 1945.

Güglingen, 16.8.48 — “Dear Mr & Mrs Tieman, Many thanks for your kind letter, which I wish to reply immediately. I am specially glad to hear that your youngest son Dieter had been pulled out of the FLAK position in Posen in time before the Russians came. That way he was spared the suffering of a Russian POW camp, and did not have to fight to the last in the fortress Posen. Now to your son Günter. I would like to give you an accurate account of the events which led to our being taken prisoners. Günter and I were in the same training group. We both got on very well together. He would often talk about you, so that your family had become quite familiar to me. When the front collapsed in January 1945, we were stationed in Krotoschin. Again it was our fate to stay in two holes in the ground next to each other. We also stood watch together at night. When Krotoschin became a fighting ground, the fighting became very hard. I remember exactly, that we drank a bottle of red wine together in the Krotoschin Brickworks and had expressed the hope, that we would be able to break through. Then we tried to break through and we succeeded. We headed towards Silesia for days on end, while the Russians were all around us. One night we rested in a village. Next afternoon, the Russians were already there. It was impossible to leave our house, as it seemed such a good hiding place. The Russians made themselves at home, smashed everything to pieces,

and were shooting holes into the walls. Then, whether one of us got scared or whatever happened, one of us got up and went outside. The Russians immediately grabbed him and also discovered us. I don't wish to describe what happened then. Later we were stood next to a lorry and then we had to run. When we were totally exhausted, we were allowed to stand on the lorry. But as there were about 15 prisoners, we were distributed on two lorries. I am not too sure on which lorry your son Günter was, but as far as I can remember, he was on my lorry. Due to ice on the road the axle broke. We were lined up in a row, a left turn was ordered, and as I stood on the right wing, I saw one after the other being hit by a bullet and falling to the ground. I was hit on my forehead, but only slightly wounded, and fell also to the ground. Then I saved myself by making a desperate dash into the nearby forest. I stayed hidden under fir trees for several hours, but I never heard any German voices in the forest, so I have to assume that all the others had been killed. I remember, the killing took place between Militsch and Rawitsch. I don't want to say with 100% certainty, that your son had been killed, but I considered it my duty to tell you in detail how long I had been together with your son Günter and what had happened. I know how hard it will be to accept that a son has been killed, but please believe me that he has been spared a bitter fate. I have been for more than three years in Russian prison camps and know it from my own experience. Particularly as your son has not written to you, one needs to assume that a merciful fate had taken him away. Everything happened so quickly, that no one had really time to think. I assure you that each prisoner has had the opportunity to write, and has also done so. Each POW was able to have the addresses of their relatives searched and many have found them through this service. Had he been taken prisoner by the Poles, he would have contacted your Polish servants, as he also used the Polish language when he was taken prisoner. In case he does come back during the year, which I would most sincerely wish, he will be able to confirm that I have given you the truth. But should he not come back, you have the slight consolation, that the events came toppling over us all so that no one had time to think. I come from the old Germany and lived in Posen since 1940. I was with your son Dieter together in the FLAK battery stationed in Dembsen, later in Posen-Kreising. Our chief was Lieutenant Günther. I was personnel leader (Lagermannschaftsführer) and had been to the Schiller High School in Rathwall. I am terribly sorry that I can't give you any better news, but I felt an inner need to do this my last friendship duty. Should in the meantime anything happen which might give you some hope, please let me know of it. With greetings to your son Dieter, I am Yours Klaus Henning."

I was not told about this letter at that stage, presumably because my

parents had not yet given up hope. However, I have no recollection that they told me about this letter at some other time. Mutter had written an addendum in Vater's Memoirs that I had put the letter into the family Chronicle, but when I found it in 1994, I think it was among Mutter's things, together with Oma's memoirs, which she had specifically written for me. Gerda writes, that when she was an adult she asked Mutter what exactly were the circumstances concerning Günter's disappearance, Mutter told her the details and that in fact, they only gave up hope when it was officially announced that all POW's had returned from the USSR. Perhaps I should have asked Mutter about this too? Maybe it was too painful for me?

As Christmas 1948 was approaching, I once again wanted to visit my parents in Emersleben. The situation at the borders had not changed over the year, and I was going to try it again near Halberstadt.

There were a few anxious moments at the border, but everything went smoothly, and I arrived in Emersleben with two weeks of holidays before me. I had a lovely time again with the family. Oma had become a little more frail, Gerda had grown and seemed to enjoy her life in Emersleben. We talked about my studies in Göttingen, and how the devaluation of the currency in the West would affect these. By then the exchange rate between the East and the West Mark was 4:1, but we didn't come to any conclusions. I also said that I had no desire whatsoever to study in Halle or anywhere else in the Eastern Zone. Somewhat reluctantly I left Emersleben after a fortnight, as I did not look forward to working at the farm again.

Bernd and I were making plans in our free time for our next reunion with the old Siebenbürger boarders. We had heard earlier that arrangements were being made for all the former students of the Schiller School in Posen to meet this year. Ernst Wenski, together with the former Headmaster, Dr. Voigt, were instrumental in getting that reunion off the ground, scheduled for the 18 and 19 April 1949. Bernd and I were very keen to be part of it, and we enjoyed it just as much as the first one, meeting some of the other school friends again, whom we had not seen the year before. Günter's friend Hans Zipper was also there. He was very sad to hear that we still hadn't heard anything from Günter. We talked about the good old days for a long time. It was so good to see him again, but unfortunately, after that meeting we lost touch again. My friend Helmut Herke had not come to the reunion.

Back at the farm I persevered with the work, although I found it very unattractive. By then I had long learnt to harness and drive the oxen. One day I was coming home with them with some freshly cut lucerne for the cows. I was sitting on top of the lucerne. As I was driving on the road, Herr Kothe came along with his horses pulling another cart going in the opposite direction. Just before he was passing me he swung out his long whip and lashed at me, hitting me in my face and neck, "Take that for

always interfering," followed by a flood of unrepeatable swear words, as his cart was disappearing behind me.

I was totally taken by surprise. I had no idea why he had whipped me. I felt degraded, being whipped like a school boy or rather like an animal. All that hatred that must have been stored inside him, suddenly welling up in this manner! I was outraged. With tears in my eyes I headed home, determined to quit. I could take no more. I left the bullocks standing in the yard, harnessed to the cart, and went as I was, straight to Onkel Werner and Tante Margaret, still in a rage. "I can understand that you are very upset, but please calm down, so that we can discuss this rationally," was Onkel Werner's advice.

"There is no way I can stay at Hoffmeister's any longer. I'm going to leave the farm. I've had enough."

Onkel Werner and Tante Margaret were patiently listening.

"I feel totally frustrated. Slaving there for long hours and hard work for a pittance, the constant bickering from Kothe, I just can't cope any longer!"

"Time will heal, Dieter. Give it time."

"What do you mean?"

"At the moment you are terribly upset, and you see things only in your emotional state. To act according to your present state of mind would probably not be in your own interest. So wait a while until your rage has subsided, and think about it then. You may feel differently about it later."

"I don't think that time is going to make any difference."

Of course I was too upset to make a rational decision, and I am forever grateful to Onkel Werner that he had helped me to see it. A couple of weeks later I was to remember his words and I recognised their wisdom.

It was my first major crisis, and it was important that I should work through it and learn from it. Onkel Werner and Tante Margaret helped me by patiently listening to my feelings, and by showing concern and understanding. It was good to have had them close by. I don't know what I would have done at that moment without them. Gradually I did calm down and they persuaded me to go back and have a talk with Herrn Hoffmeister.

It was well after dark by the time I arrived back. I knew by then all the work would have been done, and Herr Hoffmeister would be sitting in the lounge doing his clerical work as the village mayor. Frau Hoffmeister was also there, but as soon as she saw me entering the room she disappeared.

"The old Kothe bastard whipped me on the road out there, and I hadn't done anything to provoke him. I feel degraded, and I don't want to have anything to do with him any more," I blurted out, feeling all the pent-up anger coming back again.

"Na, na, that's not the way to speak. Just calm down first. You seem terribly upset. Kothe told me that you had fed his horses this morning, is that true?"

"Yeah," I admitted, "But only because he was late and they were getting restless. It's not a crime to feed his horses, is it?"

"You had better stay away from his horses. They are his pride and joy and he alone is responsible for them. He doesn't like anyone doing it, not even me. So leave him alone. He is a grumpy old man, and we all have to put up with that. I think you should go to sleep now, tomorrow you will feel better about it."

"But I can't work with Kothe. He has insulted me, and I will have nothing to do with him."

"Just sleep over it and see how you feel about it tomorrow."

Next morning the girls and Heinz were walking around with knowing faces, but acting as if nothing had happened. I didn't say anything, but deep down I felt that they were happy that I got humiliated. They didn't like to share their life and work with a person who was going to attend a university later. I had the feeling then that I was never going to be accepted by them. I just had to make the best of it. From then on I counted the months, the weeks, and the days, as I was milking my cows, or cleaned out the stables, or swept the yard, still full of resentment.

It soon became obvious to me, that the devaluation of the Reichsmark and the separation of the two Germanies meant that I would not be able to do my studies in Göttingen. Vater did not have any money to pay for the studies, nor for living expenses, neither had I. There were no scholarships in those days and so I had to resign myself to the fact that I would not become a student of agriculture at the Wilhelm August University in Göttingen, where I had already been accepted for the autumn semester of 1947.

But what was I going to do? I felt very tempted to leave this farm there and then, but as I had agreed previously to stay for two years, I was reluctant to leave earlier. I felt bound, perhaps not legally, but morally, and Herr Hoffmeister had always done the right thing by me. I could not just leave, so I decided to wait for 1 September to arrive.

Looking back at my two years in Kerstlingerode I can say that I had benefited greatly, not only physically, but I had matured through some hardships and through the wise counsel of Herrn Hoffmeister. He had helped me to become more aware of the present, to see and perceive things around me, and to see the things that needed doing. I had become a far more practical man than I had been before. I had not learnt to become a small farmer, but a better person. My future would take me away from the land, which had been my dream until then, and plant me in a completely different environment, where I had to learn a new job.

I said good-bye to the Hoffmeisters and thanked them for what they had done for me. To the others I said farewell, but never gave as much as a nod to Kothe. I was glad I was leaving. I didn't want to spend the rest of my life on a small farm with people whose horizon didn't stretch beyond what their eyes could see.

I went back to Emersleben, where an invitation to a wedding awaited my arrival. The reading circle I had been part of, had continued and had blossomed into a romance. Mally and Heinz Wenske had become engaged, and they wanted to get married on 3 September 1949. I made it in good time and the wedding turned out to be a most enjoyable occasion. Everyone from our family had been invited, Frau Grube came from Berlin, and there were lots of people from the Wenske family.

Oma was frailer again but she was still very interested in all my affairs. She was concerned about my future and so had written to her cousin, Albert Kreglinger in Antwerp, who was the president of a prosperous wool trading firm Kreglinger & Co, to see if I could start somewhere in the wool trade. Vater had written to Tante Emma in Boston, Oma's sister, whose son John had married a Kreglinger and owned the agency of the Kreglinger firm for the USA, and Mutter had contacted Onkel Wilhelm Forstmann, a cousin of hers, who was the buyer of Hardt Pocorny & Co., a worsted spinning mill producing knitting wool. He had some contacts in Bremen. The combined efforts resulted in my getting an apprenticeship in a wool firm in Bremen.

Oma wrote in her memoirs that Albert Kreglinger, whose mother died in May 1884 at the birth of her daughter, was brought up by her mother. "My mother had promised (my aunt) on her death bed, to take the orphaned children and their father into her home." He was like a brother to her, and so he promised to pay a scholarship for me for the duration of my apprenticeship. Opa's father had been a wool merchant in Antwerp, before his firm went broke. On Mutter's side too were several cousins who owned spinning mills in the Rhineland. It seemed therefore the best thing for me to continue in that tradition and start a new career in the wool trade, but I had no idea of what was involved in commerce and I would have to learn from scratch.

At the end of September I had to leave my family again. I was going into a new adventure, into a town where I knew not a soul. But I was glad that Onkel Wilhelm had agreed to take me under his wings for a little while, so it didn't feel too threatening.

I had to cross the border again, filled with trepidation and fear, but as there was no other way I simply had to risk it. I was lucky, no one saw me, and I arrived on the other side greatly relieved, for I didn't want to be late for my appointment with Onkel Wilhelm on 1 October 1949 in Bremen.

The train journey was a nightmare. A totally overcrowded train, standing in the corridor squashed into a corner, unable to move, but also unable to fall. No food of course throughout the journey, so when I arrived in Bremen in the early morning hours of Saturday, 1 October 1949, I was very tired and very hungry.

BREMEN

The Wool Trade Capital of Germany

People poured out of the train, rushing as if they were chased by the border police. I held on to my bag and followed the stream as it filed past the barrier. I had to find the Hotel Hospitz, which was very close to the station.

I was on my way to meet Onkel Wilhelm.

Hotel Hospitz ... Receptionist ... and there was Onkel Wilhelm having his breakfast.

My stomach rumbled. Breakfast sounded nice. But I was all dirty from the train journey. Could I just turn up in the dining room like that? I plucked up some courage and went in to greet Onkel Wilhelm.

"You are just in time for breakfast," he said. "Sit down here and I will order you some food. You must be hungry."

"Actually, I'm starving," I said. "There was no food on the train, and I didn't even have a seat all night. Couldn't sleep, not even a wink."

"You should travel second class as I do. I always get a seat."

"May be when I'm rich like you I'll travel second class. But for the time being, I have no money to spare."

"I'm sorry, just teasing, you know. Waiter, another breakfast for this young man please! ... And how are your mother and father?"

"They are very well and they send their regards to you."

"It's such a shame that they live on the other side of the border. We can't see each other any more."

"The border crossing went all right for me this time, but I wouldn't recommend it to anyone. It's getting too dangerous. I heard they've kept some people locked up for three days!"

After I had finished a good breakfast, I was feeling much better, and after a shower and change I was ready to meet my future employers.

"The firm I am going to introduce you to, has two senior partners, one is Herr Wunder, the other Herr Siemering. Herr Wunder has brought the

connection with 'Kreglinger & Co' into the firm, and Herr Siemering the French firm 'Dewavrin'. They are both rather old and conservative, but Siemering has a son, Jürgen. I usually deal with him. He is progressive and I hope you will get on with him. Herr Wunder has also a son, but he is presently in England learning the trade there. Are you ready?"

When I nodded he continued: "They want to see you first, but I am sure they will take you on. You see, it might help their business".

"How is that?"

"Business people always like personal connections."

We caught a taxi and arrived in no time at the Rathaus Platz, walking past an enormous statue of the famous Roland der Riese (Roland, the Giant) keeping watch over the Rathaus (town hall), a most beautiful town hall going back a few centuries, the centre of the proud burghers, the free citizens of the Free Hanseatic city of Bremen. The Hanseatic League was a trading alliance of several cities in northern Germany, including Bremen, Hamburg, Lübeck and Kiel, but also Quedlinburg and others, but mostly on the Baltic Sea. I breathed in the air of this proud city and felt that I was going to enjoy a totally new atmosphere, with new challenges and promises of a better life.

The office of Wunder & Siemering was on the second floor of a bank building, about 100 m from the Rathaus. At the reception desk we were greeted by a young man in a white coat, who showed us to the office of Herr Wunder and Herr Siemering.

"Ah, we have been expecting you. Come in. Please sit down. Do you smoke?"

Neither of us did. Herr Siemering puffed on his big cigar, whilst Herr Wunder began to talk to me.

"So you are a relative of the Kreglingers? They are a big firm and we are doing a lot of business with them, importing our wool from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, but by far the biggest import comes from their Buenos Aires branch in South America."

"My grandmother's cousin, Albert Kreglinger, is the big boss in Antwerp."

"I know him, fine old gentleman. Tell me what do you know about wool?"

"That it comes from sheep. I know the farming side of sheep, but about wool itself I don't know anything."

"It doesn't matter. You can learn it all here. You will pick it up as you work with samples in our office here. I hope you will be able to start here next week?"

"That is very kind of you, Herr Wunder. When, on Monday?"

"Yes. You haven't even asked about your pay?"

"Sorry, I'm not thinking straight. I had a sleepless night on the train."

"That's all right. Our apprentices receive DM 50 per month in the first year, DM 60 in the second, and DM 70 in the third."

"I can't live on that, of course, but I hope to get a monthly allowance from somewhere."

"Yes, well, that's settled then?"

"How long will the apprenticeship be?"

"Two-and-a-half years, till 31 March 1952."

"That seems a long time."

"This will include a three months course at the Bremer Wollkämmerei, where you will learn the sorting and wool qualities. You will also attend the Chamber of Commerce school for commercial apprentices where they teach you book keeping, accountancy and commercial practices. You will need that, as your apprenticeship will have to be registered with our Chamber of Commerce."

"I didn't know that. That sounds all right to me."

"Good, see you then on Monday. That should give you enough time to settle in, I hope?"

"Thank you very much."

"Another thing, before you go. We have a lot of correspondence in English and French. What is your knowledge in these languages?"

"English is not too bad, but I don't know any French."

"Then you had better enrol in evening classes, for both languages, I would strongly advise. You can never learn enough languages."

My head was spinning. I had thought that it would be difficult to get this job, but before I knew it I had it. And plenty of studying! Onkel Wilhelm had been right. Would it be good for their business? I could not answer that question.

While Onkel Wilhelm went to see young Siemering to talk business, Herr Wunder showed me around the firm. The sample room was a large room with lots of shelves along the walls, each one containing hundreds of little rolls in blue paper. He soon explained:

"These are wool samples that are sent from Antwerp or straight from overseas. Our clients look at those samples and if the wool suits them, they buy large quantities of that particular type. So it is most important that the wool sample is always kept in its original wrapping paper. They must never get mixed up, otherwise we would have a catastrophe on our hands. Sometimes we buy wool on sample, and when the delivery arrives, we draw another sample and check that the two samples match. If not, there is trouble."

He pulled out a blue roll, opened it and took a small piece of wool, called a staple, between both thumbs and index fingers: "This is very fine wool. We call it AA/A or in English it's a 70s. If you look at it against the blue paper, can you see the fine crimp? That's how you can tell the quality of wool. You are supposed to spin 70 yards of yarn with one pound of this wool."

I was fascinated. Although it was all rather confusing to me, I felt that I would like to work there.

Then Herr Wunder introduced me to the staff, from the most senior employee, who was the main accountant and had an office to herself, to the most junior apprentice, Walter Meyer. Walter had met us at the counter when we arrived, and he was going to be my mentor. All wore white dust coats over their clothes. Across the corridor were two secretaries, busily typing away on their type writers. They too wore white dust coats. The last room was occupied by Jürgen Siemering, who was having a chat at that moment with Onkel Wilhelm.

"Well, I hope you will settle in here. You will find us all very friendly, but we do expect accurate and punctual work. See you on Monday." I was left standing on my own in the long corridor.

Soon Onkel Wilhelm appeared with Jürgen Siemering. We were introduced and I thought he was very friendly. After we had left the office, Onkel Wilhelm asked: "What do you think?"

"I was very surprised. I'm sure I will like it here. People seem very friendly and the work seems to be very interesting. Herr Wunder showed me around, and I particularly like the look of the sample room."

"Well, I'm glad. I'm going to leave you for an hour or so in the Ratskeller. Have some coffee and read a paper. I'll come and pick you up when I have finished my other business. Afterwards we are going to have lunch with Frau von Guenther."

I had heard of the von Guenther family, who had lived in the province of Posen, but I couldn't think who they were.

"They had a property in the North of Posen. Your Grandfather and old Bill were friends. He had done his apprenticeship on Bill's father's farm — it goes back a long time. You will like Frau von Guenther. She lost her husband (Bill's son) towards the end of the war and is left now with her small son. Her family comes from Bremen and she knows a lot of people here. She will be of great help to you."

I settled in a comfortable chair in the Ratskeller, ordered a pot of tea and after a while I dozed off. Onkel Wilhelm shook me by the shoulders: "Wake up, Dieter, you can't sleep here all day."

"I'm sorry. I just couldn't keep my eyes open."

"Let's go."

We caught a tram from the Marktplatz and arrived half an hour later at Frau von Guenther's flat. She opened the door for us. She was small in stature but round and jolly, very friendly and welcomed us warmly. A real live wire, I thought. Her son Wolfgang was five, a lovely boy with big brown eyes and his mother's smile.

I was introduced by Onkel Wilhelm.

"May I call you Dieter?"

"Yes please, that makes me feel more at home." But she didn't offer me to call her Berta, and since German convention does not allow a younger person to call an older by first name, without being asked, I kept calling her Frau von Guenther.

"How did you go at Wunder & Siemering?" she wanted to know.

"I've got the job. Starting there on Monday."

"Oh good. And where are you going to live?"

"I don't know yet. I haven't even thought about it."

"Isn't that typical men. What would you do without us women to think about the more practical things in life. As soon as Onkel Wilhelm (she called him that in front of me) mentioned that you might get a job here in Bremen, I phoned a friend of mine, who wants to let a room in her house. She is also a widow and needs the money. But you can't cook there. You can leave your breakfast things, like bread and cheese and so on, in her kitchen on a tray. And you can't have a bath there either, but I'll show you where the public baths are. The rent will be DM 35 a month. That is quite reasonable, and you are going into a good house, you know! I hope you'll take it. Don't forget, Bremen had been badly bombed during the war and there's still a great shortage of homes here. Wolfgang and I have to make do with just this one room here, sharing kitchen and bathroom with others. Well, what do you think?"

"I'll take it, of course. Thank you very much for doing so much for me before we have even met."

"For Onkel Wilhelm's family I'll do anything." I thought she was rather fond of Onkel Wilhelm.

"First let's have something to eat. I'll take you over there after lunch, while Onkel Wilhelm can read the paper here."

It was a lovely lunch. She must have taken a lot of trouble preparing it. And where did she get all the coupons from, I wondered?

After lunch Frau von Guenther phoned her friend. She was there waiting for us. I took my pack and we walked around to No.8, Grossbeeren Strasse, not far from her flat. Frau Krech, my new landlady, showed me my room upstairs, above the entrance. Rather small, but it had all the necessary furniture. This was to be my home for the next two and a half years. Having received a key to the house, I suggested to take Frau von Guenther home so that I'd remember the way. When we arrived there I just said good-bye to Onkel Wilhelm and thanked him for all he had done for me that day. Frau von Guenther suggested that we might be seeing quite a bit of each other, which gave me some encouragement.

Slowly I walked to my new home. My head was buzzing. Back in my room I sat there absorbed in my thoughts. The day had been so full of events, that I had difficulty taking it all in. It had been overwhelming to be presented on a platter, a job, a room and a friend, all in one eventful day. What will the future be? Will I be happy, will I be sad? "Que sera, sera!" I hummed before me, the tune of a modern hit. Had I not been so tired, I would have jumped for joy, for this had been a good day for me indeed, and I thanked God for it.

I woke up to a dull old Sunday morning. Frau Krech showed me the space in the kitchen where I could keep my food. She also said that I could

not cook dinners there. She didn't mind the occasional egg or heat up some soup for lunch, and of course I could make myself tea. The bathroom had a place for my towel, but no hot water for a bath or shower.

There was enough money in my wallet to pay the month's rent in advance, and to buy bread, cheese, salami and milk. I loved that type of food and I was sure I was going to manage all right. Then I wrote a long letter home, giving them all the latest news.

Next morning I walked into the office at 7.50 am, where Meyer, the youngest apprentice, was already sorting out the mail, which he had picked up earlier at the post office. A pile of letters and little packages were on the front counter.

"Come right here, you can help me with the sorting," and he showed me what to do.

"On our second round we have to get all the wool samples from the Post Office. There is usually a lot on Mondays."

Meyer turned out to be a good instructor. My junior in years, he seemed delighted to hand over to me all the running and errands which traditionally the most recent apprentice had to do. He was very thorough, as a lot of responsibility went with the job. He said he would show me the job for the first week, and after that I would be on my own.

Meanwhile all the other employees had arrived. Ruhe entered as the clock was striking eight, to the general amusement of the others. Meyer cleared out the desk right next to the front counter and said: "This is yours, now. You have to answer the phone, and jump up every time someone appears at the door. The letters in this basket need to be filed. I'll show you later how to do it. But first let's do the round."

'Doing the round' meant to take letters and documents for the local banks, insurance and shipping companies and deliver them to their proper addresses, and then on the way back pick up the second mail. As we were leaving, Ruhe, the junior accountant, came to Meyer with some money. He wanted him to buy two buns for morning tea from the market.

After doing the round we stopped at the market. On three days a week there was market day. Hundreds of colourful stalls were set up filling the whole market square, and the whole population of Bremen seemed to be out shopping. It was a hurly burly I had not seen before, but I was quite fascinated by it. We bought the buns for Ruhe at a particular stall.

At the Post Office, Meyer handed in a card and we received a basket full of small wool sample rolls. We carried them in a neatly packed roll the size of a wheel kept together by a leather strap.

"This is yours now," he handed me the key to the letter box. "You know now where it is. You come here first before you go to the office, then on your round as we did now, and the last clearing is after lunch. Look after the key. If you lose it you will be in trouble."

The two of us were laden. How would I manage on my own? We took the samples straight to the sample room and left them there on the table.

The mail was sorted again as before and handed to the appropriate people. Ruhe got his buns. At long last we were able to rest our tired legs.

The phone rang, and for the first time I answered: "Wunder & Siemerling".

"Could I speak to Herrn Ruhe, please?"

"What do I do now?" I put my right hand over the mouth piece. "He wants to speak to Herrn Ruhe."

"Press the button next to Herrn Ruhe's name. Wait till he answers it, and then put down the receiver. It's as simple as that."

I had to agree, it was not too difficult, but there was a lot to remember. The incoming mail had to be stamped with a date-stamp with 14 empty boxes, and placed into a red basket. Everyone in the office had to initial it as proof that they had seen and read the letters. Then the basket went to Fräulein Mohrmann, who allocated them to the various employees. The green basket contained all copies of yesterday's outgoing mail. After everyone had initialed those, I had to file them.

There was a whole shelf of hard back spring opening files from 'A' to 'Z' each one with sub-divisions, practically for each client a separate section. In addition, some clients or suppliers had a separate file all for themselves. I needed to know which ones they were, and had to be meticulous in filing, strictly according to client and dates. Meyer took quite some time explaining and showing me the intricacies of the filing system.

Lunch time had to be taken in shifts. Meyer and I went on the early shift, so that we could be back by 1 pm. Most of the others went from 1-2 pm.

When we came back from lunch with the last mail for the day, there was a big hard covered folder on my desk.

"That's the out going mail," Heinz said. "Make sure the letters have been signed. Then you put them in their appropriate envelope, put a stamp on it, and leave it on your desk for posting tonight. Don't seal the envelopes yet, for there may be some more letters coming to the same address. We don't want to waste postage, do we?"

Throughout the afternoon letters were coming in. There were also rolls of wool samples. We had to type the addresses for those and then stick them on the outside, weigh them and fix the appropriate stamps on. A record had to be kept of all outgoing mail. Until I came to Bremen I had been writing Gothic script, as my first teacher, Fräulein Müller, had taught me, but from here on I only used Latin script.

On the dot of five everyone left the office, except Meyer and I. We still had to finish our mail before we could go. Often it would be another half hour, but if there was a market report, a circular to all our clients, we never made it before 6 pm. Then we took our leather straps with the samples, a big bag for the mail, and made for the Post Office.

"See you in the morning, and don't forget to pick up the mail first thing in the morning." Meyer had disappeared with a grin.

It had been a very long day. So many new things to remember. I was very tired. I went to search for the cheap eating place which had been recommended to me. Walking down the dark and deserted street I hoped it would not be too far to walk. Would I be able to afford a meal each night? I had worked out if I spent less than DM 1 a day I should be able to manage, but I couldn't afford to spend any more.

There was a menu in the window. One dish was for DM.0.70, one for DM.0.90 and a couple were for DM.1.20 and the most expensive cost DM.1.50. One could also have soups for DM.0.30 and sweets for the same price, but with my tight money situation, those were luxuries I couldn't afford.

I walked into the restaurant, ordered the cheapest meal, and found it quite satisfying. Well, at least I knew I could survive on that.

By the time I got home by tram, it was well past 8 pm. All I could think of was bed and sleep — what a hectic day!

Meyer was most helpful for the rest of the week. He walked with me on most errands, and didn't mind answering the same questions several times over. I found the filing rather difficult. I had to remember all the different names of firms and suppliers. Once I had filed a letter in the general section, when this particular client had a file on his own. Jürgen Siemerling gave me a blast in front of everyone.

The same applied for the mailing. It was most important that the letters and wool samples would go to the correct address. I can remember only once making a mistake, when a letter was returned, which had been wrongly addressed, but fortunately, it was not an important one. When there was a lot of mail, Weller, the senior apprentice, would also help. Especially Mondays when the overseas market reports from Kreglingers and Dewavrins came. Fräulein Meyer, the senior secretary, would type the reports on a stencil, then I had to duplicate it on a Gestetner. That was sometimes a very messy job, especially if the machine played up. But gradually I managed it quite well and the 120 copies were run off in no time. After that was done, they had to be put into envelopes. There was a special machine to print these, and it was advisable to do a batch of envelopes before the pressure was on. When the envelopes were ready for licking, we just spread them on my desk with the flap open and spaced them in such a way that only the gummed side of the flap was showing, between 10 and 20 envelopes at a time. Then we wiped a wet sponge over the lot, and folded the flap over one by one. The stamps were also stuck on the envelopes by tearing off a single row, running them over the sponge all at the same time, and placing one stamp on each envelope, tearing the perforation as we pressed down the stamp.

For special phone calls there was a sound-proof telephone booth in one corner of the main office. I noticed that Steinmetz, the man from the sales department, used it most. He must have had a lot of girl friends, for every time he emerged from it, he got booed. After I had been there for a few

days I noticed that there was quite a friendly atmosphere at the office. Quite a bit of teasing went on, and Fräulein Meyer liked to join in, in her jovial way.

Steinmetz often had very late nights. When he appeared blurry-eyed in the office in the mornings, he would sometimes disappear in the sample room and curl up in a bale of wool, where we threw out old wool samples. One day old Siemering came into the main office and asked in his husky voice:

“Where is Steinmetz?”

“We don’t know,” was the usual answer, but on that day it did not seem to satisfy old Siemering. He went looking for him everywhere until he found him curled up in one of the bales. He ordered him to come into the main office, and still with bits of wool hanging on his white dust coat, and still blurry-eyed, he got a dressing down from old Siemering in front of us all.

My financial situation had still not been resolved. I had received a letter from Vater, dated 5.10.49

“My dear Boy, I received a letter today from Mutter. She had talked with Onkel Wilhelm about financing your apprenticeship with Wunder & Siemering, and I have just finished, with a heavy heart, the letter to Tante Emma, to ask John or the firm Kreglinger through her, to send you \$US50 per month. I am asking you now, so that the letter goes quicker, to post this per air mail to Tante Emma ... Enclose also Oma’s letter and take a very light envelope, so that the letter will go per air mail. You can imagine how hard it has been for me to write this letter; It is hard that at the age of 56 I cannot even finance my son’s apprenticeship, so I had to decide to go on this “walk to Canossa”. If we do not get this help, you can still follow up the offer to go to England and commit yourself there for two years, but I wouldn’t like this. It would be really nice if you could do your apprenticeship at Wunder & Siemering. I hope you are gifted for this type of work and it measures up to your expectations and hopes. Have courage, I do hope you will succeed. Write soon how everything is and how you like it there. My thoughts are continuously with you. Remember to be careful with money. I think you could manage with much less than \$US50 per month. Farewell, God bless you, kiss from your Vater.”

Subsequently he urged me to work very hard and to remember the saying: “Lehrjahre sind keine Meisterjahre” (an apprentice is not his own master). I had to think of this saying many times, as I experienced hardships and deprivation. My meagre savings from Kerstlingerode and the money I had received from Vater ran out. I had to borrow money from Wunder & Siemering, in the hope that I would be able to repay them from money received from America. This uncertainty made me even more

careful with spending money. To pay 70 Pf. for the evening meal was sometimes too expensive. I just ended up having a bowl of soup for DM 0.30, whilst my nostrils picked up the aroma of a lovely meat dish and pudding from the neighbouring table, creating an almost irresistible craving for food. By then restaurants did not require food coupons, but until the beginning of January 1950 these were still required for butter. To save money on laundry, I had agreed with Mutter that once a fortnight she would wash all my laundry, which I sent over by parcel post, which cost only DM 0.60 for a small package.

I had booked evening classes for French and English, two nights each from 7 to 9 pm, which left me with three free nights, Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays. I used these to do my homework, write letters and visit Frau von Guenther. During office hours I had to attend classes for commercial apprentices where we were taught book-keeping, accountancy, basic commercial law and typing. I found the typing course the most useful, as I needed it daily in the office and I soon learnt touch-typing. With all these activities there was no spare time and absolutely no money for recreational purposes.

In mid-November I heard from Oma, that John Schmid, her nephew in America, had agreed to send me \$US25 per month for two years, but by the end of November the money had still not arrived. Finally by early December John had transferred the whole amount to Wunder & Siemering, with the request to pay me DM100 per month (the equivalent of \$US25). From then on I was guaranteed to receive DM150 per month, which was not extravagant, but I could live on it frugally. I was also able to pay back my debts.

My greatest wish, to go home for Christmas could now be realised. I had asked Vater to apply for an Interzonal Pass for me, which I received in time to book a seat on a bus to Magdeburg. As Fräulein Meyer wanted to spend Christmas in Berlin, we went together, and agreed to meet again in Magdeburg on our way home. We crossed the border at the Helmstedt Autobahn crossing on 23.12.49, and I arrived in Emersleben late that night.

What joy it was for everyone to see each other again! Most eventful months had passed since I had left and I had a lot to share with the family. Mutter had cooked a lovely Christmas dinner, and having had so little to eat over the past months, I enjoyed it particularly. They had also invited the Begrichs, the new pastor of the church, Frau Kleinschmidt and the Wenskes for my birthday. As it was to be my 21st, they were making a special fuss about it, and when I received a little parcel on the morning of the 26th, I had no idea what it could be.

"A ring!" I exclaimed, "with the family crest! What a wonderful surprise."

I could hardly believe my eyes. I had said sometime before, that I would love to get a ring with our family crest, but I had never thought that it

would be possible, especially in the East Zone.

"How did you manage to get such a beautiful ring made here in the East?"

"It wasn't easy, but we have all contributed," said Mutter.

"The gold is from Opa's teeth," Oma said with a shy smile. "You know, one never buries a person with all the gold still in his mouth, as it would only attract grave robbers. So they took it out in the hospital before the funeral and gave it to me. I'm sure you will honour him by wearing it."

"We bought the blood stone in Halberstadt, and Onkel Helmut took it to Halle to have it engraved."

"I can't tell you how happy you make me with this gift. I have always been proud to be a Tieman. When we lost Sapowice, I had no tangible reminder of my roots. This ring will now be the symbol of my identity, and I hope to wear it until the day I die."

"It comes with all our love." Vater kissed me and held me firmly in his arms.

As always, good times pass far too soon. New Year's Eve was still celebrated with the family, but at 8 am on New Year's Day I had to catch the train to Magdeburg. The bus with Fräulein Meyer arrived from Berlin, and we had a pleasant trip back to Bremen.

As work in the office seemed to have increased, the bosses had decided to engage a messenger. He took over from me all the running around to the post office, banks etc. With great relief I did 'the round' with him, and as Walter Meyer had done before for me, I assisted him for over a week, until he was well and truly trained to do the job. Every now and then I still had to do an errand, but it was nothing compared with before. I now had more time to get involved in the sample room, and Jürgen Siemering took me under his wing, and taught me much about wool tops (the combed wool sliver) and wool qualities.

Language courses started again and took most of my free time. By February 1950 I had saved up enough money from my meagre income to buy myself a bicycle. I had worked out that I would save more money in the long run by spending DM100 on a bike and always using it, rain or shine, instead of paying the fares for the tram. It would also be more convenient. It meant, of course, that I had to ride to my evening French and English classes as well. By then my social life consisted of the occasional dinner at Frau von Guenther's and her son Wolfgang, and a rare visit to the cinema. My time was spent working and learning, with very little time for anything else. Sundays were usually very lonely. I went a few times to church in the Dom (cathedral), but it did not appeal to me. Since I had my bike, I liked to go on a bike ride, either into the country side, or to the city and walk through those beautiful old lanes and places which had not been destroyed by the bombs. I always kept my eyes open for cheap eating places, as 'Ottilie' closed weekends and the usual restaurants were too expensive. Sometimes I would just have a plate of

soup for my meal. My staple food was bread and butter, and at weekends I would sometimes be extravagant and buy some luxuries like salami or ham, or cottage cheese. As that was quite nourishing, I did not miss a cooked meal too much.

Rolf Nissen, who had visited us in Emersleben from Berlin during the hunger period, lived now with his parents in Minden, about 100 km south of Bremen. He invited me to visit them there during the Easter holidays. It was great to be with a family again. We played a lot of table tennis and also went to the pictures. Because I had been so extremely busy in Bremen, I had not been aware of how much I had missed my brother or a close friend. This visit to Minden reminded me of how lonely I really had been all this time. I went back feeling even more lonely.

Spring was already in the air. Bremen had put on a new dress. Those big trees along the Schwachhauser Heerstrasse, which had often just dripped with condensed fog from their bare branches, burst into fresh green, and in gardens everywhere the most beautiful flowers appeared. It was a very pretty time of the year. The most magnificent display of colour was in the Bürger Park, where all the rhododendron and azaleas had burst into bloom. I had never seen anything like it before. Riding my bike through the streets of Bremen was a delight.

As I came back from Minden Fräulein Meyer said to me, "Why don't you join a tennis club if you are lonely? The evenings are much longer now, and it gives you something to do over the weekends. My club is 'Werder', it is not as expensive as other clubs. I can sponsor you, if you like."

"That sounds great, but I don't think that I can afford it. How much would it be to join?"

"Only DM50 per year, and DM30 joining fee."

"That is out of the question."

"With that you can play tennis all year, or at least as long as the weather allows it."

Where would I get DM80 from? I had saved up some since I had bought the bike, but not DM80.

"I haven't got DM80."

"You can pay the annual fee on instalment, only the joining fee must be paid in advance."

"Well, you have nearly persuaded me. But I have never played tennis before."

"Oh, don't worry about that. There is a coach and he can give you some lessons to start with."

"I'll have a look there tomorrow." More money, I thought, but what the heck.

I went to the club after work. The trainer, Herr Ramisch, was there and I talked to him about joining. He encouraged me to do so. He offered also to give me some coaching lessons.

"But I have never even held a racquet in my hand."

“That’s much better than if you had to unlearn some bad habits.”

“And how much is a private lesson?”

“For you it will be DM3. I suggest you take one lesson, then practice as much as you can, and a couple of weeks later I will give you another. Then you will be set up for a while.”

That sounded reasonable. There and then I decided to take the plunge. I had to buy a tennis racquet and some balls, and on 14 April 1950 I turned up for my first coaching lesson.

First Herr Ramisch showed me the basics, how to hold a racquet, how to swing my arm, forehand first, then back hand, and then he hit a ball to me. I was quite excited and enjoyed it very much, and I don’t think I did too badly on the first day. After the lesson, he suggested to practice with someone from the club. I didn’t think there would be anyone willing to play with such a novice as me, but there was.

Over the next few weeks I took six lessons in all, and enjoyed it very much. Fräulein Meyer was pleased that I had taken it up, and later on I even played a few games with her.

The major bonus to playing tennis was that I had something to do over the otherwise boring weekends. The club also provided some cheap meals, like fried eggs and fried potatoes, so I spent most weekends from then on at the club.

My social life changed too. By playing tennis with whoever needed a partner, I also met some nice people of my own age, or slightly older. One business man took a group of us in his car on a tour through Carlshaven, Pymont and Hameln, along the river Weser, during the Whitsunday holidays. It was a lovely time of the year with the vegetation all out in fresh green. Standing on top of the Porta Westfalica, overlooking the deep gorge the river Weser had carved out of the mountain range over thousands of years, reminded me of the battles that had been fought in the plains below for many centuries. Battles won and lost by ordinary people. A shudder crept down my spine, and not only because of the height. Many young and innocent lives had been lost because of the selfishness and insatiable greed of those who held power over the poor. I didn’t care for such power and hoped I would never be part of it.

In Bremen life continued its hectic pace until the summer holidays. It was a relief not to be going to evening classes, and so I spent most evenings playing tennis.

We had another school reunion which took place during the first weekend in July, this time in Hameln. I met Bernd there, and it was good to see him again after such a long time, also the other friends from the boarding house.

The shorter evenings in August at the club house meant that members started to drink earlier, and some of my friends tried to get me into their drinking circle. As I didn’t enjoy drinking as much as they did, and didn’t have the money to waste anyway, I lost quite a few friends. I found them

to be very selfish. The people of Bremen seemed to me stiff, formal and conventional. They were steeped in their tradition of trade and had — what I had found surprising — a rather narrow outlook on life. For newcomers like me to be accepted by them would have been rather exceptional, and so I always felt an outsider in Bremen. Nevertheless I was glad that I had joined the tennis club. It gave me a lot of pleasure and it kept me fit. It was back to the grindstone, though, when the tennis season was over, and language lessons started again.

This meant again hard work during the day and studies in the evenings. It was not as bad, though, as the previous winter. Hugo Deiters, another friend I had met at tennis, invited me for a weekend to his home in Ibbenbüren, near Osnabrück. He was learning commerce in Bremen, and we both went to the same course at the Chamber of Commerce for book keeping and accountancy, but he had nothing to do with the wool trade. His father owned a large flour mill and appeared very rich. Hugo invited me to come home with him for a weekend. We went by train. I was reminded of our weekends in Sapowice, when we came home from Posen. There was a similar atmosphere of expectation.

We were met by a driver in a big car. Their home was a large country manor. His father was very kind and welcomed me into his family. His mother had died recently. We talked about lots of things, and he wanted to know about my back ground. So I told him. He seemed very touched by my story, and when he heard that we also used to hunt at home, his eyes began to shine.

“Hunting is one of my passions. Hugo likes it too. We often go out hunting. I have bought the hunting rights on a large area, and in winter we arrange big shoots.”

I thought the weekend was a great success. Hugo was pleased that his family accepted me so well, and before we left for Bremen, Herr Deiters said: “Hugo and I had a chat together. Hugo is very keen to go skiing this winter, but I don’t want him to be on his own. Would you accept an invitation from us to join him, everything paid for, of course.”

I was stunned. To go skiing in the Austrian Alps, and everything paid for!

“Are you sure you want to invite me?” I felt so silly, but I didn’t know what to say.

“Of course. You get on so well with Hugo. You would do us a favour.”

“A favour? How can I refuse when you put it so nicely. Of course I would love to go with Hugo. You are most kind. I don’t know how I could ever thank you for it.”

On the train back to Bremen we had a lot to talk about. Hugo needed some skiing gear, and so did I. He had been given plenty of money to buy all necessary clothes, including a pair of skis each. It was unbelievable. I had been skimping all this time, as I simply couldn’t afford anything extra, and here I was on a shopping spree, to buy expensive ski gear. My excitement infected Hugo too, and we both were looking forward to our

fortnight in February next year.

There was another pleasant surprise awaiting me, before winter set in. Our bosses hired a bus and took us all to Travemünde, by the Baltic Sea, where we could swim, had a lovely dinner and a fling at the casino. It certainly had helped to improve the atmosphere at the office.

I was still the junior at the office, but Jürgen Siemering wanted me to get more involved with wool tops, which was his department. At the beginning of the new wool season in Australia, on the 28.8.50, prices had made an unprecedented jump upwards. As the war in Korea had worsened, wool prices went through the roof. It had always been said that the wool price index is an indicator for the political situation in the world. This price rise proved it to some extent. As the war escalated even further, it became more difficult to buy wool. Jürgen Siemering had a good nose for business, and so he ordered 200 bales of greasy wool from Australia. He had it shipped immediately and consigned to the Bremer Woll Kämmerei, for sorting, scouring and combing for our firm. By the time the tops were ready, prices had increased four or five fold and our firm made stacks of money from it. I had my first experience of seeing greasy wool being sorted and I liked it. The smell of sheep reminded me of my farming days, which seemed a long time ago.

Mutter came to visit me in October. She was able to stay at Frau von Guenther's and I showed her Bremen and all the famous sights. It was so nice to have her there and I think she was pleased with what she saw.

As Wunder & Siemering have had a good year, everybody in the firm received a parcel as a Christmas bonus. When I opened mine there was a suit-length of the finest worsted woollen cloth, black with a fine silver pin stripe, woven by the famous firm of Nickel & Müller. I had never seen anything like it in my life, let alone handled it or called it my own. Such cloth was extremely scarce even then, and I was very pleased with it. I went to a taylor, recommended by Frau von Guenther, who made it into a double breasted suit, which lasted for over thirty years.

My plans for going to Emersleben for Christmas 1950 did not look very promising. The Russians had closed the border to stop an ever increasing flow of people from east to west. Conditions in the east had become more and more intolerable. We had heard of arrests, of shooting of illegal border crossers, and it seemed that I would not be able to see my parents for Christmas that year. However, as I found out eventually, there was one way left. I had to go via Berlin. Berlin was still administered by the four occupying forces, and the border between East Berlin and the rest was not controlled. Fräulein Meyer wanted to visit her friends in Berlin again, so I joined her on the bus from Bremen to Berlin. Once we had arrived in West Berlin, I caught a suburban train to the east sector and from there to Halberstadt. Between the east sector of Berlin and the east zone there was no border control. I arrived safely in Emersleben and was very pleased to celebrate Christmas again with the family.

The return journey also went smoothly. Back to Berlin east sector, then across to the west sector by tram, and by a locked train through the zone back to Bremen. Along the east zone we could see a lot of Russian military. A very thorough check of everyone at the border town of Marienborn was an omen of things to come. Soon the queues at the border were to get longer and longer, until the Russians closed the border altogether. The blockade of Berlin had begun.

The 3rd of February 1951 could not come early enough for me. My first proper holiday, and all expenses paid!

We left Bremen about 4 pm. The express train took us via Hannover, Würzburg, München to Salzburg, where we arrived at 6.30 am the next morning. The train was crowded, and I remembered many years earlier a similar train ride to the south, only then it was to the Tatry mountains in Poland, whereas now it was to the Austrian Alps. We arrived in Salzburg on a frosty morning and saw plenty of snow on the ground. From there we caught a bus to Obertauern. The hotel was large and first class. Hugo and I shared a room, overlooking the mountains. It looked like a fairy land. Everything completely covered in snow, as far as the eye could see.

We quickly changed into our skiing gear, forgetting all tiredness. Then we went down to the office to make some enquiries about skiing instructions. They had two courses, one for beginners, one for advanced. As Hugo had not skied before, I wanted to keep him company at the beginners course, but he insisted that I go into the advanced course. I was really glad, because we went every day on excursions, whereas Hugo had to practice first on the beginners slope, but not for long. In the second week we were together in the same group. A young lady attached herself to us, she had been in Hugo's course, and we did quite a number of excursions together. In those days there was only one ski lift for the whole valley. We never used it. We had to earn the down hill rides by laboriously climbing up the mountains. But going down hill was a special thrill. On one particular excursion we reached the ridge of the mountain, where a cold wind was blowing. We could see far down below a building. Our instructor pointed it out to us and said: "We are heading to that small cafe there. You are on you own. Ski Heil."

The cafe turned out to be one of those Austrian places, where you could buy anything from a stiff gin to the most delicious Austrian cakes. They called it apres ski — after ski, and our group came shooting down the hill in just a few minutes, the instructor last. The joy of down hill skiing made up for the hard climb, which had taken a couple of hours.

On our last day, a Professor and experienced skier promised to take us to the top of Zehnerkar Spitze. There was still heavy fog all around when we set out in the morning. We couldn't see where we were going. The Prof said: "Just follow me, I know the way."

There was nothing else we could do. The climb was steep, the weather freezing, and neither Hugo nor I really enjoyed it. But we kept going.

Suddenly, a sheer rock rose up before our eyes, the tip all still in fog.

"We need to leave our skis here. From now on its climbing in your boots."

We looked at each other, even less enthusiastic than before. But the Prof kept encouraging us: "Believe me, if the fog lifts it is really worth while."

So we followed, tired, step after step, seeking a hold for our hands and our legs. The Prof ahead of us, followed by Hugo, and I made up the rear. Then there was, what seemed to me, a narrow ridge to cross. With the fog on both sides I couldn't see more than a few meters either side. We continued climbing. Finally we saw some jagged rocks before us and there was no more to climb. We had reached the peak. Fog was still all around us. We settled down and unpacked our lunch. I had not realised how hungry I had become with all that climbing.

As we were munching, suddenly the sun broke through the fog. A glorious blue sky, and below us a sea of clouds. Slowly the clouds disappeared. The view was absolutely breath taking. Way down below we could see Obertauern and our hotel. Around us there were other peaks, and many more peaks in the distance, with some valleys still holding tufts of clouds. We became completely still, taking in this experience, and I thought of the almighty God who had created this wonderful world. A wonderful calm came over me. There had never been, in all my life, anything surpassing that mountain top experience. We could only thank our Professor for persevering with us and for allowing us to climb with him. We would have never made it on our own.

The way down was far more difficult than the way up. I had the jitters when I saw how steep the rocks were, but sheer determination pushed me on. The ridge before, with clouds on either side, became an even narrower ridge, with precipices of more than hundred meters on either side. How could I get across there? I can't stay here until night, I thought, so I had better move on. Hugo encouraged me from the other side, and slowly, ever so slowly I crawled across the ledge on all fours. Eventually we reached the place where we had left our skis.

From then on it was skiing down hill, yippee! We certainly left a most wonderful holiday on a high note with this unforgettable experience.

Next morning we took the bus again to Salzburg. There we stayed in a hotel overnight and did quite a bit of sight seeing. Most of the snow had already melted, which seemed strange to us, having just arrived from up in the mountains, where everything was still in deep winter. We visited the Salzburger Festival Hall, Mozart's home, and the king's castle. Salzburg is a pretty town, and we were sorry that we couldn't stay longer. Sunday night we caught the train at 7.30 pm via München (Munich) again, and arrived in Bremen at 2.30 pm on Monday.



The following weekend I helped Frau von Guenther and Wolfgang move into a newly built two room flat, a great improvement from their previous one room shared flat. They seemed very happy in their new surrounding.

On Jürgen Siemering's prompting, I started a wool classing course on 2 April at the Bremer Woll Kämmerei, a combing mill in Bremen Lesum. I went there by bus each day and was assigned to one woman classer, who taught me the different types of wool. She had about ten baskets around her sorting table. Each fleece was spread over the table and if it had been classed properly in the country of origin, the quality was assessed and the whole fleece put into the appropriate basket. But more often than not the classing had not been according to German standards, and some pieces had to be down graded, and we had to see that the quality always remained the same. It was an excellent way of learning wool quality, that is to see a difference for example between wool with a diameter of 21 microns and 22 microns.

Among the other participants of the course were a lot of young people from all over the world, like Belgium, France, England, Argentina, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. They wanted to familiarise themselves with German worsted mill standards and requirements. Many of them came from the wool selling countries, who were learning to become wool buyers. During my three month course I had the opportunity to see wool from all four countries Germany imported wool from — Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and South America. In the end I could tell the country of origin in most cases. I could also practice my English and French on the others, and I felt the time spent had been well worth while.

Towards the end of April the tennis season opened again, and most weekends would see me playing. I took a couple of more coaching sessions with Herr Ramisch, and my tennis had improved to such an extent that I was encouraged to enter the club tournament. I didn't do too well, though, as my first game was against a seeded player.

For the Pentecost holidays I had been invited by Onkel Wilhelm to Dahlhausen, where I also had the opportunity to have a long chat with Onkel Rudolf Hardt, the boss of Hardt, Pocorny & Co., and cousin of Opa Tieman. He and Tante Marie were most kind to me. He had always been very conscious of our family ties, and welcomed his grand nephew with open arms. "Why don't you come to Hardt Pocorny as part of your training to see how wool is spun into knitting yarn, Dieter," he asked?

"That's a great idea," I said. "Do you think that would be possible?"

"Everything is possible if you want to. I'll have a word to Onkel Wilhelm and we will see what we can do."

I was quite excited. To learn in a worsted yarn spinning mill would give me an edge on selling tops at a later stage.

"Do you think I could also look into the worsted spinning mill of Johannes Wülfig & Co, as they spin yarn for weaving, and also do the weaving themselves?"

“Why not?” said Onkel Rudolf, “I’ll have a word to Armgard’s husband Viv.” Armgard was Tante Margaret’s sister.

During my absence at Wunder & Siemering, the young Wilhelm Wunder had come back from England and South Africa and it became clear that the two junior partners were unable to get on with each other. It had been decided then that the firm would divide on 1 August into Wunder & Sohn and Aug. Siemering & Co. When I heard the news I was very disappointed. On the one hand my loyalty was to Wunders through their connection with Kreglinger, but I had a much better rapport with Jürgen Siemering. All the employees were given the choice which firm to join. Reluctantly I had to choose Wunder & Sohn, because of their Kreglinger connections.

Whilst still in Blumenthal I received an invitation to a ball of the Bremen Nobility Club, mostly refugees from East Germany. There I met Kurt von Heyking and a couple of girls. For a little while I took one of them out, going to the pictures, on bike rides, usually with Kurt and his girl friend, but it didn’t last very long. It was good to go back to playing tennis after that. Hugo also played tennis and we often played singles together.



Vater and Mutter on 26/11/51 (Silver Wedding Anniversary)

In October he invited me to come to his home again for a weekend, as a shoot had been arranged by his father. For me it was a feast of nostalgia. Memories flooded back, I thought of Günter, how he loved the hunt, and our lost home. In the evening we showed our photos from our ski trip to Hugo's father and told him about the wonderful time we had together in the snow. He seemed pleased that we had enjoyed it so much.

After we both had finished our accountancy course and had sat for the exams, Hugo went back home to pursue his career, and we lost touch with one another.

In November I was able to go for a quick visit to Emersleben, again officially with an interzonal pass, to celebrate my parents' silver wedding anniversary on 26 November. Many guests from family and friends came for this celebration.

Looking towards my future in the wool trade in Bremen, I thought it would be important to have a drivers licence. I took lessons with a driving school, as no private tutors were allowed to teach driving in Germany. The minimum lessons were six, and as my finances were still very tight, I had to be successful at the final driving test. I took my first lesson on 15 December and the last on 5 January 1952 and luckily passed the test on 7 January.

Christmas 1951 was to be the last time I spent in Emersleben, again with an interzonal pass, which was increasingly more difficult to obtain. The relationship between east and west Germany had turned from bad to worse. Under Russian pressure the border between the East and West zone was permanently closed in the spring of 1952. Churchill had referred to this event as 'an Iron Curtain had descended between East and West'. Barbed wire fences had been erected with watch towers every so often, and a strip of about 20 meters width had been ploughed right next to the fence so that the guards, who were all equipped with sniffer dogs, would be able to immediately detect any illegal attempts at border crossings. They also received orders to shoot to kill. The only place where people could still cross from East to West was in Berlin.

I didn't know it then, but Christmas 1951 was also the last time I was to see Oma. She had written to me on 11/9/51 about a letter she had received from her sister, Tante Emma, who had suggested that I should come to Boston as part of my training, and then live at her place. Tante Emma also wrote about a certain Jean Beaurang who had married a grand daughter of their cousin. He worked for the Kreglinger firm in Sydney, Australia, and Tante Emma thought it would be good for me to spend a few years there in the wool trade.

Oma's last letter to me is dated 22.1.52. She seemed happy that my future looked somewhat clearer, and that I would be going to Onkel Rudolf in Dahlhausen. She expressed grave concern about rumours she had heard, that conscription had been introduced in West Germany. "Couldn't you two (Bernd and I) get out of it somehow? It is senseless to

sacrifice one's life and blood for the Americans. What do you think?" These rumours were not true. Very soon after this she must have become ill and had to go to the Halberstadt hospital, where she died from pneumonia on 20 February 1952, a day before her 85th birthday. I was not able to attend her funeral, which was held on 23 February by Pastor Siegfried Begrich. Her grave is next to Oma Beyme's in the church yard in Emersleben.

Oma had meant a great deal to me. She was the kindest person I had known. She would never say anything bad about anybody, or gossip. Her upbringing in Antwerp was that of a patrician lady, who had learnt about entertaining people in her home, about running a household, but this did not include cooking or such mundane work. She never learnt it either later on in her life. She was intelligent, well read and interested in talking about music, the arts, and literature. She had a deep faith and I don't remember her ever missing church, unless there were good reasons. Her love to us as her grand-children was unstinting, selfless and without bounds. We trusted her completely. When Opa would tease us, we would always go to Oma and check whether what he had said was true. She would never tell us a lie. While in Emersleben, I particularly enjoyed a wonderful relationship with her. Coming home from school, I would go into her room, and we would talk for a long time together, about things at school, or about friends or matters that concerned me. She would always listen to me and have time for me. Looking back over all those years, I realise that I had a deeper relationship with Oma than I had with Mutter. With Mutter I would often clash, but never with Oma. Oma was very selfless and modest in her needs. She never made demands. Typical of her character is her 'Last Will and Wish' dated September 1947:

"To my beloved sons and daughters.

I would like to ask you to consider these my last wishes, provided you consider them just and correct; but you are free to alter them according to your consideration.

I bequeath to Alfred & Ilse: the silver box which stands under my bed, the fur coat and all jewellery except those mentioned below. (Margaret has already received her portion).

Werner & Margaret: the complete coffee and tea set with the large tray. The silver fox fur stole.

Bernd: a set of 6 large and 6 small silver cutlery together with the serving spoons and forks (all engraved S.K.)

Wolf Dieter: the small silver tray, 12 coffee spoons, 6 cake forks and spoons.

Gerda: my (gold watch, the silver bowl which we received for our golden wedding) this was crossed out and replaced with: chain of pearls, the broach with the horse shoe and pearls, 6 cake forks and spoons.

My sister Emma: the chain of pearls (this was crossed out)

My cousin Gertrud Schmidt: a good dress or coat, some small things (but no jewellery).

Fräulein Lina: The small broach (bee), one dress, lingerie (nighties) towels.

Marthe Oboussier: two table clothes with 18 serviettes marked S.K. (because she had lost so much through me) (this was crossed out) already received.

Jetty Oboussier: my gold thimble which I had received for my wedding from her great-grand mother.

Please share all linen amongst yourselves.

I wish that my funeral be as simple and as cheap as possible. The word from scripture: "I know that my redeemer lives" could perhaps be mentioned at my grave side. Your Mutter."



Back in Bremen I didn't like the atmosphere in the divided firm. The only consolation was a new secretary, Herta Duwe, whom I took out occasionally. We had to be careful that no one in the office would find out, as such a thing was frowned upon (you do not go out with a secretary from the office!).

My apprenticeship at the firm was to terminate on 31 March 1952. Wunder & Sohn had offered me a position as wool tops sales person, but I felt that I wasn't ready yet, though I could have done with the money. I still wanted to learn more about the spinning side of business, and as Onkel Rudolf had offered to help me, I wrote to him a letter on 19 March.

"Wunder & Sohn will take me on as employee as from 1 April. My overseas plans have all come to naught, except Australia, which still has not been decided, but I may need a lot of patience with that. Herr Wunder agreed that if I get an apprenticeship, he will give me unpaid holidays, and I can go back to him afterwards."

On 25 March 1952 I received an invitation from Onkel Rudolf Hardt to come for three months to Dahlhausen to the firm of Hardt Pocorny & Co as an extension of my training. He kindly offered to pay me DM.100 per month and a room in a house nearby.

I said good-bye to Kurt and my other friends. I was not sorry to leave Bremen, as I had never felt at home there, in spite of the wonderful friends I had made over the last two and a half years. My one hope was to go to Australia, and a meeting with Mr. Beaurang had been arranged for the time I was staying in Dahlhausen. I had hoped that I would not need to go back to Bremen. In any case I had grown tired of my room with no

heating and no cooking facilities. If I had to come back I wanted to live somewhere else. Jürgen Siemering had indicated earlier that he might employ me. That was another iron in the fire. But why worry about something that lay in the future. I packed my bags on Easter Monday, 14 April 1952, and left for Dahlhausen.

Dahlhausen interlude

Leaving the industrial part of Wuppertal behind, the train wound its way along the river Wupper in the direction of Radevormwald. After the densely populated area of the Ruhr valley and Wuppertal itself, the river had become a steady flowing stream, overshadowed by leafy trees, giving me the impression of a dense forest. Only the number of stops along the way reminded me that I was still in an industrial area. Each station bore the name of a mill, either spinning, weaving or dye mill. I was in the heart of a textile industry, which no doubt had sprung up because of the clear waters of the river Wupper. It was due to the foresight and planning of the local industrialists, who had left a wide strip of forest along the river, to keep its waters clear and unpolluted.

Dahlhausen emerged out of the trees. I left the train and walked the short way to the stately building of Onkel Rudolf Hardt and Tante Marie, right past the mill of Hardt, Pocorny & Co. I was greeted warmly by my great-uncle, with his lovely Rhineland accent: "Welcome to Dahlhausen. I hope you will be happy with us here. I've organised a room for you in the house just at the entrance to the garden on your right. You must have walked past it, as you came in. Onkel Wilhelm Forstmann, (Mutter's first cousin, who had owned a property called Porthof, situated next to Strykowo in Poland), and Tante Margaret, (Onkel Rudolf Hardt's daughter), live with us here in this house. They have separate quarters though, and their entrance is just around our house from the back. You should be able to get on with your cousins, although they are much younger than you. Klaus is just 17, Erhard 14 and Ulrich nine.

"Now to some practical matters. You can get your meals like lunch and dinner at the canteen of the firm during working days. Weekends you might be invited by the Forstmanns or by us. In any case, we won't let you starve."

"You are very kind, Onkel Rudolf."

"That's the least we can do for a Tieman. You know that your grandfather and I were cousins?"

"Yes."

"Well, and now you are here with us, all among the family. Will you be able to look after yourself for breakfast?"

"Of course, I have always done that. That's no problem."

"I have asked the accountant of Hardt, Pocorny & Co. to pay you a monthly allowance of DM100 per month. Will that be enough?"

"Yes, that is fine, thank you very much Onkel Rudolf."

"Well, if you would like to say hello to the Forstmanns, I'll show you a shortcut through the house. Oh, and tomorrow you will be our guest. Tante Marie and I want to go to the Aggertal. We'll show you a bit of our beautiful Bergisches Land. Would you like to come?"

"Very much so, thank you."

I was overwhelmed. So much kindness and the feeling of being part of the family. I knew I would be happy here. The Forstmanns were also happy to welcome me, and invited me straight away to come for the meals over the weekend.

On 17 April I met the factory manager at Hardt Pocorny & Co. He had already prepared a roster for me. He stressed that I had to go through all the different branches of the factory, without missing one, so that I'd get a complete overview of things. I started at the design office. Hardt Pocorny & Co was producing mainly knitting wool under the name of 'Ilse Wolle'. The designers had to be up to date with the latest fashion, or rather they had to be ahead, to produce wool which customers would want to buy in about six months time. Onkel Wilhelm had anticipated a boom in knitting wool, as television had recently been introduced into Germany. His theory was that the women folk would sit and watch TV and have plenty of time to knit at the same time. I do not know whether his forecast ever came true.

The designer gave me a finished piece of worsted yarn and asked me to analyse it according to the colour mix and the proportion of each colour. It was almost like forensic work, painstaking and detailed, sorting out each colour component, but I enjoyed it.

After a week I went to the dye-house where mostly tops, the combed wool slivers, or sometimes the ready yarns, were dyed. It was quite a complicated procedure, as the dyes had to be fixed with heat and then cooled off and rinsed so that the colours would not run. I also learnt here that the firm had prepared a holding weir for their dirty water that came out of the factory, mainly from the dye-house, before it was released back into the Wupper. As there were so many manufacturers dependent on clean water further down stream, no one could afford to pollute the water for their neighbours.

The tops came on to a mixing machine after they had been dyed. Different colours of wool tops were brought together through a combing machine, according to pre-set proportions. I remembered my work at the designer's office and understood what this section was on about. At the same time the top sliver was reduced to about half its previous thickness, and on another machine it was stretched again and then spooled onto bobbins, which would then go on the actual spinning machine.

Each spinning machine could hold about 20 to 30 bobbins, which had

to be twisted initially by hand and wound on each spool. When all were connected, the machine was turned on and the spools began to turn rapidly, adding the yarn on to the spool. When a bobbin ran out of wool, it had to be replaced by hand with a full bobbin. It took quite some skill to join the sliver in such a way that it wouldn't show in the yarn, and the women working there were all experts in their field.



I at Dahlhausen (mixing tops)

When that was done, the yarn was twisted and twined, to make for instance 4-ply or 8-ply knitting wool. The yarn was then wound on wheel like bobbins. These were put into a conditioner, before the wool was taken off the bobbins and twisted into skeins and a paper wrapper went around each skein with the label "Ilse Wolle".

I found the whole manufacturing process most interesting. The women had to be meticulously clean, as any fluff flying around would contaminate the yarn and render it faulty. The humidity in the factory had to be kept fairly high at all time, to avoid static electricity forming. This made working conditions sometimes quite unpleasant for the workers, but they never grumbled. The pay was good and they were treated well by the management.

Hardt Pocorny & Co specialised in the manufacture of knitting wools only. A factory in the neighbouring village Dahlerau, the firm of Johann Wülfing & Sohn, had a worsted spinning mill, producing a finer yarn for weaving. This also belonged to the family, and I was given the opportunity to go through the processing of that firm for four weeks. The yarn they manufactured was for their weaving mill in Remscheid-Lennep,

another branch of the firm which I visited for two weeks.

This most modern mill produced cloth for suits and frocks. In spite of the exceedingly high noise of the weaving looms, I found the work there most interesting. As no one wore ear muffs, most weavers were totally deaf by the time they retired. A punch card preset the weaving pattern, by lifting different frames through which the warp had been threaded or lowering them according to the design. The shuttle with the weft shooting across the width of the cloth made the loud noise. There were two weaving looms working exclusively on patterns. A very large number of combinations were tried out, from which the designer chose only a few for their autumn or winter collection. If he had correctly anticipated the fashion trend, the firm would make a lot of sales. Quality control also had to be meticulous. The ready cloth was pulled over a glass surface with a strong light behind, to expose any possible faults, broken threads, or fluffy yarns, and all had to be repaired so that no fault could be seen. Usually only two or three bolts of about 50 meters of the same cloth were produced. Wülfig did not go in for mass production, but rather for quality. They catered more for individual customers.

During the Pentecost long weekend (30 May to 2 June), I took myself off on a hitch-hiking tour along the Rhine and the Mosel Valleys. I didn't have any problems getting lifts, and I thoroughly enjoyed seeing the old castles along the Rhine and Mosel. It was exciting to actually see all those places, whose names I had only read on labels of wine bottles before. I went as far as Trier to visit Bernd, who lived with his aunt and uncle Junkermann, his mother's sister. He had a job there in a building firm and showed me around the beautiful, old city of Trier with its Roman remains.

I was fortunately still there when the whole firm closed down for their annual picnic on 8 August. Buses carried all staff and workers to Köln (Cologne), where a Rhine steamer had been hired. The trip went up the Rhine, past Koblenz and St.Goar to Bacharach. In this beautiful old village, terraced above the Rhine, we were led into one of those famous hotels, where the wine was flowing freely and a most magnificent dinner was served. We had a lovely view of the Rhine, and the jolly and relaxed atmosphere was typical of the people of the Rhineland. Everybody had a wonderful time.

By the time we made our way back to Köln on the steamer, it was already getting dark. If anything, this increased the merrymaking, and the passengers were singing and dancing all the way back to Köln. The busses arrived back in Dahlhausen well after midnight. People in the Rhineland certainly knew how to be happy and amuse themselves. It was as if the wine were in their blood, even before they started drinking it.

Onkel Rudolf and his family went occasionally to concerts in Wuppertal. Sometimes I was invited to go with them in their Mercedes 300, in those days undoubtedly the poshest car in Germany, which he steered deftly through the narrow streets. The Forstmanns also had a car,

but with their three sons there wasn't too much space for me in the back, and so it was that I mostly rode with Onkel Rudolf and Tante Marie in their car.

The Forstmanns were also most hospitable to me. Their home and family was like my own home and family, and I spent wonderful days with them. Besides his full-time work as a buyer at Hardt Pocorny, Onkel Wilhelm also owned a timber yard in Mönchen Gladbach. While I was there, he offered my cousin Bernd a position with that firm, which he accepted. When Bernd came to visit me one day on his motor bike, he introduced me to his girl friend Ingrid Bardt. I had met her and her sister Daudi as a child in Zakopane, the ski resort in Poland. They were to be married in October of 1953.

While I stayed in Dahlhausen I had hoped I would hear from Kreglingers, the wool firm in Antwerp, about going to Australia for them. I had written to Tante Emma, Oma's sister in the USA, already in 1951 expressing my wish to go abroad, and Oma had written to her cousin, Onkel Albert, but until then I had heard nothing positive about it. The appointment with Mr. John Beaurang from Kreglinger's Sydney office had been fixed for 16 July 1952 in the hotel in Düsseldorf, where I met him together with a Mr. Denduits, from Kreglinger's Antwerp office. I had breakfast with them in one of the poshest hotels in Düsseldorf. I felt that this meeting would be a mere formality, as Onkel Albert Kreglinger had written to my parents in March 1952, that for the sake of Oma's memory he would pay my fare to Australia. However, the visit did not turn out as I had expected.

I felt I didn't have any problem with the English language, though Mr. Beaurang thought otherwise. He didn't tell me this to my face, though, but I heard through Tante Emma later on, that this is what he reported back. During our conversation, which was all in English, Mr. Beaurang asked me: "Do you know all the Australian government wool types?"

I had to admit, "No, but can't I learn those quickly?"

He only smiled. That was obviously not good enough. He reported to Onkel Albert, that I did not know enough wool, and so he could not employ me in Sydney. Later I heard that he didn't really want to employ me anyway, as he had enough young people from France and Belgium, and he had his doubts how I as a German would fit in with the others. But he had to justify himself before Onkel Albert (and Tante Emma), who obviously had put some pressure on him on my behalf. After the interview he could report that he had tried, but that I wasn't good enough. This was quite a blow to my ego, and especially for my future plans. I really didn't want to go back to Bremen. I didn't like the place. I would have given anything to be posted to Sydney for Kreglinger's, but ... it was not to be.

What could I do now? I thought I would write to Bremen first and find out from Frl. Meyer, the senior secretary of Herr Wunder, what the

situation was like at their firm. I still thought it would be better to work with a Kreglinger-related firm. She wrote back and said they had no opening for me. They had taken on someone else in my place. That was a second blow, for when I had left I was given to understand that I could work for them.

Finally I phoned Jürgen Siemering to tell him that I would like to work for him. He asked me to come to his office and talk things over with him. On 11 August, I made a quick trip to Bremen with a truck of the firm and came back with a firm contract in my pocket. My first proper job! I was ever so happy to be independent from then on. My gross salary was to be DM.300 monthly, plus DM.0.01 p.kg commission on all wool tops sold by me. In addition there was DM.1 per day towards lunch for the days I was not travelling. Working hours: Mondays to Fridays 8 am to 5 pm and Saturdays 8 am to 1 pm. Holidays: 1 day per month and, although this was not written in the contract, I was told that I was going to get the firm's car for business only. Starting day: 1 September 1952.

I left Dahlhausen on 30 August, with a grateful heart for all the love and care I had received there from the extended family. They took me in as one of their own and I had never felt excluded or unwanted. They always showed concern for my parents, as the situation in East Germany was getting more and more intolerable. They wanted to know when my parents and Gerda would come to West Germany, not if they would come. I conveyed this to them in cryptic terms, as I felt that they were already in real danger, and any open correspondence about leaving the east zone, could have meant the end for them.

CHAPTER 17

BREMEN

Working and Searching

My second stay in Bremen was to be happier than my first one. I knew what it was like, and I wanted to change the things that had depressed me before. I needed a room which could be heated in winter, and one with some cooking facilities. In 1952 it was still difficult to get a room in Bremen, but I hoped that Frau von Guenther would help me again. There was also the awful feeling at weekends, that I didn't belong anywhere, always on the lookout for a suitable restaurant for a meal somewhere. During the tennis season it was better, but for the rest of the year this loneliness was horrible. To my relief, Frau von Guenther said that I could come to them for a meal on Sundays for a nominal fee. That was wonderful. She also offered to put me up in her flat until I found a suitable room.

I arrived back in Bremen on 30 August 1952 and stayed for the first ten days with Frau von Guenther. Then I moved into a room in Park Strasse, where the rent was only DM.37 p.m. But this room could not be heated, so I kept looking for another one. A month later I found what I was looking for, a nice room, with a washbasin with hot and cold water, and always heated. It was in the Georg Gröning Strasse, quite close to Frau von Guenther, and the monthly rent was DM.55 p.m., including heating. My landlady was Frau Häseker, married with two school children. She was warm and friendly, and it seemed that she lived a fairly busy social life.

Work at Aug. Siemering & Co started on Tuesday, 2 September. The office was situated in Railway street a couple of blocks from the railway station. I knew most employees from the time of Wunder & Siemering, except for Herr Schulpig, who was in charge of scoured wool, and Fischer, the new apprentice. They all greeted me warmly and made me feel welcome.

"This is your desk," Jürgen pointed to the one standing right next to the teleprinter, facing the desk of Schulpig.

"You will use this new machine probably quite a lot, as most of our clients have a teleprinter now and our offers are usually passed on

through it. I will show you later how it works. If Tourcoing comes — the place in France, where Dewavrin & Fils, their main overseas supplier had their office — you have to call me, unless it is a routine message with new prices.”

His office was located at the other end of the main office, with a large desk and some comfortable lounge chairs.

After Jürgen had finished the introductions, and I had seen everything there was in the office, I sat at my desk and thought:

‘Here I am, having jumped from an apprentice to wool tops sales, accountable to Jürgen Siemering only! Is this real, or am I dreaming?’

I also heard that Jürgen’s father August had died in July 1952, only a couple of months earlier.

It was not difficult to settle into my work. I soon became quite competent on the teleprinter, and sent offers directly to the prospective buyers. I had known all the clients from my apprentice years, and the names of the buyers were soon learnt. I was also familiar with the types of wool tops we were selling.



My friend Peter Spies, whom I had met towards the end of my apprentice time, was working for Stucken & Co, another wool importer in Bremen. He had told me how fortunate I was, getting such a good job at Siemerings. He could not see himself getting a similar position at his firm, and so he had made some enquiries to go overseas for his firm. We would often visit each other and talk of the future. He knew of my overseas plans, and so we dreamed together about one day perhaps going into partnership and starting a wool exporting business somewhere overseas. We became good friends. He was also a good tennis player and had joined the Werder club, where I was a member.

But before we could even think about going into business together, I knew I had to earn my own reputation first. Siemering had offered me a commission of DM0.01 for every kilo of wool tops I sold on my trips, or from the office on my own initiative. For that reason I was keen to go on my first trip to visit our clients, but this didn’t come off until December. A Monsieur Roger from our French supplier Anselme Dewavrin & Fils, Tourcoing, was to come with me. I prepared two ranges of samples, one of spot lots and one of types which could be ordered for later delivery, together with the latest price list for greasy wool. Some clients bought raw wool, usually in 200 bale lots, which they either scoured and combed in their own mill or at the Bremer Woll Kämmerei (BWK). Our first visit was made to a spinning mill in Wilhelmshaven, near Hamburg, where we sold some wool, earning my first commission. It was also very useful to meet the buyers personally.

My financial situation improved considerably, as for the first time in my life, I was earning quite a good salary, DM269 net per month. When I mentioned this in my letter home, Vater suggested in his reply, that I should be able to save up some money for my trip to Australia, "but as I know my son, you will now smile about your father and won't do anything of that kind."

I think my father was a bit severe. I was not that prosperous yet. I had started with very little reserves. To my consternation I had realised earlier, that Wunder & Sohn had paid me until April 1952 the supplement I had received since December 1949 from Uncle John, although, after the initial payment of \$200, he had never sent any more money for me. This meant that I had overdrawn money from Wunders to the extent of DM451 including interest, which they insisted I pay back before the end of the year.

Daily living costs were also pretty high. Prices in 1952 for everyday items were for example: A loaf of bread DM 0.90, toothpaste DM 0.75, a frankfurter sausage at a stall DM 0.65, a small bottle of Coca Cola DM 0.40, ticket to the cinema DM1, a haircut DM1.50, postage for a small parcel DM 0.60. In the month of October 1952, I spent on food alone a total of DM68.58. In spite of this I was able to pay Wunders the amount owed, not only because I was very thrifty, but because we had received two bonuses from Siemering, an autumn bonus of DM115 in September, and a Christmas bonus of DM652 (including my commission amounting to DM20). From the beginning of 1953 I should have been better off, but the events that were coming to a head in January and February concerning my parents and Gerda, meant another drain on my finances.

The news from Emersleben were not good. Earlier in the year, Vater had been given the neighbouring property of Nienhagen to look after in addition to Emersleben. It had been run down by the previous administrator to such an extent, that it would be impossible for Vater to fulfil the quota set by the government, as the end of year quota was combined for both properties. There was no one else at Nienhagen who could help, and Vater's work had virtually doubled, certainly his responsibility had, and he suffered under the additional pressure. In his letter of 15.6.52 he mentioned that he had had enough and that he would like to leave Emersleben. But what then, he asked himself? That question made him hesitate and postpone his decision for a long time.

In addition to these worries, Vater mentioned also the political situation. In May the borders had become even more impenetrable than before. Mutter had applied for an inter-zonal pass to visit her dying sister in the west, even supplying the authorities with a medical certificate. On 24.8.52 she wrote that her application had been rejected. Tante Annemarie died a week later.

A ten kilometer strip along the border had been declared 'no access

zone' for any non-residents. That meant for instance, that Gerda could no longer visit her friend, who lived within that ten kilometre zone. Also people from west Berlin were not allowed to travel any longer in the east Zone. Traffic between the different sectors of Berlin, however, remained open.

I continued sending parcels with my dirty socks and washing that needed mending to Emersleben as I had done in the past. My regular laundry was done in Bremen, though, but not ironed, as Frau von Guenther had taught me to do the ironing myself. That way I saved a lot of money and I also became quite competent at ironing my own shirts. In these parcels to Emersleben I included sometimes items that my parents could not get in the east Zone, such as batteries, nails, chocolate, coffee etc. Sometimes they even asked me to send them some medicines, which were unobtainable there.

An interesting item was mentioned by Mutter from a Kirchentag in Quedlinburg in September 1952,- an annual rally of protestant churches in the east zone — which she, Vater and Gerda had attended along with about 5000 others. The final address was given by the well-known dean of the cathedral Rev. Hildebrand who spoke on the theme: 'What has Politics got to do with a Christian?' "We received a clear answer to this question," she wrote.

"As he stands in the midst of life and has such a wide horizon, one can only fully agree with him. In any case he lifts one above the pettiness of daily life, also in politics, and has given us all comfort and strength. We are so thankful for such challenges by the church and that we can hear really good addresses, which is worth more than anything else. It gives us constantly strength. It is so nice that Vater and I completely agree on questions of faith. You need not worry about us. I only wish that you would not estrange yourself from the church, and that God's spirit would remain in your heart. One needs at times a quiet hour and this kind a stimulation. So, once again, don't take on too much, the constant rush of modern life only kills the spiritual values. May God keep you, my boy. In constant love I am praying for you daily." (23.9.52)

Right from the beginning, the church in East Germany played an important role in spiritual leadership and political guidance, which was to become so prominent 37 years later during the peaceful overthrow of the Communist regime.

Early November Vater wrote about his own situation:

"Worries grow like an avalanche, and I am trying, often desperately, to keep my head above water. I hope to manage through winter, but then I might have to look for some other job". (2.11.52)

I sensed that something was going wrong in Emersleben, but I didn't know what it was. It was not possible to ask plainly, as all the mail was said to be censored.

Early December I received this cryptic letter from Mutter:

"There are news which worry me very much: one is the sudden illness of Onkel Bernd Enckevort, whom the doctor sent away without delay. Tante Alice and Onkel Helmut visited him. I could have done it too had I not left earlier. Tante Ursel (his wife) and the two youngest were advised to join him. As he is now in a healthier climate one may hope for a quick recovery. These poor people have gone through terrible worries, you will understand how close to my heart this is. Tante Alice wanted to persuade Onkel August to get a referral from National Health to be sent to a sanatorium immediately, as he suffers from the same disease. I don't think this correct, in any case the disease is not as acute, and there is a possibility of improvement, if he works less. The doctor confirmed that. It is to be feared, however, that he could end up with a miserable life, without any joy. But to sit in a sanatorium without doing anything and to live just out of a suitcase, would certainly not be to Onkel August's liking. One would love to advise and help, but how and what? Tante Alice is in favour of the sanatorium and doesn't understand that it seems to Onkel August to be the more difficult choice. Tante Lotte (Mutter's friend, a librarian in Potsdam) is in the same position, and she would not even consider it." (27.11.52)

I knew the Enckevorts, cousins of Mutter, had a small farm on the east side of the Elbe. I also knew that Tante Alice and Onkel Helmut (Mutter's siblings) had just met Mutter in Berlin, so Onkel Bernd must have gone to Berlin with his family, into 'a healthy climate', meaning West Berlin. I then interpreted 'Onkel August' as meaning Vater, and 'sanatorium' meaning West Berlin. Tante Lotte had previously written of her troubles with the Communist regime, but that she would not quit and leave.

What should I advise? I had heard in the news of an ever increasing flood of refugees crossing into West Berlin via east Berlin. As long as that door was kept open, I felt there was a possibility for my parents to leave, but what if the border there was also closed completely by the Russians?

One thing I could do was to see if I could get a job lined up for Vater, for I knew that his main objection to coming to West Germany was that he didn't have a job there, and that for him to sit around and do nothing was worse than having to work himself into the ground under Communist slave drivers.

Three days later Mutter wrote:

"In addition to my last letter I also wanted to mention that you had offered to find a garden for Onkel August, with a garden shed. The

latter would not be necessary, since if he does go bankrupt, he will lose all his household goods and gear. This depresses him very much. It is hard for an old man to go through all this for the second time in his life." (30.11.52)

The 'Garden for Onkel August' must mean some work on a farm for Vater, I thought, and 'the garden shed' could mean a house or flat for them. Would they consider staying in the East because of their household goods and gear? I couldn't believe it, for that was not my parent's normal attitude. Maybe there was something more? But what could it be?

On top of my worry for their safety came the news that Mutter had a bad bronchitis and had to stay in bed. I had planned to go on a skiing holiday again, but in view of my parents' dilemma, I made only a provisional booking, subsequently cancelled. First I had to see how it would all end. Vater wanted me to go, especially as winter had come early and there was plenty of snow in the Alps and everywhere in Germany. He said how much he regretted that I could not come over for Christmas, and how deeply he felt the separation from the rest of the world. They now had electricity black-outs all the time, (from two to as many as nine hours a night), as the economy of the country seemed close to breaking point.

A week later I received a letter from Mutter with the following message:

"I am completely depressed about the result of the x-rays, for it could be a long time with serious consequences for us. It is so important that I should be able to work, for I will need all physical and spiritual strength to be of support to Vater, which he needs, for you know, anything not to do with his work rests on my shoulders ... Another request: please don't send any more socks before Christmas, in fact, don't send anything like a coat or other things. I am now too busy." (8.12.52)

Mutter had to go to hospital in Halberstadt on 15 December with her bronchitis, which had developed into a stubborn pleurisy. The doctors, however, suspected lung cancer, as the x-rays revealed a shadow there. So she had strict orders to stay in bed. Vater was very worried, and it made things worse, as the doctors did not bother to communicate with him.

From hospital Mutter wrote about their escape dreams in cryptic terms:

"My main goal is to get better quickly so that I can help Onkel August. He is asking, by the way, not to mention much about his impending stay at the sanatorium to the family, as everything is still uncertain. He is very grateful, of course, for all advice and offers. The most important thing is that the transfer of the National Health does not arrive too late." (15.12.52)

In his letter dated 20.12.52 Vater wrote:

“I don’t know what will happen to me. I am thinking about giving up my job here and looking for another one, but Mutter must be better first. It won’t be easy for me to find something suitable. I just can’t cope in my present job. Nienhagen is too much of a burden ...”

Mutter had to stay in Hospital until January, but she was allowed home over Christmas. Her health had improved and she was quite optimistic that all would be okay. Another complication arose when Onkel Helmut, who was only visiting, broke his right arm on Christmas Eve, on the way to church. He had slipped on the icy road. He was admitted to the same hospital as Mutter, and they were able to visit each other, once Mutter got permission to get up.

Meanwhile I followed the invitation of Onkel Wilhelm Forstmann to spend Christmas in Dahlhausen with them. As I was travelling by train, my thoughts went back to previous Christmas celebrations, always amidst the family. This was to be the first time away from them, and I felt the loneliness and nostalgia nibbling away at my self-confidence. The dreadful uncertainty about my parents made things worse. But it was good to go to Dahlhausen again and to be there with relatives and to be able to talk things over with them. They too advised that I should urge my parents to come over to the west as soon as possible, for the number of refugees daily arriving in west Berlin was by then in the thousands. We all felt it could not go on like this for much longer. On 28 December I returned to Bremen.

Mutter wrote from Halberstadt on the 31.12.52:

“Our trip into the sanatorium has to take place in 3 weeks, but it is doubtful that he will get the permission from the Health Insurance then. Mally’s mother had to cut short her stay at her sister’s Grube quite suddenly. I wonder whether that was necessary. In my opinion a change of air would be most desirable. If the sanatorium does not work out, it would be nice to go at least to the Harz mountains.”

I interpreted ‘Health Insurance’ as still being able to cross the border in Berlin. At least, I thought, they were aware of the urgency, if my interpretation was correct.

In my attempts to find a job for Vater I had written also to Herrn Rimpau, the former owner of Emersleben. He replied, dated 2.1.53, that he had heard from his cousin’s husband, (Onkel Wilhelm von Beyme), that Vater’s safety was in danger.

“I am urging you to try everything to get your parents out into the west, before the route via Berlin will be permanently closed.”

He regretted very much that he had, only recently, engaged a new

administrator on a property which he rented. But a job, he said, was only secondary, safety should come first.

I passed this message immediately on to my parents, again in veiled terms, and I think it made them think even more urgently about their escape. Mutter was discharged from hospital on 10 January 1953, and Onkel Helmut a day before. Vater wanted to finish the accounts and the budget for the current year before 'going on holidays'. Even when in danger for his own life, he was still conscientious, though it could have also been a calculated risk, as they did not want to raise any suspicions.

In her last parcel to me, Mutter had included Oma's silver tray, hidden among mended socks. It was obvious to me then that she tried to send away as much of their silver and valuables as possible. I hoped only that it would not be discovered.

By then I was convinced, that a decision to escape had been taken. But then came a most disconcerting letter from Mutter dated 19.1.53, where she asked for some goodies for her birthday, like dried figs, a chamois, pencils, hair pins, and hankies. They wanted to go 'on holidays' after her birthday, 8 February, because of Onkel Helmut, as he was very dependent on them.

Another delay or procrastination? Why on earth could they not take the plunge? I knew it was not easy, but to delay any further was too dangerous. Then, four days later, this letter arrived from Mutter:

"Vater has a terrible lot of work to do. He is run down, has headaches and it is time that he takes his holidays and goes to a sanatorium. I am asking you not to send any dirty washing, nor anything else, have no time to wash or mend. Please send wrapping paper to Mally, not in a roll but in an oblong carton. Onkel Helmut is going to the doctor today and hopes for a lighter bandage." (23.1.53).

This was to be the last letter from Emersleben. On 28 January I sent Dm100 to Frau Grube, Mally's sister, our only contact in Berlin. I knew they would contact her on arrival. Anxious days of waiting followed. Over the news I heard that the refugees through Berlin had swelled to ten thousand a day. I hoped my parents would be among them.

The weekend of 31 January to 1 February 53 I spent in Otterstedt with friends of my parents from Poland. When I came back in the evening of 1.2.53, a telegram was awaiting me at home. It was from Berlin. In haste I opened the envelope:

EBEN GUT ANGEKOMMEN = VATER + MUTTER
(Just arrived safely)

The time sent: 22.03 on 31 January 1953.

My first thought was: where was Gerda? Surely, they couldn't have left

her back in Emersleben? She was barely 15 years old. There were so many questions, but no answers. Only one thing was certain. Both my parents had arrived safely in West Berlin. I thanked God for this and prayed that Gerda may also be safe. I knew that they would be at Frau Grube's.

In the morning of 3 February I phoned my parents and learnt then that Gerda had also arrived in Berlin safe and sound. The reasons for her delay were also explained. In order not to raise any suspicions, my parents had told everyone that they were going on a fortnight's holiday to Blankenburg, in the Harz Mountains, where they usually went. As she was going to high school in Halberstadt, it would have been odd to be seen with them. Secondly, she had helped to pack more of their belongings which were then stored with friends, the family silver included. She was told to stay in Emersleben until a telegramme arrived congratulating Onkel Helmut on his recovery. This was the signal for her to take the train to Halberstadt, where she was usually boarding during the week. From there, suitcase in hand and provided with someone's address in east Berlin, she took the train to Berlin and crossed over to the American Sector, where Mutter was waiting for her.

On 4 February I sent another DM100, this time directly to Vater, and he in return wrote his first letter from Berlin:

"Unfortunately there are a lot of expenses here travelling back and forth those long distances, and I fear that we won't get away from here very soon. This gigantic mass of refugees over the last few weeks, and still continuing to come, is causing enormous delays with the formalities. We have to complete a total of 16 points on our forms, but sometimes, for only one point we are given an appointment eight days later, and in the meantime we can't work on any further point, as each needs to be completed before we can go on to the next one. Real bureaucracy! I was advised that it would take at least five to six weeks before we can fly to West Germany. It's no fun to queue up in a line with hundreds of people for hours in this cold weather, and when finally my turn comes up, to be told that I had to complete another point, before that one could be dealt with. All this queuing in vain!

Our trip, also Gerda's, went smoothly, we've only lost our passports. Because everything was so well prepared, we left Emersleben without anybody noticing it. I had applied for holidays in Blankenburg. From Halberstadt we travelled on detours to Berlin. Mutter had a referral to the Poliklinik in Berlin from her doctor, and I, of course, had to accompany her. So we were able to salvage quite a few things, especially as Mutter had also sent things away by parcel post. Only with the money it was not so easy, and we had to leave a lot behind, in the hands of many people, as to take it with us would have been too dangerous." (6.2.53)

Frau Grube was most hospitable to my parents. It did take eventually almost six weeks before they were flown out of Berlin, and they stayed with her for all that time. They were able to pay her for their lodging, and they also had some parcels sent from Emersleben with food. Mutter met with Onkel Helmut in East Berlin who brought over some of the family silver and valuables. Mutter never lacked courage. Having reached the safety of West Berlin, she put herself again at risk going across the zone border! Vater was always more careful and thoughtful. But it could have gone wrong. The rest of the family silver came across the border either in parcels or through Onkel Helmut at a later time.

On 9.2.53 Vater wrote that he had received news from Emersleben, that he had been recalled from Blankenburg per telegram on the 3.2.53. and since the budget plan for 1953 had been handed in late (they had been working on it for weeks), he was dismissed from his position on the spot as per the 4.2.53. The flat had to be vacated by the 16.2.53. This dismissal had come before the authorities knew that Vater had defected to the west. He expressed disgust at the mentality of the authorities: "For that I had worked like a slave for eight years!"

No thanks, no appreciation. He was lucky indeed to get out of there alive.

Eventually my parents and Gerda were booked on a flight from Berlin to Hannover, on 10.3.53 arriving at 10.30pm. Onkel Box, brother-in-law of Tante Alice, Mutter's sister, had sent a car to pick them up and taken them to Braunschweig, where they were staying with Tante Alice.

The weekend 14 to 15 March was the first opportunity to visit my parents and Gerda in Braunschweig. Jürgen Siemering allowed me to borrow the firm's car, a Ford Taunus 12M. What a wonderful reunion that was! I felt they had escaped from prison! Now they were free again. By then the 'iron curtain' had truly come down, and the loophole via Berlin had also been closed. How thankful we were that they had escaped just in time. The 15th March was also Vater's 59th birthday, and we all celebrated together his 're-birth'.

On Good Friday 3 April, the girlfriend of my friend Kurt von Heyking gave me a lift to Hannover. Her name was Helga. From there I caught the train to Braunschweig, to be again with my family, until Easter Monday. My six cousins, children of Tante Alice, were there too and we had a wonderful time together. Helga picked me up from Hannover again. She had been racing her horse somewhere nearby.

Just a weekend before Easter we had farewelled Kurt, who had started a new job at the firm Polysius in Neubeckum. I had promised him to look after Helga. Her mother owned a chocolate factory in Bremen, and Helga's passion were horses, and I would have added 'riding in a taxi'. Wherever she went, she took a taxi, when poor people like Kurt and I would go by public transport. We teased her of course quite considerably about that, but she didn't mind. For the next few weeks I would attend more horse

aces than I could have ever imagined. The fact that she had her own horse in these races, made it of course somewhat more interesting.

My first big business trip on my own was to take place during the first week in May. I left on Saturday to the Rhineland, stopped at Kurt von Heyking's for afternoon tea, and stayed overnight with the Forstmann's in Dahlhausen. From there I visited five worsted spinning mills in that area, and stayed with Bernd over night at Mönchen Gladbach, where he was employed by Onkel Wilhelm Forstmann in the timber yard. Then via Godesberg, Wiesbaden, Kaiserslautern, Hersfeld, again back to Dahlhausen, where my parents came visiting the following weekend. Bernd had announced his engagement with Ingrid Bardt at Easter, and over that weekend we celebrated their engagement with them. On Monday 11 May I drove back to Bremen.

During that week I had visited most of the worsted spinning mills in the south and west of Germany. I managed to sell only very little, about 2,000 kg of tops, which was very disappointing. I had earnt in the first quarter of 1953 a total of DM156 in commission, second quarter DM235, third quarter DM340, and the final DM348.

For the long weekend of Pentecost 23 to 25 May we arranged to meet again with my parents and Onkel Werner & Tante Margaret in Braunschweig. As Tante Alice was away with her children, it was a Tieman only reunion and we kept talking of the past, of the many times we had been together as a family in Sapowice and Strykowo. It was so good to be able to do this again after so many years of enforced separation. We also felt intensely the loss of our two brothers Günter and Horst.

My next business trip was planned for Saturday, 20 June to southern Germany. Helga wanted to visit her boyfriend Kurt, so I offered her a lift to Neubeckum. I was glad to have some company for the first part of the trip. It was a warm and sunny afternoon. The car just purred along through the country side. Helga operated the car radio from the passenger seat. The volume was perhaps a bit louder than necessary, but it felt great to drive through the country side with the fresh leaves on the trees and shrubs still verdant in their early glory. We had just passed Minden and were about to enter Oeynhausen, coming around a gradual bend, with trees and shrubs on our right and only the occasional tree on our left. There were some triangular warning signs on the right (a black steam engine in a red frame). These were partly obstructed by trees and shrubs. I hadn't noticed them. Suddenly Helga shouted out: "Watch out, a train is coming from our right!"

I slammed on the breaks, but it was too late. The narrow-gauge steam-train engine, pulling several passenger carriages, had just left the road-side station and was already half way across the road. I tried to veer to the left to avoid a collision, but the car skidded and the passenger side smashed against the left wheel of the steam engine. The impact pushed my car clear away from the railway tracks and it came to a halt in the middle of

the road. The steam train also stopped about 15 meters further down the tracks. The first thing Helga said after the impact: "Let's get out of this. The car may burst out in flames."

I turned the radio off and said: "We are all right. The car has stopped, and the train too. No worries."

Then I realised that Helga was holding her right arm.

"Are you hurt?"

"A little bit."

"I'm sorry, Helga. So stupid of me! Look what I have done! And how are you going to meet Kurt now?"

"Where are we?"

I had no idea. Meanwhile a number of people began to crowd around us. From them we heard that we were on the outskirts of Oeynhausen. I asked them where the nearest hospital was. They pointed out a medical centre nearby, when they saw that Helga's arm was bleeding. Someone offered to take her there, but I wanted to do that.

Leaving everything behind, I walked with Helga to the medical centre. Luckily a doctor was on duty and I heard that the wound was only superficial. The arm did not seem to be broken.

"I'll come back for you, Helga. Just wait for me here. I have to go back to the car and our things."

When I walked down the street I saw a bigger crowd than before, all standing around the scene of the accident. The Police was already looking for me: "Where have you been?" an officer growled at me.

"Over at the medical centre. My friend's arm needed some medical attention."

"I thought you had shot through."

He took all the details, and then went over to the medical centre to get Helga's side of the story.

Only then did I have a look at the car. The right door had been pushed in, the window of it had shattered, and some of the right side looked a bit out of place, but I didn't think too much damage had been done. A tow-truck came and took the car to the nearest repair place. I had left my wool samples in the car, and taken our personal gear out. Being Saturday, the repair place was closed, but I could leave the car in its yard.

Then I booked into a nearby hotel and went back to Helga. She had been bandaged and was ready to go, but she was still in some shock. We walked together to the hotel, where Helga phoned Kurt, and told him about our accident. She asked him whether he would be able to pick her up, but that was not possible. Helga decided then that she would return to Bremen the following morning.

I stood there sheepishly.

"I'm terribly sorry to do that to you. Was he angry?"

"Not at all. He sends his regards to you and asked me to tell you how lucky we both were!"

"Hm, lucky?"

"It could have been far worse."

"That's true. I had better phone Jürgen Siemering now."

"Hello, is that you, Jürgen? Dieter here. I have been involved in an accident here in Oeynhausen ... Yes, smashed against the engine of a narrow-gauge train..... No, I am all right. Just Helga, my friend's girlfriend hurt her right ellbow ... No it's not broken, just bandaged. It's just the car. The right door is smashed in and lost it's window. Also the mudguard, and the wheel is a bit crooked.... No, I can't drive it. They said it was not safe. It has to be repaired here ... Yes, I put it in the yard. I'll phone you again on Monday with the full report on the car."

I walked upstairs to Helga's room.

"Well, that's done. I'm amazed that he didn't go mad. He seemed more concerned about my well being than the car. I'll have to phone him again on Monday once I know what they are going to do with the car."

"What are we going to do now?"

"I guess we can spend the rest of the day commiserating each other."

"I really want to go back to Bremen, but I can't leave you all on your own."

Then she phoned her mum. The evening passed only very slowly. Neither of us had much to say. Next morning I saw Helga to the train.

"See you again in Bremen, before long, I hope!"

First thing on Monday morning I went to the car repair garage. They told me that I needed a new door, which they didn't have in stock. It had to be ordered. The chassis was also slightly bent, which they could fix. He wanted me to come back the next day, when he could give me a quote and tell me how long the repairs would take.

I phoned Jürgen and told him. He suggested to stay another night in Oeynhausen and phone him back with the quote and then catch the next train to Bremen.

Another long day in despair, all by myself. On Tuesday I was told that it will take at least two weeks to have the car repaired, and I received a quote for the work to be done. I phoned Siemering and took the next train to Bremen. I walked into the office, feeling very low. The people in the office were very nice to me, though. Of course they wanted to know all the details, how it all happened, and especially all about that young lady?

"She is my friends's girlfriend. I just wanted to give her a lift to Neubeckum."

"Oh, go on. Tell us another story!"

No one wanted to believe me. I just had to shrug it off and leave it at that. The car came back after two weeks, but Jürgen decided to sell it and replace it with a new one. I still felt very bad about it, but he was very gracious. He never mentioned it again.

It was fortunate for me that my annual leave came up two weeks after the accident. I had booked myself into a boarding house at a seaside resort

for two weeks, costing DM200. That would give me some time to get over it, I hoped, and help me to adjust to the new situation.

On 11 July I took the train to Westerland, on the island of Sylt, in the North Sea. It was quite an experience to travel across a long causeway, with the sea on either side. I had the feeling the train was travelling on the sea.

Westerland is a typical seaside resort, with a lot of bed and breakfast places and hotels of varying standards. Plenty of restaurants scattered throughout the town. The town itself was on a long island going from north to south, with the North Sea to the west. There were lovely beaches and sand dunes on the western coast, as far as the eye could see. Closer to the town on the main beach there were wicker chairs for hire. On my first day I strolled around that area, but it didn't really appeal to me. There were too many people, and too many families with children. Rather touristy, I thought. The next day I went exploring the beaches further south. I came to a sign which read:

NUDIST BEACH — Enter at your own risk

I had heard about this beach, but when I came face to face to it, I didn't quite know whether I would have enough courage to 'enter' all by myself.

I had bought a beautiful multicoloured bathing robe for DM69 for my holidays, I thought this could protect me if I became too shy. So I took the plunge, or rather took my bathers off and walked resolutely past the sign. There were plenty of nude people sunning themselves, groups all over the sand dunes and along the beach. As everyone was in the nude I slowly lost my selfconsciousness and literally plunged into the water.

I met a few couples with their children and two women from Sweden, one with long blonde hair and younger, the other more mature with dark hair. Her name was Lilo. We all became good friends and not only stayed at the beach together, but shared also meals together and enjoyed some of the entertainment that Westerland offered to tourists, including a casino, promenade concerts and restaurants. I escorted Lilo to most of these and I think she was rather fond of me. I shared my room in a bed and breakfast place with another man, but we hardly saw each other, as there was so much going on in Westerland, day and night. I thoroughly enjoyed my fortnight there and went back to Bremen refreshed and ready to face the hostile world again.



The world did appear hostile to me, as soon after my return I received a notice from the Company who owned the narrow gauge rail service, that they were going to sue me. A preliminary hearing was set for early October in the town of Minden. I had to hire a solicitor who represented me at the

hearing, but I did not have to appear in person. The case weighed heavily on my mind. What would happen to my plans to go to Australia if I were found guilty? And what would the fine be? I thought I had better double my efforts to go to Australia.

Back at the office a pleasant surprise was awaiting me. Jürgen Siemerling wanted me to go on the trip which I had missed out because of the accident. He seemed to have enough confidence in me, which gave me some encouragement. This meant, however, that regrettably I couldn't attend the engagement party of Kurt and Helga.

This trip took me again to southern Germany. During the week I visited firms in Offenburg, Rottweil, Stuttgart, Augsburg, München, Kulmbach, Bamberg, Fulda and Frankfurt, making some sales of wool tops, but overall I was again disappointed.

Helga seemed to need someone to lean upon, and as Kurt was living in Neubeckum, she leaned on me. She had forgiven me the episode with the accident, and we did a lot of things together, like swimming, going to the pictures (which she loved), and of course the horse races. My only regret was that Helga didn't play tennis. As I loved playing tennis, I had to go there without her. By now I had met a lot of young people in the club, but I could only count Peter Spies as a close friend. Unfortunately he had gone to Lennep in May doing a similar course as I had done the year before. I was able to recommend him to some of my friends there and he was very grateful for that.

I knew his time in Germany was running out fast, as he was going to South Africa for Stucken & Co, leaving by ship on 8 August 1953. At our farewell we had promised each other to write regularly and to work towards our common long-term goal, to start our own wool business.

At that time I was very tempted to follow Peter to South Africa, but the political situation there held me back. Apartheid and the treatment of the blacks was repulsive to me. I knew I could have never been happy in an environment like that.

Coming to this decision had taught me to become more aware politically. When the second free elections for the west German parliament were held on Sunday 6 September, I became far more critical of the programme of Adenauer and his Christian Democratic Union (CDU). He had written a 'personal' letter to all 'fellow country people' of Germany before the election, trusting for re-election on the good records of his government. It was written in a chatty style, asking people to look around in their homes and see for themselves, how much better off they were since the first election four years earlier. I couldn't agree with that. There were still many Germans living in very poor conditions, and for many of us former refugees, Germany had failed to become a Heimat, where we could feel accepted and strike new roots. But the majority of the German people didn't think so, for Adenauer was re-elected with an absolute majority.

On 3 October 1953 we celebrated the first wedding in the family: my cousin Bernd and Ingrid. They were married in Oberbalzheim, where Ingrid's parents lived. I attended the wedding with Mutter and Onkel Wilhelm and Tante Margaret Forstmann. Vater had just started a job, so he couldn't join us. On Friday was the traditional Polterabend, a relaxed get-together of family and friends with speeches, stories, and short skits about the young couple to be married. Mutter with her gift for poetry had composed in verse some episodes of Bernd's life, which were much appreciated. The wedding took place in the village church and half the village seemed to be watching from the side. It was a memorable occasion. The reception was in the manor house, in a style we were used to in Poland.

The last time I played tennis in Bremen was on 11 October. It was later in the season than the years before, as the autumn had been exceptionally warm and beautiful. Looking back I find that tennis had been a real highlight for me in Bremen. By the end of 1953 I played it reasonably well, and I had always enjoyed it very much. But as pressure was mounting for me to leave Germany, I hoped that this would have been my last time of tennis there.

Frau Häseker, my land lady, had worked in England at some stage and was fluent in English. She kept up with her friends from there and from America. One of them came from Australia. Since Peter had written, that the most important preparation I could make for overseas was learning as much English as I could, I asked her to coach me. I started in mid October.

We did mainly conversation, and I became aware that I had to learn a lot of new words which I didn't know. In addition to improving my English considerably in a short time, I also got closer to Frau Häseker. One day I asked her about her friend from Australia, where he worked.

"In Bremen-Lesum. He is the Migration Officer of the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration. Why are you asking?"

"I just wondered what the work situation would be in Australia. Would he know anything about it?"

"You can always ask him."

"You see, I don't seem to be able to get a job lined up, and so I was wondering if it were possible to go to Australia without a firm job? I thought, once I am there, I'm bound to find work, any work, even if it is not in the wool trade."

"I'll give you his address."

I wrote to him, getting Frau Häseker to correct my English. My friend Peter Spies didn't think it was such a good idea going overseas without a job lined up, but then he didn't want to advise against it either. Actually, his letter encouraged me, as he said there were usually plenty of opportunities to get jobs. That, of course, applied to South Africa. Why should it be different in Australia?

Meanwhile Vater had been able to get a job in Lübeck, in an agricultural produce firm. My parents were able to rent one room there. They had left Gerda in the care of Onkel Box and Tante Liesel in Braunschweig. During this time in Lübeck I visited them several times by train, and for Christmas Gerda came too and we were able to celebrate Christmas once again together as a family. It was difficult, though, to create the atmosphere we have had at home in Sapowice. Space was very cramped, but more perhaps than that was the fact that I had grown out of the magic of childhood years, that I had grown away from my parents and Gerda to some extent, and that Günter was still missing. I guess I was really ready to start my own life, having left the nest long ago. The more I thought about it, the more I longed to go to Australia, a new adventure, far away, to prove to myself that I could do it.

This became even more urgent, as the court case about my accident in June had drawn near. It came before the court on 19 January 1954 in Minden. Jürgen lent me the firm's car to take my solicitor there. As before, the solicitor suggested that I not attend the trial, so I waited outside in the car for the verdict. After a long wait he appeared in the door of the court house. He didn't smile.

"Bad news for you," he said, "the judge wanted to set an example with you. He found you guilty of negligent driving, and sentenced you to four weeks detention in jail. You will have to surrender your driving licence within three weeks. I have, of course, appealed immediately, but this appeal is not likely to change anything, and in any case it will not be heard before July."

"How is that possible? What am I going to do now?"

"Didn't you tell me that you wanted to go overseas?"

"Yes, I do, but ..."

"I suggest that you do your utmost to leave the country before the appeal is heard."

"Is that possible?"

"Of course. Once you are out of the country, no one is going to chase after you abroad."

"But I have nothing lined up yet, neither a job nor a place to go to."

"It's up to you. I'm sorry about that, but that was the best I could do for you."

I was completely deflated. My worst fears had come true. I don't think I said a word during the whole trip back to Bremen. What could I say to Jürgen Siemering? Without a driver's license I would be no good to him. I resolved there and then that I would leave no stone unturned to get out of Germany. I would not go to jail. Once convicted, my record would be blemished and I would never get out. This verdict, more than anything else, made me even more determined to do everything in my power to go to Australia.

Jürgen Siemering seemed to be rather philosophical about the verdict.

He didn't sack me on the spot, as I had feared, nor did he say it didn't matter. How could I continue working for him, if I didn't have a driver's license? I then told him that I would be making every effort to go to Australia. That seemed to settle the dust for a while.

Through Frau Häseker I met her friend from Australia Mr. John Schroeder, the chief Migration officer in Bremen on 25 January 1954. I told him about the court verdict and that I was anxious to leave Germany. He encouraged me to proceed with my efforts and promised to write to a friend in the Department of Labour in Melbourne, to see if a job could be lined up for me.

"How soon would I be able to go?"

"If you can pay your own fare I could arrange for you to go on the next migrant ship. If you want to have assisted passage, you will have to wait for at least 18 months."

"I can't wait that long. How much would the passage be if I had to pay it?"

"About £200, I think, but you can ask at Oltmann's here in Bremen, they're our shipping agents."

"I don't know where I can find that amount of money, but I will certainly try."

My parent's, of course, had no money. I would have to borrow it, I thought. Then I remembered that Onkel Albert had promised to pay my fare to Australia, before he had died in 1953. I would write to Kreglinger's and ask if they could help me, reminding them of Onkel Albert's promise.

On the day I had to surrender my driver's license, 8 February 1954, I wrote to Mr. Denduits, whom I had met with Mr. Beaurang in Düsseldorf in 1952, asking him to help me. I referred to Monsieur Albert Kreglinger's letter dated 24 July 1952, where he wrote that he would pay my fare to the port of destination, either cabin or tourist class. I also mentioned that the vessel SKAUBRYN was leaving Bremerhaven on 7 April, and that the fare was quoted £150 for the lowest class and £190 for the highest. Could he please help me.

Mr. Schroeder from the Migration Office had kept his promise. He had sent a letter to a friend in Melbourne, who replied, that I should have "reasonable prospects of employment in the wool trade during or after August when the season gets fully under way ... Nevertheless, alternative suitable employment should be available for Mr. Tieman from May until August, and at any other periods while he is settling in and seeking a permanent opening in the wool trade."

That was wonderful news!

Mr. Schroeder advised me subsequently to apply for a business visa at the Australian Embassy in Bonn. I did this on 12 February 1954, supported by a letter from Mr. Schroeder. He also advised, that I needed a medical certificate for the migration papers. I attended to that immediately. The doctor declared me fit, except, he said, I had a hernia which needed

fixing. Since October I had attended a Jiu-jitsu self-defence course, and in one of the exercises I had to throw my opponent over my shoulder on to a mat. Before we could do that, however, we had to learn to fall down by rolling sideways. When we started to practice the throwing, I felt a sharp pain in my groin, but never gave it another thought. My hernia must have come from that.

There was no point delaying the inevitable. I had to have my hernia fixed and had it done at the St. Josephsstift, a hospital run by the Catholic Church in Bremen, on 23 February. The operation was done under a local anaesthetic and I was quite aware of it, watching the procedure in the reflection of the big theatre lamp. Hernia operations in those days meant a fortnight of strict bed rest. I couldn't even go to the toilet. So I had plenty of time to mull over my future, and as the days were ticking by and there was still no news from Antwerp regarding the money for my fare, my anxiety increased.

When I returned home, the shipping agent wanted to know whether I would be going on the SKAUBRYN or not. With reluctance, I wrote another letter to Mr. Denduits in Antwerp in which I mentioned that I needed an early reply. Waiting had never been my forte, this time it caused considerable stress.

A week later, on 20 March 1954, I received advice from the Commerz-und-Disconto Bank, Bremen, that a cheque for £190 or DM2,231.68 to the order of the shipping agent had been received. Yippee, the good news I had been longing to hear! Australia, here I come! I was most ecstatic!

I spent my last weekend with Frau von Guenther and her son Wolfgang. Wolfgang was keen to see me off in Bremerhaven and see the ship, but Frau von Guenther was not. Wolfgang and I would go together by bus to Bremerhaven, and the Siemerings, who also wanted to see me off, would take him back home. It was a strange feeling to say good-bye to the von Guenthers. They had been like a family to me all these years, and now that Wolfgang was ten, I felt he had become like a young brother to me. To leave them made me sad, but the joyful anticipation of a new future produced a mixed feeling once again, as it had been in the past.

A former neighbour of my parents from Poland let me have her trunk for the trip. I packed as much of my belongings in Bremen as I could. The rest, and my bike, had to go to Braunschweig to my parents. I was not allowed to lift anything heavy, though, because of my operation, which made things a bit more difficult, but I managed. Free luggage allowance by ship was 150 kg, but all my worldly possessions were far less than that.

Vater's 60th birthday was really on 15 March 1954, but neither of us had the time to celebrate it on the day. He was still working in Lübeck, and I had just come out of hospital. Then Onkel Box and Tante Liesel invited us all for the 27th to Braunschweig to celebrate it at their place, 12

days after the event. I was very pleased that I could attend. On that occasion I was asked to make a speech, which had to be somewhat more elaborate than our earlier efforts in Sapowice. I said:

“We can’t just ignore a 60th birthday, as you, dear Vater, would probably prefer. You have added another decade to your age, which in your case perhaps counts twice as much, and it is worth while to stop for a moment and reminisce a little. We are grateful to you, Tante Liesel and Onkel Box, to enable us to meet here in this circle, to duly celebrate this day, even though not strictly on the day. But who wants to be so accurate anyhow?

Ten years ago, when you, dear Vater, celebrated your 50th birthday in 1944, Germany was in a mess. Nearly a whole year of war was still before us, and no one could have imagined its outcome. Almost a year later you had to leave your life’s work behind, Sapowice, on which you spent all your strength and energy, the place of your childhood memories, the joys and fruit of your labour. A whole new life began for you in Emersleben.

There you learnt life, work and particularly people from a different side. There you proved that you could not only manage a farm in an exemplary way, by working untiringly from early morning, waking the bulls, until late at night filling in forms in the office, but also be a human being to your colleagues, a friend and helper for all occasions, an example, a prop to everyone in those chaotic days. Proofs of this still come by mail daily, letters from the East Zone addressed to you with thanks for what you have been to people there.

But you couldn’t remain there, to harvest the fruit of your labour. You had to leave Emersleben. For the second time, fleeing, this time leaving almost all your material things behind, you found here in Braunschweig shelter and to find yourself again. No sooner had you recovered, dear Vater, than a new restlessness seemed to plague you again, and you took on, with enormous energy, any opportunity which looked like work for you.

You might say, you were able to find work only because of good friends. Sure, but how do you make friends in the first place? In Soltau you worked hard at some new job, even though it was only for a short time, but you achieved much. Then you came to Lübeck, the proud Hansestadt on the Trave. There you worked truly hard under difficult circumstances. It was again a change workwise and sociological, and you worked as if you owned the firm.

I looked for a quote in Goethe’s ‘Faust’ which might describe you (as you know, there are so many passages that can be quoted in ‘Faust’ that some cynics said it was no great achievement to write it; all Goethe had to do was putting together quotes!). I have found a good one for you, which suits you admirably:

"T" is written: "In the Beginning was the Word."
Here am I balked: who, now, can help afford?
The Word? — impossible so high to rate it;
And otherwise must I translate it,
If by the Spirit I am truly taught.
Then thus: "In the Beginning was the Thought."
This first line let me weigh completely,
Lest my impatient pen proceed too fleetly.
Is it the Thought which works, creates, indeed?
"In the Beginning was the Power," I read.
Yet, as I write, a warning is suggested,
That I the sense may not have fairly tested.
The Spirit aids me: now I see the light!
"In the Beginning was the Deed," I write.

Couldn't this reflect also your development, from year one to 60? At first the Word you heard and spoke, then came the Thought, followed by Power of your strongest years, maturing into a fully thought-out Deed.

I wish you, dear Vater, that you may be able to do great deeds here in Braunschweig for a long time, that you may remain healthy, and that the future may be more stable for you. Happiness and blessings on all your ways! Please join me with these wishes by raising your glasses and drink a toast to you, dear Vater!"

Onkel Box had been able to give Vater a new job as a book-keeper in a book shop that was part of the Westermann business. My parents got a flat in Braunschweig and everything seemed to fall in place, none too soon for me.

The birthday party, which was also my farewell from the family, was wonderful. Onkel Werner and Tante Margaret were also able to come.

It wasn't easy to say good-bye to my parents, as I was going into an unknown future. Apart from Walter Grube, my friend from Berlin, who was now in Melbourne, I had no friends in Australia. I had booked to go to Sydney, as from my reading about Australia I felt a strong attraction to that city, but I had no address there, and no job lined up. And all this on the other side of the earth, five weeks away by ship.

Vater, who was always very cautious, never really approved of my going, but Mutter supported me wholeheartedly. I had a funny feeling in the pit of my stomach, but I was then 25 years old and adventure was a strong driving force.

On 5.4.54 I left Braunschweig by train. When would I see my parents and Gerda again?

There was a farewell party at the firm that afternoon. Next day all my luggage had to be delivered to the ship's agent, and on 7 April 1954 a bus

took Wolfgang and me from Bremen to Bremerhaven. I was able to show Wolfgang my cabin in the Skaubryn and we walked all over the ship. Would he perhaps one day come and visit me in Australia? It would have been wonderful, but he never came. I had said good-bye to Bertha von Guenther that morning. I'll never be able to thank her enough for all her kindness. It was good to have Wolfgang with me to keep me company and to see me off. The Siemerings came when the gangway had already been drawn. So we only shouted our good-byes, but I was glad for Wolfgang to have their support.

The band played a popular farewell tune and at 6.30 pm the SKAUBRYN left the wharf with a lot of hooting and a lot of waving. Good-bye Germany. I had no tear to spill for this country, for it had not been able to provide a Heimat for me. I wept for my family and friends left behind, but Germany? No! To me it seemed narrow and confined, not only physically. It was occupied by four foreign nations, and divided into east and west. A crass materialism had spread, leaving no place for spiritual values. Officialdom was heavy-handed and authoritarian. The individual didn't seem to count. I did not want to be part of such a Germany. Maybe the island continent would offer me a new start in life, where I would feel accepted and valued for who I was, not where I came from or how much money I had. Would the open spaces of the inland of Australia compare with the open spaces of Sapowice? And would the people there be friendly to a stranger, and perhaps allow me to strike new roots in my long search for a Heimat? Only the future could answer that.

PART THREE

AUSTRALIA, MY NEW HOME

Sailing under the Wind of Hope

It was a strange feeling to be standing at the deck's railing and waving to my former boss Jürgen and Dagmar Siemering and to Wolfgang von Guenther, who had become like a younger brother to me. As the SKAUBRYN moved away from the pier, the people waving there became smaller and smaller until they blended into one indistinguishable group of humanity. Slowly the harbour buildings and the docks with the derricks and petrol tanks merged together, and as the SKAUBRYN began to move full steam into the open North Sea, the structures built by human hands were the last sight of Germany, disappearing in the distance.

My feet seemed screwed to the deck, for a strange feeling of anxiety came over me. What had I done? I had left the familiar behind and exchanged it for an unknown future. I had travelled across borders before, but it had never been into a country with a different culture, using a language in which I was still not thinking. I told myself that I had a good grounding in English, but deep down I knew that I would have to learn a lot more until I mastered it in the same way as German or Polish. And how would the people in Australia accept me, coming from a country with which only ten years ago they were still at war? Would there be a future for me, or was I going to just enjoy the trip, learning about the wool trade and after a couple of years come back to mother Germany? But then I thought there was the thrill of adventure. I was still young at 25, and the promise of a new world and a new life pushed my anxiety slowly into the background. I was determined to have a positive attitude towards all new experiences, absorb them and let them mould me into a new person. My parents and my Heimat had given me enough to be proud of them, my family and my ancestry. I knew who I was and I could look into the future with confidence. I did not want to live with a confused feeling of hankering after the past and at the same time trying to grasp everything the future would offer.

It had not been difficult to say my good-byes to my parents, to Gerda, to the extended family and to my friends. I began to realise that I didn't have a future in Germany. Having lost my Heimat at the end of the war, I

had felt uprooted and never really had that feeling of being at home. Family and friends alone did not make a Heimat for me. I needed something more to give me that feeling of at-home-ness. At that moment I didn't know what it was, but I sensed that I would know one day. Somewhat bewildered I turned away from the railing, when I noticed that the sky was almost dark. The ship's lights showed me the way to my cabin.

It was only a short walk there, through the side door, down a flight of stairs and along a narrow corridor. I met my two companions with whom I would share the cabin for the rest of the voyage, a 12-year old boy whose name was Eckart, and a 19-year old, called Gerhard. Eckart was to join his mother in Australia, and a nurse from the ship's hospital was assigned to mother him during the trip. They had the bunk and I slept on a night-and-day behind a table. We had a wash basin in the cabin, and a small wardrobe each. There was also a port hole to see what the weather was like outside. Our steward was French and had only a smattering of German. As I spoke some French I thought we should get along fine. He told me that our dinner was being served at the dining room.

The head waiter showed us to our table. There were several tables spread across the dining room with the captain's table at one end. The Norwegian Captain Alf Fäste was flanked by the other Norwegian officers and two German doctors. The menu, all in French, didn't help my companions. I had to translate for them. The SKAUBRYN flew the Norwegian flag. She was owned by the Skaugen Company from Oslo, but had been hired by the French Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes, and most of the crew were French, or Italian. The kitchen staff were all French, hence the French food and the French menu. Apart from some dishes, the food was excellent. Dinner was always served with red wine. Eckart was also expected to drink it, but he refused.

Opposite our cabin was a shower room and toilets. From here on I enjoyed a daily shower. In Germany this was considered a luxury, but it soon became a necessity for me.

On our first day at sea the First Officer Ellef Knudsen assembled all 20 or so paying passengers from the dining room on the upper deck in a small sitting room. He explained:

"Most of the ship is taken up by government funded migrants. They have their own quarters, dining rooms and lounges. The upper deck is reserved for you, the paying passengers, or Tourist Class, as we call it. This here will be your lounge. None of the migrants are allowed here. If you want to stretch your legs, you can walk all over the ship, but you will find that the rest of the ship is rather crowded. There is a purser on board who will exchange your money if you want to go ashore. He will also help you with excursions etc.

"This ship will take on more migrants from Naples. After that we will stop at Port Said, Colombo and Fremantle before we disembark all emigrants at Melbourne. Is there anyone going to Sydney?"

I raised my hand and saw several others too.

“Good, you will have the ship almost to yourselves from Melbourne to Sydney, except for a few people joining us in Fremantle and Melbourne for the return journey. Any questions?”

“Is there a swimming pool on board?” I asked him.

“Of course, but we won’t get it ready until it gets a bit warmer. You might find it still quite cool, even in the Mediterranean at this time of the year. When the time comes we will reserve an hour in the mornings and afternoons for Tourist Class only, so that you can swim there in more comfort. Anything else?”

“Is there any entertainment?”

“There will be dancing in the main dining room on the lower deck occasionally, sometimes we will show films, yes, and there is of course plenty of opportunity for you to do your own entertainment.”

Some of us smiled, others did not seem to be amused. As I had never been on a ship before, I had no specific expectations and for me it didn’t matter. I was happy to spend my time in the lounge reading, or walking around, or just looking at the sea.



On board the SKAUBRYN

When our ship entered The Channel we could see the white cliffs of Dover glistening in the evening sun. With the help of a pair of binoculars, which I was taking for my friend Walter in Melbourne, I could see the homes and harbour facilities. This was England! I thought of the war, the

bombers which had come from there, and our bombers which had caused so much destruction, and the 'Battle of Britain' fought in this place. Then I remembered that I had once made some effort to go there to find work. Well, our ship was passing by the south coast of England and heading towards Australia. The Channel became wider and the land receded as darkness came over the sea.

I feared the Bay of Biscay, as it was known for its high seas and sea-sickness for us inexperienced travellers. I woke up to a slightly rolling ship. Was this going to be my test? I went quickly up on deck to catch some fresh air, but it was already too late. The long corridor seemed to be turning around, and when I reached the deck I had just enough time to lean over the railing and 'feed the fish'. After this I felt much better, and as we had been advised to keep eating and drinking, even though feeling sick, I went to the dining room and enjoyed a good breakfast. There weren't too many passengers around, but I was determined not to be defeated by sea-sickness. On deck I stretched out on a chair and soaked up the warm sun, getting a sun-burn, my first and last on the trip. The Bay of Biscay didn't live up to its reputation, though, the weather was fine and the sea was calm.

As our ship followed the Spanish and later the Portuguese coast, we reached the Western-most point of Europe, before we turned East again into the Straits of Gibraltar. The 'Rock' seemed to be looming fairly high above the sea, as our ship went close by it. On the opposite side we could see also land in the distance, the North coast of Africa. What I had learnt in Geography I could see now with my own eyes. The others too became quite excited when we sailed past a particular point of a continent or a well-know place. It broke the monotony of the sea and became a talking point for some time afterwards. The voyage had turned into a tourist experience for most of us.

No sooner had we entered the Mediterranean, when our ship began to roll again. It was hard to sleep with this, and I waited again for daylight to go up on deck as I had done before. I noticed that I didn't feel as woozy as in the North Sea, but I tried to remain outside in the fresh air, to fight the sea-sickness. My favourite spot was right on top deck, holding on to the ropes and watching the ship climb the wave and then splashing down with the bow into the valley, with the spray coming right over us. Every now and again the propeller seemed to come out of the water when the stern was lifted up. This made the whole ship shudder and groan. Although we were assured by the officers, that there was nothing to worry about, many of us felt very uneasy and anxious.

Only very few people appeared for meal times in the dining room, but I was determined to ride it through. This storm was quite a frightening experience. The French called it the 'Mistral', apparently an annual occurrence in the South of France in Spring, reaching gale-force winds in the Mediterranean. The nurse who looked after my young cabin mate

Eckard, Sister Eva-Maria, didn't feel too happy in the hospital in this weather either. She came up on deck as often as she could. We would often talk and encourage each other.

On one such occasion we stood there again when dark rain clouds blew over from the West. It looked very threatening, and we both prepared to go below deck, when suddenly the sun broke through the clouds and a most beautiful rainbow appeared in the East. I stood mesmerised.

"Look! What brilliant colours!"

"A lovely rainbow," said Eva-Maria.

"Rainbows always make me feel warm inside. I like to think that they are a sign that God is still in charge, particularly when I go through difficulties and danger. When I see a rainbow, I remember the story in the Bible where he promised Noah that he would never destroy the earth and all living creatures. The rainbow is a sign for me, that I never need to give up hope, no matter how hopeless the situation may appear. God remains in control, even when things are in turmoil."

"You mean for us now or for yourself?"

"Yes, for us, but also for me personally. You see this ring? The blood stone has our family crest carved on it, depicting a sailing boat front on. On its left are clouds and lightning, a bit like we are going through now, and on its right is the bright sun. I know that where there is sun and rain, there is also a rainbow. This picture of our crest, then, without actually showing a rainbow, links me personally to the rainbow I see, and to the hope I have through God."

"Oh, really?"

"Yes, and what's more, the ship in our family crest is symbolic of life itself. Life which sometimes goes through clouds and threatening experiences, with lightening, destruction and tears, sometimes through a sunny period, with warmth and comfort and ease. And the motto is: DER MENSCH DENKT — GOTT LENKT." (in English 'Man proposes — God disposes', or literally: 'Man thinks — God steers', like a ship).

"Is that why you feel that the rainbow is a personal sign for you?"

"Yes. I see God guiding me, not just throughout this trip, but all through my whole life, and particularly through my uncertainties in Australia, or wherever the future may take me."

"You are a born optimist then?"

"I would say, that I have faith in God. That makes all the difference."

"I can't say that of myself, unfortunately."

"Why not?"

"I don't know."

In the evening we felt that the ship suddenly stopped rolling. The engine was idling and we were drifting in the high sea with the waves coming from everywhere. We became quite concerned that something serious had gone wrong, but later I found out from Sister Eva-Maria, that a passenger of the migrant section had to have his appendix removed, and

the captain had to be part of the operating team. They had stopped the ship to stabilise the rolling and avoid the shuddering of the propeller. After about half an hour the ship continued to plough through the waves again. We had some more rain and really foul weather. The mood on board became rather gloomy, but when we read in the ship's daily news sheet, that another of the BOAC Comet jet planes had plunged into the sea with all lives lost, we thought we were still better off in a ship than in a plane.

In Naples the SKAUBRYN took on board more migrants. They all seemed to come from Italy. Now our ship was truly full to the brim. In the migrant section they filled the cabins to the utmost capacity so that all facilities were stretched to the limit. I was glad then to be in Tourist class.

No passengers were allowed ashore, as the ship had been delayed by the storm. After about three hours we sailed on again, leaving Mt. Vesuvio, the famous volcano in the hazy distance, past the romantic island of Capri with its sheer rock and the Blue Grotto visible from our ship. The sea became quite calm and it was sunny and warm, a complete change after the storm. After dark we passed the island of Stromboli, another volcano, and many passengers assembled on the top deck to watch our passage through the Straits of Messina. It was full moon and the scenery most beautiful and memorable. Lights of homes and streets were clearly visible, even trees on both sides of the shore, Sicily on our right and the toe of Italy's boot on our left.

As we were sailing due east, the ship's clock was put forward by half an hour, a regular occurrence about every second day from then on.

On Good Friday, I went to a Protestant Service in the main section of the Ship. I was sorry that the Catholic Padre was not conducting the services, as we had become rather friendly together. I got on much better with him than with the Protestant padre, whom I hardly knew.

When we talked to one another again, the Priest asked me how our service went.

"I don't know. Our minister hasn't got the same experience as you. I think he is rather boring."

"But you don't go to church to be entertained, do you?"

"Quite right, Padre. I shouldn't be so critical. But when I see you reading the Bible in Chinese, and hear of your experience in China, Christianity becomes more alive for me."

"Well, not everyone can become a missionary to China. But I tell you, since the Communists have expelled all foreign missionaries from China in 1950 and 1951, there is a great need there. I don't know how the churches will manage without the guidance of more experienced priests and ministers. If they become totally cut off from the Mother Church, the work we have done there will have been in vain."

"You mean that the churches won't be able to continue without overseas pastors?"

"Yes, I guess that's what the new regime is aiming at."

"So, where are you heading for now?"

"My next appointment is in Papua New Guinea."

"Will you be going there straight after we arrive in Melbourne?"

"I'm actually going to Sydney on this ship. I will be staying there with my order for a fortnight, and then I will sail on another ship to Port Moresby."

"That should be very interesting."

"I'm sure. And what about you? Are you going to Melbourne?"

"No, I am also going to Sydney."

"What are you going to do there?"

"I don't know yet. In Bremen I was in the wool trade, and I hope to get a job as a wool buyer somewhere. I've got a friend in Melbourne, but I don't know anyone in Sydney."

"Why then go to Sydney and not Melbourne, if you haven't got a job lined up?"

"Funny that you should ask that. I don't think I can answer that in any definite way. You see, there was a possibility to join a friend of mine from Bremen, who went to South Africa, but because of the political situation there I was not interested. Then I read quite a bit about Australia, and I seem to have developed a special liking for Sydney."

"Probably because of it's beautiful harbour and the beaches?"

"Could be. I have always loved the water and am keen on swimming, but also the climate. There is more sunshine in Sydney than in Melbourne, and people are far more interested in outdoor life, their gardens, picnics and excursions into the bush. You know, I spoke to one person who had lived in Sydney, and he said that even on a hot day people can expect a cool sea-breeze in the evening."

"Is that so? Well, you seem to have worked it all out, I only hope that you are not going to be disappointed."

"I know it's going to be difficult at first, especially as I don't know a soul in Sydney, but as long as I get a job in the wool trade, I'll be all right."

"I wish you luck."

"Thanks, I think I'll need that."

Easter Saturday we sailed past Crete on our way to Port Said, where we arrived on Easter Sunday. We were all excited as the captain let us go ashore. The Padre, Sister Eva-Maria and I decided to go together. None of us wanted to buy anything in particular, we just wanted to stroll through the bazaars and soak up the exotic atmosphere, which for us Germans was a most unusual experience. I actually liked to talk to the hawkers and without intending I found myself bargaining with them. We bought a few souvenirs, which seemed extremely cheap to us. We also went into a street-side cafe and I had my first taste of Middle Eastern food, encouraged by the Padre.

"Why didn't you go with the doctors and the others overland to Cairo

and then on to Suez?" Sister asked me after the meal.

"I haven't got the money."

"Oh, and I thought you were very rich."

"What made you think that?"

"I thought being a private passenger on a migrant ship?"

"My uncle paid the passage. I need every bit of money for Australia."

"Don't be too stingy with yourself. You may not come this way that soon again."

"That's true."

"I tell you what. The doctors are already talking about hiring a taxi in Ceylon. The Captain said, that it would be a really worthwhile excursion. I would like to go, what about you two?"

The Padre shook his head. "I'm sorry, I won't be able to go."

"And you, Dieter?"

"It can't be too expensive, if we all share. I really would like to go. Why not!"

But we were still in Port Said, and the noise of the cars and the people immersed us into the scenery of an exotic city, which had suddenly turned on its lights as darkness had come quickly. We were in no hurry, as the SKAUBRYN wasn't scheduled to leave until midday tomorrow. Eventually we strolled back to our ship. It's been a worthwhile and quite exciting excursion.

Next morning I went again ashore with some other people, but the magic of the previous night was not present. Our ship left fairly punctually, with countless boats full with goods and hawkers still trying to make a last sale. They tied the items on ropes which the prospective customers hauled up, inspected, and if they agreed to buy it, they sent the money down the same way. People had to make sure they put in the right change, as they might never have seen the change.

Eventually the boats were left behind and the SKAUBRYN sailed into the Suez Canal. Our ship was the first in a convoy of about 25 other ships.

Along the Canal was a road on either side, and a train line on the western side. But beyond that there was desert. Occasionally we passed a village. When we saw another passenger liner I thought it was going through the sand. I then realised that there was another branch of the Canal, where ships were able to pass each other.

By midnight we had passed through the Canal. We had entered the Great Bitter Lake, half way to Suez. I was wondering how the two doctors would join the ship in Suez, as we were not going to stop there, but that was not my worry. In the early morning hours they were brought in with the pilot boat, while it took our pilot back to shore.

In the Red Sea the captain ordered the swimming pool to be filled with water. Both air and water temperature were 30°C and I swam and splashed in it for the whole hour it had been reserved for the Tourist Class. From then on this became routine, especially as the temperature went higher

and higher each day, up to 36° and as our cabins were not air conditioned, it reached over 40° in them. The constant heat in the Indian Ocean caused a great deal of discontent on board, as I heard from the Padre. Marriages seemed to be breaking up and occasionally fights broke out. The boredom was not even alleviated by the announcement that the Queen of Britain would be sailing by our ship on the GOTHIC with two escorting destroyers, on her way home from a royal visit to Australia. The ships passed fairly close, one could have seen the Queen waving, had she been up on deck!

The evenings were balmy, and there was only a soft breeze caused by the ship's speed. I loved to stand on a spot right behind the bow of the ship, leaning over the side and looking into the water. Often I would see the glimmer of phosphorescence as the waves beat against the bow, sparkling like thousand sparklers. Then I turned around and leaning backwards against the ship's side, I looked at the stars. They were so brilliant and sparkling just like the sea. I noticed different constellations appearing. The Orion was much higher in the sky than in Europe. Suddenly I saw what I had been looking for: the Southern Cross, very low on the horizon, but unmistakable. It was the one constellation I had read about, and the only one I knew in the southern sky. I felt goose pimples covering my body, although it was not cold. It was an emotional moment for me. We were approaching the Southern hemisphere, the other side of the globe, a new and exciting world, altogether different from the known world of Europe. I looked at the Southern Cross and thought to myself, 'from now on you will be my guide. If I see you I will know where south is, and I will not be lost. Because of you, the new world is not going to be threatening to me.' From that moment the Southern Cross became my most favoured constellation.

On 29 April we arrived in Colombo. Joachim Jaeck and Erich Dehn, the two ship's doctors, the two nurses and I squeezed into a large taxi for Kandy. We had the occasional tropical showers, and the air was warm and humid. It was great to see a tropical vegetation, plenty of banana trees and dense jungle further inland. I noticed that our driver was in bare feet. I had not realised that one 'could' drive a car without shoes. He stopped near a bridge where we could see some elephants bathing in the river below. The driver of one was sitting on his elephant, while it was wallowing in the water, with his umbrella up against the rain. It looked most idyllic. Then our driver picked up a stone and threw it into a nearby tree. What had looked like hanging bee hives or birds nests, suddenly became alive and made a lot of noise. They were flying foxes, which none of us had ever seen before. The road took us also past rice paddies, and I marvelled at a farmer who ploughed it with his buffalo whilst it was still very muddy. No one in Europe would ever plough such wet soil! Then our driver stopped in a village where a market was in full swing. Apart from the large crowds, there were also elephants milling around, which

intrigued us, and they became an object for our cameras. The noise and smell was very exotic. We could not forget that we were here in Asia.

The road began to ascend into the central mountain range. Kandy was a pretty old city, with a lot of temples and beautiful wide avenues, lined with palm trees or some flowering trees. It had been the capital of an ancient kingdom, until the British moved it to Colombo. We also visited a tea plantation and had lunch in a beautiful guest house situated in a large park. I enjoyed some hot curry whilst the others had some more conventional food.

After lunch the driver took us into the most beautiful and famous Botanical Garden where, he said, a lot of movies had been filmed. On one spot we saw a freshly planted tree, which the Queen had planted barely a week earlier. A large tree next to it had been planted by another British Monarch, who had visited Ceylon years ago.

On our trip back to Colombo our taxi had to stop for a religious procession to pass by. Queer sounding noises coming from some pipes and drums (similar, I thought, to the noise of a bag pipe) came right by our taxi.

I was very pleased to have gone with the doctors and Sister Eva-Maria and Sister Gerda on this excursion. Even though it came to about DM30 per person, I wouldn't have missed it for anything. It was a memorable introduction to Asia.

On 1 May our ship crossed the Equator. The officers had prepared a proper 'Neptune' celebration, and practically everybody got anointed first with some evil-smelling soapy mixture, and then dunked into the swimming pool. We all had a lot of fun and the ball in the evening helped everybody to forget the discontent of a few days earlier.

Soon after this the temperature dropped. We came into a storm and came up against high seas again. During the day I would still go to my favoured spot at the bow and watch the flying fish or the dolphins racing with the ship. There was usually no one else there. I could enjoy some solitude for a while, away from everyone. Still being near the equator the moon looked like a boat instead of like a sickle. The waning moon would look like a cap, I was told.

The swimming pool had to be emptied, not only because it was getting cooler, but because of the heavy seas. I noticed several times how the water had splashed on to the deck when the ship was rolling.

Our first port of call in Australia was Fremantle. It was a momentous occasion when I stepped ashore. My first step on Australian soil. The date was 8 May 1954. My heart missed a beat, I was so excited! Walking past some shops through Fremantle I noticed some wonderful fresh fruit for sale. I bought myself 'a welcome-to-Australia' treat, fresh grapes and pears, which tasted better than anywhere else. What a wonderful sign of welcome to me, I thought.

At Fremantle some of us, including the Padre, hired a taxi and drove to

Perth. It was a charming city with its covered walk-ways and lots of shops, its quaint 'London Court', its churches and public buildings, some of which had exotic cacti or palms growing in their gardens. Also the wide sports fields, and the beautiful Kings Park with the view over the city were most magnificent. Here again we found a newly planted gum tree which the Queen had left to commemorate her recent visit to Perth.

In Fremantle a cabin-deck cabin became vacant. I asked the purser whether I could move into it, and as no one else wanted it, he agreed. Why not travel the last week in style? The weather became cold and blustery. We were in the Great Australian Bight, and the wind seemed to blow straight from the South Pole. We were not used to this and felt it quite keenly. It was lovely, though, to watch the great Albatrosses sail with the ship for hours. They would occasionally rest on a quiet spot of the ship.

A couple of Australian passengers had joined the ship in Fremantle and I had my first opportunity of practising my English. Their accent was rather strange, but I would have to get used to that, I thought. Just before Melbourne the Captain invited us all to a farewell cocktail party. He made a very nice speech wishing us well in our new country. As no one else spoke English as well as I, my fellow passengers asked me to reply to his speech. I thanked him for all he had done for us during the voyage, for his good wishes to us, and wished him in return all the best for his and his fellow officers' futures. I was rather apprehensive about my speech, but they must have thought it was all right, as they all clapped when I finished.

On the morning of 13 May we arrived in Melbourne, quite some time after having sailed through the Heads a few hours earlier. After the ship had docked, I came back to my cabin after breakfast. I noticed immediately that my camera had disappeared from the table. I looked through the open window, and saw a couple of wharfies busying themselves with the long handled shuffle board. I ran out immediately, but when I arrived on the deck, no one was there. Then I rushed to the Purser's Office, who was busy with disembarkation procedures, but he listened to me and organised an officer to come to the deck. Of course it was far too late and the thief had disappeared. I went ashore to see if I could do anything at luggage check, but to no avail. My camera was gone. Luckily I had changed a film recently, at least those photos were safe. I reproached myself for leaving the window open, but who would have thought that people could be so cunning to use the long handle of the shuffle board to fish for my camera! Luckily I was insured, and so I asked the purser for a certificate.

After this most unpleasant 'welcome' to Melbourne, I took a taxi to visit Walter Grube, my friend from Berlin, whose address I had in my diary. He was very pleased to see me, and I was pleased to see him, as he was the only person I knew in Australia. He had just bought himself a small house in the Port Melbourne area and was in the process of moving in. He kindly took the time to show me around Melbourne in his car.

Sister Eva-Maria told me in the evening, that Joachim Jaeck, one of the doctors, had met an old German friend of his, who was a wool buyer in Melbourne. He gave me his address and suggested that I visit him next day. His name was Alex Stucken, but he was not related to the Stuckens for whom Peter Spies was working in South Africa. When I talked with him, he seemed concerned that I should have no one in Sydney I could turn to. So he gave me the address of Michael Jensen, and urged me to call on him as soon as I arrived in Sydney. I was very pleased to get at least one address.

The SKAUBRYN left Melbourne at 8 pm on 14 May, practically empty, as all the migrants had disembarked to go to the migrant camp at Bonegilla. I made the best of all the space on board, walking through each deck and at the same time took my leave of every familiar item. After five and a half wonderful weeks on the SKAUBRYN there were quite a few people I wanted to say my good-byes to.

Next morning I got up at 5 am, so that I wouldn't miss the entrance into Sydney Harbour. It was still twilight when the ship sailed past the eastern suburbs of Sydney. Through a depression in the land I had a brief glimpse of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, which I had seen on many photos before. Then the ship approached some high cliffs, with a light house nearby. The engine stopped for a while to take on the pilot. Then we were sailing between North and South Head into Sydney Harbour. But where was the Harbour Bridge? There were a lot of sailing yachts on the water, their sails reflecting the rising sun, a most beautiful sight.

After what seemed ages to me, the Harbour Bridge appeared around the corner. Everybody on top deck took photos, but I had no camera. I just let the image soak in. It left an indelible mark on my mind, sharper than any photo could ever do. The suburbs of Sydney stretching out on our left, bushland on our right, and we were heading straight out for the Harbour Bridge. The early morning sun was on the iron girders, bathing the whole structure in a pink light. Some cars were crossing the bridge, and a bus or train intermittently. Just before the bridge the SKAUBRYN turned left and docked at Circular Quay in front of old sheds, where now the Overseas Terminal stands.

Only a few people were standing there, huddled in their overcoats, to meet their family or friends. Suddenly a lady from our group got very excited. She had recognised her daughter down on the wharf and was waving frantically to get her attention. The evening before she had given me the address of a young man, a friend of her daughter's family, who was involved with the YMCA in Sydney. She thought it might help me to meet some friends.

On Sunday, 16 May 1954, Sydney opened its arms, inviting me to come ashore. What would the future bring? Happiness? Disappointment? I guess much would depend on me. I knew no one in that city of over 3 million people.

CHAPTER 19

SYDNEY

Wool trade

Circular Quay on 16 May 1954 was freezing. I had not expected such a cold welcome to Sydney, but the sun was shining and it promised to be a fine day. Our hold luggage had already been unloaded and was lined up in the shed. This must have seen many new arrivals anxiously collecting their few belongings, wondering what the new country would bring. Customs and immigration formalities were kept to a minimum. Was that because it was Sunday, or was it always that way? What a difference to the customs in Germany, I thought. A taxi-truck took all my luggage and myself along Pitt Street to the Central Railway station, where I left it till I found a place to stay. Frau Gudden had given me the address of the YMCA in Pitt Street, where I could stay if I didn't find anything. I also had the address of Michael Jantzen, a young German in the wool trade. I would give him a phone call. I hoped he would be able to see me.

I was lucky, Michael was at home and he asked me to come and see him that afternoon. I had some lunch for five shillings and went by tram for 6d to Edgecliffe. From there I walked all along Darlingpoint Road to where Michael lived. He seemed a friendly chap. He worked for a German wool firm and offered to keep an eye open for a job for me.

"Now about your name, Dieter, we will have to do something about that."

"What do you mean?"

"Nobody here knows the name Dieter and you will always have a problem with that. Why don't you change it to Peter. Sounds like Dieter, but people know it here. I know, others have done it."

"Oh, really? But I rather like Dieter, I'll try and see how I am going with that."

"Just as you think, it was only a suggestion."

"Thanks anyhow, I'll remember it."

"And where are you staying?"

"I don't know yet. I have left my luggage at Central Station for the time being."

"You are game, to arrive in a totally strange city, not knowing anyone, and you don't even know where you are going to stay the night! Well, maybe I can help you. Before I moved here I stayed at a boarding house just down the road in Darlingpoint Road. A Mrs. Ehrlich is running the place. I'll give her a phone call, maybe she'll have a place for you."

After a brief telephone call, Michael appeared again.

"You are lucky. She has a vacant room. She is very particular in choosing her boarders, but as I could put a word in for you, she wants to see you. How about we go over there right away."

"Thank you, that is very kind of you."

Mrs. Ehrlich reminded me a little of the Dachs, the cook at our boarding house in Poznan. She was also small in stature and spoke rapidly in a fairly high pitch. After greeting us without shaking hands (for me this seemed rather strange) she invited us to come in. She showed me the front room with two beds.

"If you like you can have this room. It will be five guineas full board."

I looked puzzled at Michael.

"Five pounds and five shillings a week, no lunch during the week, but weekends you will get three meals."

"That sounds fine to me. Thank you, Mrs. Ehrlich, I'll take the room."

"Are you also in the wool trade like Michael?"

"I was in Bremen, and I hope I'll get a job here too."

"That's good. There are two young Japanese wool buyers staying here, you'll meet them later. Where is your luggage?"

"I left it at Central Station. I'll go and pick it up now. Later I want to go and see my ship leaving. The trunk will have to wait till tomorrow."

"Well, that's settled then. Tea is at 6 o'clock sharp."

With that we left Mrs. Ehrlich. Michael walked home and I went back to the station.

The SKAUBRYN was still at Circular Quay, when I arrived after dinner, but it had changed its appearance. Lots of brightly coloured streamers seemed to be holding the ship in place. I hadn't seen that custom before. Those on board held one end, whilst those seeing them off held the other, maintaining contact with each other until the last possible moment. A lot of shouting went on, and I found it hard to see any familiar face in the crowd. Then I discovered the doctors and nurses right up on top deck. I waved frantically and shouted to draw their attention. Eventually they saw me and waved back. Suddenly a strong feeling of loneliness came over me. Here was 'my' ship, my home for five weeks, my last visible link to Germany, and my friends, with whom I had shared a marvellous voyage. It was home-sickness, and had it been possible, I may have gone back on board. But the gangway had already been removed and slowly, ever so slowly, the SKAUBRYN was moving away from the pier.

"I have found a place!" I shouted up.

"Write us your address," Sister Eva-Maria shouted back.

“Have a good trip! Bye-bye!”

Meanwhile, all the streamers had broken. The tug boats had freed the SKAUBRYN from the pier and it could move under its own steam. It quickly disappeared around Benelong Point, behind the old tram sheds. The quay was almost empty, the crowd had quickly dispersed, leaving me on my own. I felt terrible. What had I done? Was my courage to leave me now?

As I was walking along Pitt Street towards Market Street, the early excitement of the new city came slowly back to me. I had studied the map of Sydney and almost knew it by heart. I decided to walk back to Darlingpoint Road, physical exercise would do me good and in any case, I had plenty of time. Walking down William Street towards Kings Cross, the neon lights at the end sent their advertisements in continuous flashes. The Cross on a Sunday night was deserted. Then I walked down towards Rushcutters Bay, past White City, the famous place where a number of Davis Cup games had been played. I thought, one of these days I will become a member there. When I arrived at the boarding house, it was already late and everybody seemed to have gone to sleep. I was thankful and happy to have a warm and clean bed.

Next day I hired a taxi truck to pick up my trunk from Central Station. At dinner time I met the other boarders. All of them were single people, working in the city. The two Japanese wool buyers could not speak much English, but they seemed very friendly. After dinner we hugged the gas fire in the lounge room, the only place which had heating, but as people seemed to be getting up very early no one stayed up late.

Having found a roof over my head, my next priority was to find a job in the wool trade. This turned out to be far more difficult than finding accommodation. I found in the pink pages of the telephone book all the wool firms listed with their addresses and phone numbers. Just what I needed, I thought, and I ripped out the page. But rather than phone them, I decided to visit them personally.

Amongst the early firms I visited was Victor Dekyvere & Co. Mr. Victor Dekyvere told me that he could do with a helper, but he would not employ anybody before the new season started in August. Others told me that they were either not interested, or, if they wanted to employ an overseas person, they would go directly to their contacts there. The prospects were not good and I became quite disheartened. After about two weeks of job hunting, having visited about seventeen different firms, I gave up. It became apparent that there was no point to keep knocking at people's doors until just before the new season would start in August.

I had arrived in Australia with £48. By Friday of the second week I had spent £15, not counting the board of £5.5.0 due on Sunday. I was getting worried that my money might run out. I simply had to get a job. That morning I went to the employment office and asked for a job.

“When do you want to start?” I was asked.

“As soon as possible.”

“Anywhere?”

“As long as I can reach it by public transport.”

“There is one at St.Peters. Hardie Rubber stores. I have just phoned them. They pay the basic wage, which gives you about £13 per week after tax. Turn up there on Monday morning 8 am and see a Mr.Ryan. This is the address.”

He gave me a slip of paper with the name of the firm, the name of the store manager and the full address. I had no idea where St.Peters was, nor how to get there, but I had time to find out. From the Boarding House I would need to catch the tram to Central Station, and a train from there to St.Peters. From there I had to walk for 15 minutes to get to the stores.

Hardie Rubber rented the premises, former wool stores, for their car and truck tyres. I had to learn the different sizes of tyres, different ply, and to wheel them on the floor, usually four abreast, sometimes even six or more, and that was not so easy. At first I made a terrible mess of it. They went all over the floor, I just couldn't keep them together. But I learnt. As I was the youngest, I had to buy lunches for everybody in the team. They asked for food I had never heard of, like pasty, pies, sausage rolls, and fish and chips. I took an immediate liking to the apple pies and cream. Also meat pies.

The workers spoke in rough Australian, interspersed by the inevitable swear word. That too was new to me, but I never took it on myself. I felt it showed a lack of manners and was due, probably in some cases to a poor knowledge of English, apart from being quite unnecessary. The fact that I came from Germany did not seem to bother anyone. People have always been friendly to me and I never felt discriminated against, even in those early days.

Everybody seemed to be looking forward to Fridays knocking-off time. It didn't take me long to find out that they all went to a pub for a binge. They asked me to join them, but I never liked the idea and I felt free enough to say 'no thanks'.

On the first Thursday I went to the YMCA to meet a Werner Fredericks. Frau Gould had given me his name before we left the ship. He was a member of the International Friendship Club, one of the groups of the YMCA. I met him, and since the club met every Thursday, I stayed behind and joined the group. There was another German there, a number of Greeks, some Italians, one English, and the rest of them were Australians. It was a good mix of male and female, mostly under 30s. They had a regular programme, and some activities for the weekends. This was great, as the weekends were often dragging on with nothing much to do.

I quickly made some friends, and I hardly ever missed out a meeting or a weekend away. Especially enjoyable were the camps at Yarramundi, in the Grose valley, owned by the YMCA. It had great facilities for swimming, canoeing, hiking, volley ball and a large hall for indoor

activities. There was never a dull moment. It was here that I came across Australian wild life for the first time. Possums came to the hall at night, and we saw platypus in the river, echidnas, a large goanna and plenty of kookaburras.

In July our group hired a bus for an excursion to Canberra, the nation's capital. I still remember driving past the main shops with the colonnades (Sydney and Melbourne buildings) and then across a new modern bridge over what seemed a tiny creek way below the bridge, with sheep and cattle grazing on the slopes. Had we gone past Canberra? No, after a while we came past some large government buildings and hidden behind some trees was the impressive Parliament Building. We did the usual touring and sight seeing and ended up at the bottom of Red Hill. The road stopped there, and we had to walk up the unpaved, rather rough path up. On top we had a lovely view. On our right, where now the satellite town of Woden is situated, we saw a valley with dotted trees and one farm house. On our left were large houses with European trees, all very neat and in true suburban style. In the distance we could see the airport of Canberra. Black Mountain stood there in all its solemnity. As we were looking straight across Canberra we saw the War Memorial, which we had visited earlier. It all looked beautifully planned, and we were amused by the roads going around in circles and bends, none of them straight.

We stayed the night at a scout camp on the way to Cotter Dam. In the morning we couldn't get any water out of the taps. They had all frozen with icicles hanging from them. The paddocks looked like they were covered in snow, but it was just the heavy frost on the ground. I don't think I have ever been so cold in my life. Only a large log fire would slowly thaw us. On this trip I met Frank Lee, a student from China. We sat together and got on very well. He was new to Australia, as I was. He invited me to play tennis with him and his friends in Kingston on Sunday mornings. I greatly valued his friendship and the opportunity of playing tennis with a rather well-playing group. I'm sure my tennis improved considerably in the time I played with them.

Another group at the YMCA was a photographic club. They had a darkroom for developing, and as I got friendly with some of them during the Yarramundy camps, I was able to do some enlarging and developing myself. It took a lot of time, but was great fun.

At the beginning of August I left my job at Hardie Rubber Stores, determined to find one in the wool trade. I had saved up enough money to see me over a few weeks. Armed again with the torn-out pink page of the telephone book, I went from door to door of the Wool Buyers and Merchants seeking employment. This time the atmosphere was much more positive. Firms were making plans for the new season, and some said that they would think it over and suggested that I come back. One in particular looked promising: Victor Dekyvere & Co. I met Marcel Dekyvere, and when they heard that I was not expecting a salary like

other overseas young people, they were willing to employ me for £12 gross a week. I knew this was even below the minimum wage, but I was so keen to set foot in the wool trade, that I agreed. I was to start on 24 August, and I was very happy.

As there were still two weeks to go, I decided to enjoy some holidays. I had moved from Mrs. Ehrlig's to a rented room in Coogee. Full board was rather expensive, I thought, and since one of my fellow boarders had mentioned a vacant room to a colleague of his, I moved there to 39 Dolphin Street.

Coogee is in the Eastern Suburbs by the sea, which had a lovely beach. The house was just five minutes from it, ideal for a beach holiday. I disregarded the fact that August was still the last month of winter in Australia, as the weather was warm and sunny, and having just arrived from Europe, I found even the water not too cold for swimming. I loved it and by the end of the two weeks I was so suntanned that people asked me whether I had been to the snow fields!

At 7 am on 24 August I turned up at the office of Victor Dekyvere & Co. The overalls I had brought from Bremen came in handy, as everyone changed into special store clothes. I was introduced to the senior wool buyer and the others, as well as the sampler. Victor also came to the stores, whilst Marcel remained in the office. All six of us squeezed into one car and drove off to the wool stores.

There were eight different stores selling wool in one week. They were: Australian Mercantile Land & Finance Co, Country Producers Selling Co, Dalgety & Co, Goldsbrough Mort & Co, New Zealand Loan & Mercantile Agency Co, Pitt Son & Badgery Ltd, Shute Bell Badgery Lumby Ltd, and Winchcombe Carson Ltd. We had to value greasy wool at two stores a day for four days. Fridays were no sales.

At the first wool store, Tom Guayatt, the senior buyer, told me to pencil for him. This meant that I had to pick up a catalogue and starting from Lot 1, I had to write in pencil the type of wool (Australian standards), i.e. Tom had to assess the quality or fibre diameter, cleanness and staple length, and if we had an order for that particular type, he mentioned the order number, and the yield which he estimated. The yield is the clean weight in percentages. The first lesson I had to learn was to write down the details on the correct lot. It was easy to make a mistake, but Tom watched me carefully and warned me of the dire consequences if we bought the wrong lot because of my mistake. As I wanted very much to do well, I had to give the work my fullest attention. The wool types were the same I had learnt in Bremen, so I quickly picked up that part of the job, but to guess the yield was far more difficult. Tom would ask me occasionally what yield I thought, but it was either too high or too low, sometimes it was right, and through trial and error I slowly learnt to put a more correct yield on the wool.

I can't have been too bad, for soon the second buyer, Fred Black,

wanted me to pencil for him also. He was well known for his jokes amongst the other buyers, especially the Japanese. Sometimes he would bring a rubber snake and half cover it with wool. Then he would say to one of them: "Do you think this is good enough for a Japanese 60s quality?" The Japanese buyer would grab a handful of wool where Fred had hidden the snake, suddenly yelling out in fright when he saw it. Fred would burst out laughing, and everyone joined him. Fred was also well known for his dirty jokes. One day a young married man complained to him that he could no longer perform in bed as he used to. "Ah," Fred said, "you have to remember: in your teens it works trice daily, in your early twenties twice daily, in your late twenties try daily, in your thirties trice weekly, in your forties twice weekly, in your fifties try weekly, in your sixties try weakly, and in your seventies try to remember."

You could usually tell where to find Fred by the spontaneous laughter coming from a small group of men. I think his secret was to write down a key word for each of his jokes, and every now and again he would look up his list, and that would then be the joke of the day.

As work started so early for the wool buyers, everyone took two breaks, one for morning tea, and one for lunch. The stores supplied tea and cakes and hot lunches in their canteens, which were quite adequate even for people with good appetites. Tom was always concerned about his figure, so each week we would stand on one of those scales they weighed wool bales on. My weight was always constant, about 83 kg, and Tom wanted to know how I managed that, in spite of my good appetite. It must be due to my metabolism, for I have kept that weight until now.

Peter, our junior buyer, valued the star lots. These were small lots, under five bales. They were shown on a separate floor and also sold in a different auction room, which Peter attended. I hoped that one day I would graduate to that job too.

After lunch we had to rush back to the office to calculate prices for Fred Black in the auction room that afternoon. The orders came from overseas in pence sterling on clean wool only, whereas the auction price was Australian pence greasy. Again this had to be done accurately, as mistakes cost money.

Our sampler George had drawn in the morning large samples of each lot bought the previous day from bales not shown on the show-floor. All buyers looked at the samples together to check the quality and yield. On a rising market Fred may have bought some lots above the limit, in which case the buyers would decide whether the yield could be adjusted, as our firm would always guarantee the yield to the customers.

The auction started at 2 pm in the big hall at the Wool Exchange, opposite our office, corner Pitt and Bridge Streets. Fred was our regular bidder there. The speed with which the lots were sold was phenomenal. I remember once the fastest seller setting a record of clearing 400 lots in one hour, to the applause of everyone. I would often sit at the back of the

auction room, watching the procedures while waiting for the first catalogue to be finished. Farmers, whose wool was being sold that day, were also there to see what price their wool would fetch.

As soon as the first catalogue was finished, I took it back to the office. Victor wanted to see how many bales we had bought, and the price paid. This would then indicate whether prices were going up or down. We costed every lot that we had valued in the morning and put the prices on a large sheet of paper. Tom worked out the prices for each type and prepared cables for our overseas customers.

When the auction was over, usually between four and five, final figures were calculated and a market report prepared for our main customers. Longer cables had to be coded to save money. A whole sentence could be represented by a five-letter code-word. Then the cables had to be typed on an OTC (Overseas Telecommunication Corporation) cable form and I usually took them to their office, again not far from us. We seldom finished by six o'clock, usually it was half past six or even seven. After a long day's work, everyone assembled in the visitor's room for a drink. Marcel Dekyvere never came to the stores. He was more in charge of administration. Michael Selios was head of the scoured wool and wool-tops department. They would often speak French together, and they would always join us for the drinks. The accountant, two shipping clerks and three secretaries did not, as they would have left the office by 5 pm.

Every second week the buyers went either to Brisbane, or to Goulburn or Newcastle. They caught a plane to Brisbane on Sunday evenings and came back on Thursday evenings. The team split for the other centres, Fred and Peter would usually go to Goulburn, and Victor, Tom and I to Newcastle.

There we stayed for one or two nights, depending on the amount of wool for sale. I would often team up with Doug Halling from Feltex for our evenings there. I also met buyers from other firms with whom I became quite friendly. On one occasion, during the morning work in the stores, I walked past Jean Beaurang of Kreglingers, whom I had met in Düsseldorf in 1952, and who didn't want to give me a job in his firm. He never acknowledged me in any way nor did he show that he recognised me. I would have loved to show him that I was not as stupid as he thought, but there would have been nothing gained.

There was not much time to develop a social life, except for the weekends. The son of a spinning mill owner in Germany, George Egert, whom I had met in Bremen just before I left, came to Australia by plane just in time for the beginning of the season. He worked with one of his father's suppliers. We would meet occasionally during weekends, either at my place in Coogee or at his place, and would go to the pictures together and sometimes share a meal. We would talk in German all the time which I found quite relaxing, as English was still a bit of a strain, though speaking it all day long I soon got used to it. When I had to write a letter

to one of our customers, Michael Selios would always be willing to help me. I owe him a great deal, as he was very patient with me.

The first Tuesday in November was Melbourne Cup Day. I marvelled at the way everything seemed to come to a stop in Australia for the duration of the race. Auctions were stopped, and as I looked down Pitt Street from the office windows, there was no tram moving on the road, no car, and hardly any pedestrians. Hazel Lynch, the boss' secretary, had brought her radio, and Stan Burrows, the accountant, made sure that everyone had drawn a horse in the sweep stake. Some time after three, everyone assembled around the radio, listening to the broadcast from Melbourne, and at the finish came great jubilation from those who had won in the sweep, or who had put a bet on the winning horse.

There were no auctions over Christmas. In fact the office closed down between Christmas and the New Year. Colin from the YMCA had invited me to his parents' home in Gosford to spend a couple of days over Christmas with his family. But what to do on Christmas Eve? There was a German church in Goulburn Street, and they had a traditional Christmas Eve service in the afternoon. This was attended mainly by families, and suddenly I felt terribly lonely. Memories of lovely Christmas celebrations with our family came flooding back, and here I was, not knowing a single person at church. There was another young man who seemed all on his own, so I invited him to have dinner with me in a nearby restaurant. I was usually very careful with money and I don't think I had been out in a restaurant before, where I had to pay the bill, but on that night I felt generous. We had a very nice meal together.

On Christmas morning I met Colin at Central Station and we caught the train for Gosford. I hadn't been there by train before. The Hawkesbury River looked beautiful as we approached the bridge and then the train went along plenty of waterways and tunnels before it arrived at Gosford station.

Colin's family were most delightful. They made me very welcome. Christmas Dinner the English/Australian way was quite different to our tradition. Everyone had to wear a silly paper hat, and the meat was turkey and ham and Christmas Pudding. It was a lovely meal. Next day I went for a long walk with Colin through the bush. I nearly trod on a black snake. It was so small that I thought it could not be poisonous, but apparently they are very much so. I didn't let on that it was my birthday. For that year it just had to be ignored.

From the end of June until the end of August there were no sales anywhere in Australia. It was the usual winter break, when most wool buyers went away on holidays. I dearly wanted to see a sheep farm in the inland, and a very kind gentleman from Winchcombe Carsons, one of the selling brokers, arranged for me to stay on one of that firm's sheep property near Nyngan. At some ungodly hour in the morning in July I caught the mail train going to Burke from Sydney Central. My ticket said

Canonbar, and the conductor assured me that it was one stop before Nyngan. The platform was just long enough for one carriage. I was in the outback for sure. The country was as flat as Sapowice, the property where I grew up. I took an immediate liking to it. A car came to pick me up and take me to Miowera Station, where Mr. & Mrs. Muir were the managers. They offered me hospitality in their home.

Shearing was in full swing, and I was roped in straight away. The shed had places for six shearers, who kept the classer and the helpers busy. My task was to keep the classing table and the floor around it clean from locks and other pieces of wool, as the classer was very particular about the fleeces. As I was familiar with all the different types of wool, I could make myself quite useful in the shearing shed.

Bruce was the jackeroo on the station. He too stayed with the Muirs. One day the shearing could not continue as the sheep were all wet. Bruce took me on horse back around the station. We came to an emu nest with about 15 large, green eggs. Bruce collected one: "This should be enough for scrambled eggs for the whole family."

"Can you eat emu eggs?"

"Sure, you must try."

"Do you think it is still fresh?"

"Yeah, he hasn't sat on them yet, they are still all cold."

"You said 'he', doesn't the female incubate the eggs?"

"No, she only lays them, the male incubates them and looks after the chicks."

What a strange world, I thought, everything seems to be upside down. Then we came across a wild pig family.

"We should try to catch one of those little piglets. Mrs. Muir can fatten it then. You can't eat the big ones caught in the wild, they have too strong a taste."

It wasn't easy to catch one, but eventually we succeeded. Mrs. Muir was very pleased about the piglet and the Emu egg. I loved the open air and the country side, riding there with Bruce in charge, and not a care in the world. I took a lot of photos on our rides and also of the sheep and the station. I would develop them myself at the YMCA, and I promised Bruce that I would send him some of himself and the horse.

The mornings were crisp and frosty. It looked like snow outside, but the days were beautiful and sunny. The evenings were spent in front of a huge blazing fire, talking about all sorts of subjects. I was surprised at the wide range of knowledge these people from the bush had.

The classer took me back home to Sydney in his car, after the shearing was all finished.

A friend of mine in the wool trade, Len van den Hout, wanted to sell his Lambretta motor scooter. To be motorised would make a big change to my life style. I would no longer be dependent on public transport, particularly at weekends, when very few buses and trams were operating. So I decided

to buy it. It was a great joy to put-put along the roads and weave in and out of traffic. Distances had suddenly shrunk considerably, and I had far more time on my hand. But it was not all easy sailing. The Lambretta had her moods. She was not easy to start, and I remember once pushing her up the hill past the Randwick Race Course to the top of Randwick, from where the road descended gently towards Coogee. I just let her roll down the hill, and suddenly the motor started again.

After I had worked for over twelve months at Dekyveres for a salary well below the minimum wage, considering the long hours of our working day, I went one day to Victor's and Marcel's office and asked for a pay rise.

"Oh, no, we can't give you a pay rise", Marcel replied.

I became angry. I was going to ask for a modest rise, but his stubbornness irked me. I had been working very hard and knew that I was appreciated. This encouraged me to reply: "Well, in that case I'll have to leave you."

"You can't do that, we need you here. How much do you want?"

"Double of what I'm getting now!"

"And how much is that?"

"I'm getting now £12 a week, and I'm asking for £24. Surely that isn't too much for the amount of work here!"

Eventually both agreed, and I was very happy. I didn't really want to be looking for a job again.

From then on my salary rose continuously. The year ending in June 1956 I received £1108, a year later £1335, and in June 1958 it was £2031.

One day in Spring of 1955 I was invited to a farewell of a friend of George Egert's. At that party I met Bill Eckels, a wool buyer from Germany, who had been in Australia since before the War. He was a partner in a wool exporting business. I had seen him before at the wool stores, but apart from casual exchanges we had never talked to each other. We seemed to click immediately and he invited me to his place in Pymble to help him in his garden the following Saturday. There I met his wife Jean. Both were most hospitable and they asked me to come again the following weekend and stay for the night. Of course I was delighted. It was such a nice home and the garden was just great.

One evening they took me to a party where I met many of Bill & Jean's friends, most of whom worked also in the wool trade. The party was jolly and boisterous. Some were younger than Bill & Jean, about my age, and we all had a good time. From then on I visited Bill & Jean quite frequently, mostly on my Lambretta, and went to many parties with them.

During that time I became quite friendly with one of the girls from St.Ives, also friends of the Eckels. Her name was Christa. She had come with her parents from Germany after the war, and her mother's sister was Minti Fabarius, whose husband was also in the wool trade.

I introduced Christa to my YMCA friends, and she joined us at several of our weekend outings. Eventually Christa and I got engaged. We wanted

to be married in April of 1956. Her parents received me well and everything seemed just so. However, our relationship did not develop enough on which to build a future life together. I couldn't see it at that time as I lacked maturity, but Christa had enough sense to call the wedding off, just a month before the set date. I was caught unawares, and it took me some time to get over the shock. My self image and pride were hurt. In retrospect I can see how much I needed a thorough shake-up to come to my senses. Had Christa been a lesser girl, I would probably have married her and been sorry afterwards. Bill and Jean were wonderful to me in those days. I don't know what I would have done without them.

As I had saved up quite a lot of money for the wedding, in spite of my low salary, I decided to spend it then on a car. I sold the Lambretta. The NRMA finance would lend money only on new cars, and only up to 50% of the price. I paid cash £518 for a new Volkswagen, registration No.BDG 851 — grey colour with dark red trim. The balance would be paid off by instalments of £22 per month. What luxury after the Lambretta! Having been exposed to all weather before, this beetle car was wonderful, and so reliable! I can still remember the smell of the new car, driving it out of the VW sales yard. A new life would start for me.

The Dekyvere's were kind enough to allow me two weeks' holidays while the sales were still on. I wanted to go to Melbourne to see some of the Olympic Games. Soon I was heading South along the scenic Princes Highway. The NRMA had provided me with plenty of maps. In those days there was still a 100 mile stretch of unsealed road south of Bega to the Victorian border. It was a bad patch, but my VW managed very well indeed. Most nights I would just sleep in the car. The back of the front seat would fold back, giving me quite adequate space for sleeping.

I arrived in Melbourne during the second week of the Olympic Games. George Egert was able to put me up in the house he rented, and I went to as many events of the Games as I could. Officially, there were no tickets available, of course, especially for the swimming events, but I got them from scalpers who sold them after the sessions had started at a price I could afford.

One session for the water polo match between Hungary and Russia cost me £3. I was hesitant to pay so much for it, but the match turned out to be one of those historic events, where Hungary beat Russia by brutal force. Russian tanks had recently invaded Hungary to overpower an uprising. Before our eyes unfolded an act of revenge. The Hungarian team played so aggressively that they punched and nearly drowned their Russian opponents. There was blood in the pool. We all felt the tense atmosphere and watched the umpires unable to prevent the players from injuring each other. The vast majority of spectators were siding, of course, with the Hungarians. It was an unforgettable experience.

Encouraged by this I went again to the swimming stadium for several finals. This time I had to pay £5, and once again I was not disappointed.

To see John Hendricks win two gold medals for Australia, and Dawn Fraser another gold, was absolutely fabulous. To experience such world class competition is something unique. This can never be reproduced by just watching these events on Television. I also watched one afternoon of Gymnastics and the highlight was the closing ceremony. Melbourne stadium was packed with 125,000 people. Then the announcement came over the loud speakers, that the athletes, for the first time in Olympic history, would not march into the stadium under their own flag, but all mingled together, symbolising the “brother/sisterhood of the nations”. The applause and the welcome of 125,000 people was overwhelming. I don't think there was a dry eye among the spectators.

During the second week of my holidays I travelled towards Adelaide, via Mt. Gambier. The crater lakes showed themselves in all three different colours. Adelaide was very pretty. I liked Glenelg and stayed there in a caravan park. I also visited Joe Whicker. He was the wool tops sales manager at Mitchell & Co., from whom we had bought lots of wool tops. He was very friendly and invited me for an evening meal where I met his wife Doreen. He took me to see the sights of Adelaide at night up the mountain towards Belair, a wonderful sight.

On my way back I went along the Murray. In Swan Hill I jumped into the Murray and promptly lost my car key. The car was locked and I had to get a mechanic to unlock it. He also fixed a connection with which I could start the engine without a key. The only trouble was that I couldn't lock my car from then on. Fortunately, in those days it didn't seem to matter. Then, via Albury, I went back to Sydney along the Hume Highway. When I turned up at the office, I had forgotten my disappointment of the past and was my old self again. The whole holiday had been absolutely wonderful.

Meanwhile, I had to move from my room in Coogee, as Mrs. Hegedus expected a baby and she needed the room. This was before my engagement broke up. I needed a room just to tie me over until we found a place for both of us. I didn't care too much where it was, and as the Kings Cross area had plenty of rooms to let, I chose one in a 'private hotel' in Maclean street towards Potts Point. It was close to the shops and I thought it would be quite handy. Unfortunately, it turned out to be a terrible place. I hated to live in such an impersonal atmosphere, and the place was dirty and full of cockroaches, the size of mice, which came out at night and scrounged around for food. I was quite disgusted and longed to move out again. When the wedding was called off, the Eckels' took me into their house for company and comfort for a couple of weeks.

At that time Victor Dekyvere's sister-in-law was looking for a boarder. She lived in Mosman in a typical suburban three bed-room house. I could do my own cooking and washing there which suited me fine. Mrs. Shipway also seemed a very nice person, so I agreed to rent the room. When I later bought the V.W., I could park the car in her back yard. The

car was my pride and joy and I washed it regularly every Saturday.

My social life also improved with the car. I soon took out another girl and we went to several parties. I remember going with her to one party where we had to bring our own drinks. As I had been given a bottle of whisky for Christmas, I took that to the party just for the two of us. Cynthia only had a couple of glasses, and by the time the evening was over, the bottle was empty. I took her home and drove the car over the Sydney Harbour bridge back to Mosman, when I got violently sick. I parked the car in its proper place and went to bed, but next morning I couldn't remember how I got home, nor that I crossed the Harbour Bridge. There was a complete blank. I could have almost sworn that I had never gone out that night, had it not been for the smelly evidence in the car. It took all morning to clean it up. Since then I have never touched whisky again.

At another party I met Rainer Volk, a young German about my own age. We seemed to click immediately, and before long we discussed the possibility of renting a house together. My sister Gerda had written that she would like to come out to visit me after finishing her leaving certificate. So we needed a house with three bed rooms, but all we could find at the price we could afford was a two-bedroom house. The lounge was large enough, however, to be converted to the third bedroom, and so we decided to rent No.11 Mudies Road, St.Ives for two years.

Gerda arrived in September of 1957, soon after we had rented the house. It was wonderful for me to have someone from the family around again, and we got on quite well. Gerda loved cooking, which I did not, and so she offered to do the cooking, and I agreed to do all the cleaning up afterwards. Rainer was going to clean the house once a week.

The house had a dining room, which we used as our lounge/dining room, with a sofa where visitors could sleep. This became very handy, as I had made another friend at the YMCA, George Blome, who one day arrived on our door steps with no where to stay. "Of course, you can stay here in our lounge, George," we all agreed, and George made himself comfortable. I very much enjoyed our long hours talking together, and breakfasts on the back verandah in the sun in the middle of winter. George had a spiritual depth which I missed in Rainer. One day George came home in the evening.

"You should have been there, Dieter," he said, "You would have enjoyed it."

"Where, did you go, George?"

"To Church in Pymble. I discovered a terrific minister. He has a wonderful sense of humour. I'm sure you would like him."

"Which church did you go to?"

"The Presbyterian Church."

The following Sunday we both went together to the evening service. I sure liked The Rev. Robert MacArthur, and from that time on I hardly

missed an evening service. Coming home from the beach or any other weekend activity, it didn't feel like Sunday, if I had to miss church for one reason or another. It was almost like coming home after a long, long absence. The church services filled a gap which I didn't know was there. Bob came to visit us both, and since Minti Fabarius lived almost diagonally opposite us, we arranged for Bob to meet us all there.

In July 1958 I changed jobs. Michael Selios, who had been in charge of the processed wool at Dekyvere's, had started his own business in 1957. I agreed then that I would join him as soon as the business was established and he could pay my salary. His business was to specialise in the export of processed wool. He had similar clients as Dekyveres, and my experience of selling wool in Germany would be very useful in the small firm. I went there gladly, although I lost salarywise, earning in the first year £1127, second year £1425, third year £1960, and fourth year £1560. Only in the fifth year did I reach my previous salary at Dekyveres, earning £2076, and as the firm prospered in the sixth year £3500, and in the final year £4333. When I left Michael Selios in December 1965 I received £6000 for the six months plus a lump sum of £2200 plus the firm's Holden station wagon. With that I was able to pay off the housing loan.

Michael and I worked very well together. I felt more like a partner than an employee. He went often on overseas trips or to Melbourne, where we opened a branch office, leaving me in charge.

This was a happy time in my life. In 1958 I had no worries about girlfriends, and I was quite content. As we had been to so many parties at other people's places, we felt it was our turn to invite our friends for a party at our place. When we discussed it together, we decided on a fancy dress party. The theme would be 'SPUTNIK III' and we invited our friends to "COME AND JOIN SPUTNIK III in whatever costume you fancy, indicating 'blast-off date and time' and that fancy dress was compulsory and travellers had to bring their own food and drinks. The whole house was re-arranged, except Gerda's room.

Over 100 people of our mutual and separate friends came to the party and it was a roaring success. One friend from the wool trade came as a rich mogul carried by his slaves on a palanquin to the sound of gongs and drums and a huge pot of a rice dish for all. Gerda had painted the silhouette of Mt. Fuji on one of our walls, which we thought looked just wonderful. A lot of raffia and palms for decoration and floor mats made one room look quite oriental. My bedroom gave the illusion of space travelling. Only a soft bluish light revealed a couple of mattresses and cushions on the floor, with stars on the wall and ceiling. Rainer's room was decorated in a futuristic style. We took a lot of trouble with the preparations, but it was well worth while. Everyone had a wonderful time, and the party was talked about for months afterwards.

Life at St.Ives was pleasant. Gerda tried very hard to domesticate us batchelors and to make our house a home, but unfortunately, it wasn't

possible to create a community. We all followed our separate ways without much concern for one another. Whilst I had found a wonderful friend in George Blome, the others may have felt left out. This friendship prepared me for a new experience which was to change my life for ever.

Striking new roots

In September of 1958 a nurse from England was expected at Bill & Jean Eckels. They had sponsored her and she came on the assisted passage scheme to Australia for two years. I wanted to meet her and went to the Eckels on the first weekend after she had arrived, but she was in bed with the flu. I still saw her briefly and said welcome to Australia, and that was it. My friend George wanted to go on a trip into the country of NSW during the October long weekend. His girl-friend was Renata Fabarius, my former fiancée's cousin, and he urged me to invite a girl and to come too. But I didn't really want to go.

"I haven't got anyone to take. I would only be a fifth wheel on the cart. No, you go by yourself."

"Why don't you ask that English nurse at the Eckels, she might want to come with us?"

"Oh, she wouldn't come."

"You can always try."

Well, more for George's sake I went and asked Jean whether it would be all right for me to ask Alison for the week-end drive.

"Why don't you ask her? I'm sure she won't mind."

So I did, and after referring the matter back to Jean and Bill, Alison agreed to come.

Encouraged by this I asked her also if she would like to come with me to the wool ball on the Friday before we left. She again said "Yes".

At that time I had no idea that this was going to be the start of a life-long romance. The wool ball was nothing particular, but our weekend was. We had agreed to meet up with George in Yass. I had to go to the office before we could leave and that gave George at least three hours' head start. Alison and I stopped for lunch on the side of the Hume Highway, somewhere before Goulburn. At about two we had caught up with George and Renata, and were heading towards Cootamundra and Young, where Renata's cousin Eberhard was working on a farm. We wanted to visit him.

The girls stayed in a hotel near Young, while George and I slept in his panel-van. On Sunday we were invited to a sumptuous lunch by the farmer where Eberhard worked. After that we made our way towards Bathurst. We camped the night under some trees near the main road.

Alison was quite impressed with how we were able to light a fire with just damp gum leaves and twigs. The eucalypt oil in the leaves burnt in spite of the dampness. But the evening was not very nice, as it began to rain again, and we settled in our two cars, the girls in my VW., and George and I again in his panel van.

It must have been on one of those country roads, when the next day a police car stopped George to book him for speeding. I didn't know why he was stopped, so I pulled up in my car and asked what had happened.

"Are you travelling together?" the policeman asked.

"Yes."

"Could I have your licence please?"

"Sure," and I gave him my licence. "Could you tell me what this is all about?"

"You have both been speeding."

"No, I haven't", I protested, but to no avail. He booked me and said: "If you like, you can contest this in court, but I can assure you, you would lose. I saw you both speeding."

I was furious, but there was not much I could do. George may have gone too fast through the village, but I certainly did not, as I arrived at the spot where George was booked quite a bit later. Should I fight against the police? Perhaps it was futile. But nevertheless I was steaming inside.

This nasty interlude did not spoil the peace and tranquility I felt along the road. Alison was just sitting there quietly, and I felt comfortable in her presence without having to say anything. I think she also enjoyed her first experience in the Australian bush.

For a few weeks after that, we did not see each other again. Then in November, George wanted to go again on a trip, and it was on that trip that we first kissed each other. From then on we saw each other frequently and regularly, as much as my and Alison's work would allow. I would often pick her up from her private nursing place, and then we would go out together.

On New Year's Eve of 1958 we attended a party in a house in Wahroonga which stood on a block of land where the express way to Newcastle is now. We were both standing outside in the garden, looking at the moon, and it was close to midnight. It was here that we decided to get married and spend the rest of our lives together. I felt like I was walking on a cloud.

Next morning we made two or three attempts to phone England. Finally we got a reasonable connection with both parents on the other line. They were a bit shocked, but eventually gave their blessings to us both. The engagement party was set for 17 January 1959.

When I told Michael Selios about our wedding plans he said:

"Make sure you get married before April, for in April I want to go on my overseas trip."

So we set the wedding for Friday, 20 March 1959, as this was also

Alison's mother's birthday.

Minti was happy to give us the afternoon tea reception at her place. Before the wedding, Bob MacArthur explained to us the order of service and we practiced going through the motions. There was no pre-marital counselling.

Meanwhile we were frantically looking for a house to buy. The Bank of New South Wales would give us a loan, and we were looking for a place within walking distance to the train line on the North Shore. That turned out to be very difficult. We found a house at 60 McIntire St. Gordon, but it needed a lot of repairs before it became habitable. Then came a gift of £1,000 from Alison's father. With that money we were able to pay more and find something quite suitable. Alison phoned me one morning at the office and said: "I have just found our house."

"Where?"

"In Lindfield. Not even 5 minutes walk to the station. It's a sunny house on a corner block, and quite a nice aspect. I'm sure you will like it too."



Our house in 24 Bent Street, Lindfield

I left the office immediately and looked for 24 Bent Street, corner Newark Crescent. Alison was still there, and when I saw the owner of the house I recognised Ken Hirodo, a Japanese wool buyer. A broad grin on both our faces, and the deal was struck. We bought the house for £5,000, and Ken's family would vacate early in March. That would give us enough

time to do some painting before the wedding. We were overjoyed.

On the morning of our wedding I had to do two things in town, to pick up the wedding ring and something else. I was in such a tizz, that I received two parking tickets. George, as Best Man, was supposed to look after me and see to it that I wouldn't forget anything. But he was quite useless. He was also too excited. Gerda was to be Alison's Bride's Maid. The service started at 3 pm at Pymble Presbyterian Church, and Bob MacArthur was there to greet us. We had invited about 30 guests.



Our Wedding 20/3/59

Alison looked beautiful. She walked down the aisle escorted by Bill Eckels. Jean couldn't come as her eldest daughter Selina had chicken pox. Bob made our wedding service a memorable occasion. It was taped for both our parents in England and Germany, as unfortunately none of them were able to attend. Gerda was the only member of the family, and she had to represent both sides at our wedding.

The reception at Minti Fabarius' place was a simple occasion. There were drinks and afternoon tea with lots of finger food and a lovely wedding cake. I fumbled through the mandatory speech, but George made a good one. He said some funny bits, but it was mainly serious, more contemplative and looking towards our future together. Bill also made a speech, representing Alison's family, and soon after that Alison changed into her 'going-away' outfit. She looked very smart, and as she

did not like hats, she had a contraption of feathers on her head instead. The good-byes were not difficult, as I was very keen to get away and on our way. By then it was already about 5.30 pm and it was getting dark.

Our VW beetle gave a final honk, and we were off. But we didn't get very far. There were some empty tins on a string trailing behind us which made a hell of a racket. Going around the corner I removed them and we thought that would be it. But then there was another clanking noise, which I didn't quite know where it came from. Eventually we decided it must have come from the left hub-cap. In my best suit I had to get out again and remove the cap. A few pennies dropped to the ground.

"Now we shall be ready to go at long last," I said to Alison, and we drove off confidently. At the next intersection I had to stop again, and there was that by now familiar clank again, this time from the right front wheel.

"Oh no, another one!" exclaimed Alison.

By now I was in a slight rage. I had enough of this.

"It must have been George and Horst," I said, "wait till we come back. I'll give them a piece of my mind!"

But there was no point swearing and carrying on. I had to remove the hub-cap again and shook out the pennies. By now it was quite dark.

After travelling for about twenty minutes, we heard another clank from the wheels.

"One must have got stuck and come loose again. I've had it. I'm not going to undo the hub-cap again. Let it get stuck again and tomorrow in daylight we will be able to remove it."

I needn't have worried. The one penny that was left got well and truly stuck again and didn't bother us any more.

Our destination was THE GREAT NORTHERN Hotel in Newcastle. I had booked the bridal suite. We wanted to have some dinner, but we were too late. They made us some sandwiches which were brought to our room.

Alison heard during the night a lot of trains shunting and whistling, but I was dead to all the noise. Breakfast was in good old Aussie style, a selection of juices, serials, eggs and bacon on toast with a decent steak. Alison was surprised at my appetite.

"I hope you don't expect a breakfast like that every day."

"Of course not. I was just starving having missed out on dinner last night."

With this good breakfast, our honeymoon trip continued. We were heading for Port Macquarie, where I had booked a flat for ten days. It was right opposite Flynn's Beach and we both loved it. Port Macquarie in those days was a sleepy little mid-north coast town. It had two or three typical Aussie cafes, which were closed on the day we wanted to eat out.

There was also plenty of rain, but it didn't prevent us from doing sight seeing around Port Macquarie and going further up north. The first ferry on the Pacific highway was across the Macleay river, and up to Brisbane

there were further four or five ferries.

Unfortunately, our lovely honeymoon had to be short as I had to be back in the office on Monday the week after our wedding. Michael was leaving the following day for overseas and had to brief me on all outstanding matters of the business.

Our home was lovely. We had brought a few items of furniture from our St.Ives home, such as the divan bed, a couple of saucer chairs, and mainly kitchen ware. We had to purchased a new double bed and a second hand fridge. A kitchen table with four red chairs came with the house. If we had more than two visitors, they were asked to bring their own chairs unless they wanted to sit on the carpet in the lounge room. We had ordered a wardrobe unit, but there was a delay before it could be delivered, so our clothes were all hanging from the picture rail in our bed room. Before we moved in we had all the floors sanded, except the lounge room, and I had painted them with liquid nylon, a hard wearing lacquer which brought out the natural grain of the cypress pine boards. We bought some straw mats for the hall, and very gradually we bought items such as lounge room furniture, dining room furniture, all second hand, and a new dressing table for Alison. Although our house was modest, we never lacked visitors.

Horst Schmidt, another friend from the YMCA, joined our family together with Chawalli, his Afghan hound. Both of them were very good tenants, and we had never any trouble with either of them. Chawalli was such a lovely dog, quite elegant and he had refined manners. Some neighbours thought that he was aggressive and one complained that he had attacked her. We could never believe it.

During this time Klaus von Bonin was a regular visitor with us, also Werner Schlieper, a cousin of Rainer's. They were all Germans without any family here. Gerda, of course, came quite regularly, and there was always a lively atmosphere in our home. With Klaus our whole group went water skiing or if we didn't have a boat we just went to the beach.

In May Alison became pregnant, but this did not seem to change our way of life. She only occasionally had morning sickness, but otherwise was strong and healthy. George Blome left Australia for the U.S.A. to further his studies. We kept corresponding but I really missed him. There was no one who could take his place.

The beginning of 1960 was extremely hot. We kept going on water skiing trips, but Alison was getting big and felt more and more uncomfortable. In January we had a four-day long heat wave, with temperatures above 100 degrees Fahrenheit. My office, exposed to the western sun, was very hot. I would come home in the afternoons and sit in our bath tub with some ice cubes added to cool the cold water.

After dinner we would go to Dee Why swimming pool to cool off. There were hundreds of others there, all trying to escape the heat. After having thoroughly cooled off, we went back up the hill at Dee Why, where the

oppressively hot air hit us again.

Our George was born on 16 February 1960. Alison had done the washing and cleaning of the house, and as soon as we had gone to bed, her waters broke and we had to go straight to the Sanitarium Hospital in Wahroonga. I was able to sit with Alison through the first stage of labour, then I was whisked out and Alison was wheeled into the delivery ward. They told me it would be at least another hour, so I walked outside into the dawn of the new day with a very strange feeling. Today I was to become a father. What would it be, a boy or a girl? We had agreed on names for both genders, but there was little doubt in my mind that it would be a boy. Then I rushed back into the hospital, I didn't want to miss the arrival of our first one. I didn't have to wait for long. Dr. Schofield, our G.P., appeared still in his surgical gown:

"Congratulations, you have a boy!"

"Can I go in and see Alison?"

"Sure, just put a surgical gown on."

Next moment I sat by Alison's bed and greeted her and our newborn son. I was so very pleased and thankful that everything had gone well.

Alison greeted me with a tired smile and said: "Only another eleven to go!"

What a thing to say at that moment, I thought. We had read the book 'Cheaper by the Dozen', and whenever people would ask us how many children we wanted, we would always say 'a dozen'. It was good to see that Alison had not lost her sense of humour. I was happy and a very proud father. As was customary in those days, I had to buy some cigars for the men in our office.

George grew daily and filled out visibly into a beautifully looking baby. I had to learn to change his nappy and to give him a bath. It made such a difference to my coming home every evening from the office. I tried my utmost to come home early so that I would still see little George.

Michael wanted me to go on a business trip to Asia and Europe in June. If Alison and George were to go too, we had to pay a refundable security of over £1000 for Alison, to ensure that she would return to Australia. She had come out on a £10 assisted passage, under the condition that she would stay in Australia for at least two years. Alison and George would go straight to London via the U.S. and I would start in Hong Kong, then to India, Pakistan, Egypt and then join her in the U.K.

We left on the same day, Alison and George in the afternoon, and I late the same evening. My first stop was Hong Kong. It was hot and steamy, and as Mike had suggested, I went only with hand luggage, whatever else I needed I should buy in Hong Kong at very cheap prices. I stayed at the Miramar in Kowloon, and Mike's tailor fitted me out with a tropical suit with two trousers and three shirts made of the finest cotton. Other items were added to the purchases, and a suitcase to pack these things, as well as gifts for the family in Germany and England. There were no clients to visit

in Hong Kong, so I flew to Calcutta, arriving about an hour before midnight.

Mike had asked me to make some purchases for the Australian Trade Commissioner in Calcutta. He was to meet me at the airport to get the things through customs, but he didn't turn up. That delayed me at customs clearance and I missed the bus to the city. Then I heard that a general strike had been declared from midnight. By now it was after midnight and no bus nor taxi would leave the airport for the city. I was stuck there, the only foreigner in the big airport hall. As I was sitting there, feeling sorry for myself, very tired and longing to be in my comfortable hotel bed, I saw an Indian with a turban signalling to me: "Want a taxi, sahib?"

I went hesitatingly to the door and said: "Isn't there a strike on?"

"Come with me, I know a way, I'll get you to the city. Where do you want to go to?"

"The OBEROI ORIENTAL HOTEL."

"No problem, sahib", and he gently pushed me into his old rickety taxi, slamming the back door. I should have checked with someone official from the airport, but everything went so quickly, that I had no chance.

My turbaned driver went at enormous speed. The streets were all deserted at two in the morning. It was pitch black outside. I could only see what the dim headlights of the car revealed, the occasional straw hut, a deserted village with rather dingy homes. Suddenly it occurred to me, that I may have made a mistake. Who was this taxi driver anyway. What if he was an accomplice of a gang of robbers, leading me right into their arms to rob and perhaps kill me? By now truly concerned I looked again through the windows, and what I saw did not seem to re-assure me at all. The homes were looking even worse than at first. I felt quite sure that I was already in the trap. What should I do? Should I ask the driver to take me back to the airport? If he had evil intent, he wouldn't do it anyway, I reasoned. Should I jump out of the taxi? That was too dangerous, anyway, what then? Unable to make a decision I just sat there, still hoping to see some signs that the city was approaching. Suddenly I saw bright lights, the taxi stopped, and in bold neon lights I read: HOTEL ORIENTAL.

A big sigh of relief! I gladly paid the driver twice the price of a normal taxi fare from the airport. I was so glad to be in one piece and at the hotel I was booked in.

Mike had told me never to drink the tap water, not even use it for cleaning my teeth. So I had to order several bottles of soda water, a rather strange medium to clean ones teeth with, but I had a real fear of the local bugs. I had packed enough enterovioform pills, but prevention is better than a cure. When I arrived at the breakfast table next morning, I was told that I could do nothing that day in town. The general strike had stopped all means of transport, including taxis, and all factories and offices were closed. So I spent a lazy day in the nice hotel, recuperating from the flight

and the anxiety of the night before.

I never saw the Trade Commissioner until the following day. He came to pick me up at the hotel and we went to the airport to clear his things through customs. He was also very helpful supplying me with addresses of spinning mills and giving me useful hints for business. The strike lasted for four days, but conditions had eased considerably by the second day, and I was able to visit some of the mills on my list.

After about four solid days of visiting, I continued on my next part of the journey. I caught a train to Kanpur, first class air conditioned sleeper, the top range of seats available, and the most comfortable way to travel apart from air travel.

The trip to Kanpur took about 36 hours. I booked into the only hotel available, which was of quite poor standard. It had no air conditioning, and since the monsoon had not yet come to Kanpur, it was stinking hot. My bed was under the fan, and every hour or so I had to go under the shower to let the fan dry me. This way I got at least a few hours of sleep.

Our client in Kanpur was Cawnpore Woollen Mills, a huge mill, formerly part of the British India Corporation. It was still run under the old colonial system. The buyer was a very pleasant Englishman, who invited me to dinner at his home. The servants had laid a table outside in their spacious garden. A fan provided some cooling air in the otherwise stifling atmosphere. A waiter served us with a most delicious meal. I could imagine the British enjoying such a lifestyle for centuries. My host insisted that on my next visit I must stay in their company's guest house, which was far superior to the local hotel.

As Kanpur was not far from Agra, I decided to make a side trip to see the Taj Mahal. Even though I had bought a first-class ticket, the compartment had only open windows, letting in soot and dust. The six seats were jammed with about 18 passengers. I don't know how I managed to eat my lunch there. I had ordered a non-vegetarian meal from a railway officer, and when it came it was all very well presented, with several side dishes, all very chilli hot but extremely nice. I thoroughly enjoyed this meal on the train, not giving much thought to the poor people who were travelling in fourth class, some had even climbed on the roof of the carriages. It would have been an understatement to describe this train as overcrowded.

In Agra I hired a bicycle rickshaw to take me to the Taj. I felt sorry for the poor chap pulling me, as it was very hot and the perspiration was dripping from his bare back. I told him to go slowly, but I don't think it made any difference.

The Taj Mahal itself was magnificent. Although it was still in the hot part of the day, when most people stayed indoors, the mausoleum certainly cast its spell over me. What wonderful architecture, what brilliant marble! I could see why people called it one of the great wonders of the world.

From Agra I caught another train to New Delhi. Alison had given me the address of a nursing friend of hers from England, who lived in Agra. Anne and her husband were missionaries, but during the hot months they stayed at a guest house at one of the famous hill stations called Naini Tal, in the Himalayas. I went there for the weekend, catching the train to Bareilly, and then by taxi, which I shared with a catholic priest, to Naini Tal. The taxi dropped me at the bus station, as cars were not allowed inside the resort. They said it was only a few hundred yards further, but what I didn't anticipate was how the altitude would affect me. Naini Tal is about 4000 meters above sea level, and any physical effort at that altitude was an enormous strain on my body. Even to walk slowly up the path towards the YMCA was a major effort.

I tried to rest in the afternoon, but my heart was pounding, and I just couldn't sleep at all. The same happened again at night. Later that afternoon I met Anne, Paul and their two children and we had a long talk together over dinner. The following day they took me on a boat trip on the lake. The landscape looked magnificent. The still lake surrounded by high mountains made a lasting impression on me. The evenings were quite cool, a most pleasant climate, I thought. No wonder that people who could afford it escaped the oppressive heat of the plains to spend it up there on a hill station.

On my way back to New Delhi I was able to get an air-conditioned overnight train. I shared the compartment with a most interesting Indian. We sat up half the night talking about religion. I learnt from him a great deal about Hinduism, about their great religious tolerance, and how their religion was affecting their every-day life. It was a most interesting and stimulating conversation, which I thoroughly enjoyed.

In New Delhi I caught a small plane to Amritsar. We had a rather bumpy trip and I vowed never to travel on such small planes again. It made me quite sick.

In Amritsar I stayed at Mrs. Bandhary's Guest House. There were no hotels in town that would come up to the standard of accommodation and cuisine of Mrs. Bandhary. Michael had warned me already of her outspokenness, and she was certainly a personality, respected by diplomats and business people alike. I had to visit several Woollen mills in Amritsar, and also in Ludhiana, a short drive away. Mrs. Bandhary owned her own hire car, and the driver knew where to find all the addresses. This made it very much easier for me. There was even time to go to Chandigar, the provincial capital at the foothills of the Himalayas, a most beautiful area.

I also had enough time to visit the Golden Temple of the Sikhs. The Sikh religion is an offshoot of Hinduism, which had a social programme very much like our Christian church. They had schools all over the northern part of India, also hospitals and community centres to feed and clothe the poor. I was fascinated to find such a caring and sharing

community in the midst of a society still divided by a caste system and where the majority of people didn't seem to care for the poor and outcast.

From Amritsar I had to cross into Pakistan. The border is a few kilometers away from town, and Mrs. Bandhari's hire car took me right to the border. As the enmity between the Pakistanis and Indians since 'partition' had not abated, there was no communication between the two countries whatsoever. After finishing the usual border formalities on the Indian side, I had to walk to the Pakistani border post, a distance of about two to three hundred meters, carrying all my luggage without trolleys being available. I was glad to have followed Mike's advice, to send my heavy suitcase ahead to London. No porter was allowed to come with me. I was reminded of the many times I had crossed the border between East and West Germany illegally. What tragedy it is, if nations can't coexist peacefully. Several Indian and Pakistani people told me about their traumatic experiences during 'partition'. The sad thing was that even after twelve years they were still not willing to forgive and forget.

From the border it was not far to Lahore, where I was to stay the night and then catch the plane next morning to Rawalpindi. But my spirits were very low. I had worked very hard for the last week or so, and the heat and the food and lack of sleep took its toll. I had to cancel the trip and went straight to Karachi.

There were only a couple of mills to be visited and in spite of feeling unwell I visited them. Then I caught the next plane to Cairo, where I had to visit the woollen mill at Mehalla Kubra, a distance of over 100km north of Cairo. The trip there along the Nile delta in an airconditioned taxi was very pleasant. The mill itself was huge. They were usually buying large quantities of wool, but unfortunately nothing at that time. However, they promised me to buy from us in future.

In London I was met by Alison who surprised me with the news that her mother was looking after our George, and that we had a couple of days in London for sightseeing, before going on to Goldstone. That was such a nice idea, and I couldn't have wished for a better tour guide than Alison. Names like 'Big Ben', 'The Tower', 'Westminster', 'St. Paul's' and many more became real places which had a long history.

In Goldstone I was to meet Alison's family for the first time. What would they think of their son-in-law? With some trepidation I went to meet them, but I needn't have worried. They welcomed me with open arms. It was most wonderful. Not only Alison's parents, but also her three brothers with their families. I felt I was warmly accepted in this large family. After the hustle and bustle of Asia, and the dirt and the heat, Goldstone was a real recluse. It was most relaxing to spend a couple of weeks with Alison in that peaceful surrounding.

The fruit farm had been in the family for one hundred and fifty years, when 28 acres were bought by Peter Chandler. He died in 1826 and was succeeded by his son Thomas. Since those days, each generation added

land to the original farm until the present total of 972 acres was reached. A variety of fruit is grown there, and several cold stores allow the firm to store, mainly apples and pears, until the glut of the harvest is over and better prices can be obtained on the market. We arrived just at the tail end of the strawberry season. David had left a patch for us uncut. What wonderful hospitality!

Father Chandler showed me around the fruit farm and explained everything to me. As I had some farming experience, it was not too difficult to follow the explanations, and I think I was able to ask also some reasonably intelligent questions. Mother doted over our little George, whom she had looked after all on her own for the two or three days Alison and I spent in London. There was a large party arranged to welcome home Alison and to welcome George and me into the family. Every Chandler was present and it must have been a great joy to Father & Mother, to have the whole family together.

But, alas, the quiet and relaxing time in Goldstone had to come to an end. There were a number of customers on the Continent to be visited. Alison, George and I flew to Bremen, where my former boss, Jürgen Siemering, had bought a V.W. for me, which the dealer was willing to buy back after my return. This was a much cheaper way than hiring a car for all that time and distance.

This V.W. took us to Braunschweig, where my parents were eagerly expecting us. It took a while to get used to driving again on the right side of the road, but it was not too difficult. My parents had not met Alison before either, and she was now in the same position as I, before I met her parents. But here again, Alison and George were most warmly welcomed. Mutter was thrilled about her first grandson, and she thoroughly spoils us all.

When we travelled on small excursions, George was put in the boot of the V.W. behind the back seat. That niche seemed to be just right for him. We also travelled to Göttingen to visit Onkel Werner and Tante Margret, and also other members of Mutter's large family. Language did not seem to be too much of a problem. Alison had learnt some German at evening classes, and she managed very well when I was not present.

After about a couple of weeks I took Alison and George to Hannover airport to go back to Goldstone, while I set out for my European trip. On the way south I dropped in at Bernd and Ingrid's and went together with them to a school re-union of our old Schiller School held at Hameln. It gave me a special pleasure to meet my former English teacher, Frau Vogee, who used to despair of my poor results in English and who had often said: "Tieman, you will never learn English." I had the great satisfaction to remind her in English of her remarks, but she continued in German and said she couldn't remember ever having said that. She actually was quite pleasant, but she refused to talk to me in English. May be she didn't want to expose her own limitations.

I also met Günter's old school friend, Hans Zipper, who had visited us in Sapowice many times. He asked me lots of questions about Günter, but I just had to say that he was still missing. As we had both grown older we no longer had the same closeness as before, but it was good to be able to talk about the good old days in Sapowice. The members of Tante Else's boarding house were also there. Many were married and had families, yet the old bond was still in evidence and we enjoyed our time together very much. This was to be the last time I attended one of those re-unions, which continued to meet annually for fifty years.

After the re-union I dropped Bernd and Ingrid off at their home and continued on the Autobahn to Vienna. After some sight-seeing there, I turned south over the border into Yugoslavia. I left my car at Zagreb and caught the train to Skopje, where I arrived in the early hours one morning. The hotel I had booked wasn't ready for me yet, as it was too early, and they claimed they had no spare room, so I had to sleep in a chair in the lounge until the first guests checked out. It seemed a long night. Then came the visit to the mill, and again I had plenty of time to fill in.

There was not much to be seen, but one feature of Skopje struck me as unusual. In the afternoons, as it was getting dark, the whole population seemed to be ambling along the main thoroughfare of Skopje in their Sunday bests. They did not go shopping, nor did they turn in at pubs or cafes, but their sole aim seemed to be to show themselves to the rest of town. Some people would meet friends or relatives and walk with them. It was a social event, which was repeated night after night, in the balmy evenings of the summer months. The reason for this could have been that it was very hot during the day and their flats were so hot, that it was far more pleasant to amble outdoors than to be sitting inside. It certainly was something unique, which I had not observed anywhere else.

Back at Zagreb I picked up my VW and went via Trieste, crossing the border into Italy. visiting clients at Prato (near Florence) and Biella, situated at the southern end of the Alps. At Domodossola my car went on a train through the Simplon Tunnel until Bern in Switzerland.

It is difficult to describe Switzerland in a few words. Everything looked so clean, and being surrounded by high mountains which one could almost touch, I felt a sense of unreality, like looking at a model town from close up. I spent the night in Bern and picked up a hitch-hiker from England, who was on his way home. I dropped him at the border of Holland. He helped me to make the trip more interesting, as it was a long drive and I was getting tired.

In Holland I wanted to visit the mother of Len van den Hout, my friend from Sydney who had sold me his motor scooter. He told me that his mother did not speak any German, but if I spoke German very slowly, she would answer in Dutch. He assured me that we would understand each other. To my utter astonishment it worked!

In Bremen I handed back the car to the dealer, and talked Jürgen Siemerling into coming to Australia to see if our two firms could do some business together. The second leg of my European trip was to be by plane. Going by car on my first round I had appreciated the distances in Europe. I could probably have covered the same distance by car in Australia without much trouble, but in Europe, with many more cars and a far denser population, it was far more strenuous.

I flew via Hamburg, meeting my cousin Jetty Oboussier and her mother at the airport, talking with them for over an hour. Then via Berlin to Warsaw. The flight path must have gone right over our home in Poland, but it was already too dark to see any details. It was a strange feeling to be so close to my childhood paradise and yet unable to see it. From Warsaw I took a plane to Lodz. As I had to negotiate for a taxi I noticed that my Polish, which had been buried for years, came up to the surface. It probably wouldn't take me long before I could speak it again fluently, as I did in my childhood. Unfortunately, I didn't get that opportunity.

From Warsaw I went to Prague, where I again had plenty of time for sight seeing, apart from business. I greatly enjoyed the old university town with its ancient history. The last stop was Budapest. The taxi driver pointed out some houses which still showed marks from the shelling of the Russian tanks in 1956. He didn't leave me in any doubt where he stood politically. I felt very sorry for these brave people, who were suffering under a most oppressive regime, much more so than the Poles and Czechs.

After Eastern Europe I was to visit Bradford, where we had a sales representative, but as I came down with the flu I had to cancel that trip. Alison was quite pleased to have me home a few days earlier than anticipated. The family doctor was called, who prescribed me Alison's father's famous cough mixture. After a couple of days' rest my health was restored. When the time came for us to leave for Australia, Alison's parents and David took us to Heathrow airport, where we caught a plane that went straight to Chicago, where we were met by George Blome. This was a wonderful reunion with my best friend, and our conversation went deep into the night, in spite of the time difference. In San Francisco we boarded a Qantas flight for Sydney. When we heard the captain's voice making an announcement, his broad Australian accent brought tears to my eyes. Had I been so long away from Australia? I couldn't wait to be home again. I knew then that I had struck roots in Australia. After fifteen years in the wilderness, I had a home again. Australia was my home, our heimat, with Alison and little George making up my wonderful family. Alison also felt assured by this trip, that Australia was her home too.

On 25 August 1961 our Mark Gunter was born. Gerda, who was teaching then at PLC Pymble, came to look after George. As school holidays had just started, Mark couldn't have chosen a better time to come into the world. He was a bonny boy, and I thought he looked like

George. Alison had an easier birth, and she was very happy to have a second child. Although we had chosen a name for a girl also, we both felt that it was going to be a boy again. We hoped that bringing up two boys so close together would make things somewhat easier, and we hoped also that they would become good playmates, as I had been with Günter growing up.



Vater and Mutter, Christmas 1960

On Christmas Eve of 1960 family and friends gathered as usual at our place to celebrate Christmas. Right from the beginning we favoured celebrating Christmas on Christmas Eve in German tradition, however dinner was strictly according to English custom. At dinner time three of us mentioned that we wanted to do some further studies in 1961, Gerda, Rainer, my former house mate, and I. As it turned out, only Gerda stuck to her plan and achieved her goal. I started studying Biology and Maths at University of NSW on a part time basis in the evenings. The University accepted my German 1947 Leaving Certificate only under the proviso that I pass two subjects in the first year. As I had always enjoyed maths and been good at it, I thought it would be a breeze, but it was not so. I failed the end-of-year exams in Maths, after a post (second chance), but passed Biology. This meant that I had to give up studying for a science degree.

What was I to do now? The wool trade didn't give me full satisfaction. I felt a lack of fulfilment, and having always to be on one's guard against being cheated went against my grain. I began to look out for something else, but at that time I didn't know what. I even went to a career's adviser, who gave me an I.Q. test and after filling in lots of questionnaires, he suggested to become a public servant administrator. I was not impressed.

In spring of 1962 we expected the first visit of my parents in Lindfield. They were to sleep in our dining room, while our two boys had their bedroom next to the kitchen. It was a bit crowded in our small house, but my parents planned to rent a house together with Gerda, hopefully nearby. During August Alison became pregnant again. We hoped that Mutter would still be there to help in the house and with the children. This worked out very well. On 2 May 1963 our James Stuart was born. Before I took Alison to the hospital, I had to pick up Mutter from Chelmsford Ave. Lindfield, where they lived. Vater had not noticed that Mutter left in the middle of the night. He went as usual at 5 am. to his job of selling papers at Lindfeld Station. When I walked up to him at about 9 am and congratulated him on the arrival of another grandson, he was completely surprised.

It was wonderful to have Mutter and Vater around that time to help with the two boys and in the house. They were really of great help. Vater even helped with the garden, and George and Mark would love to be with him 'helping'. At least once a week we would go over to my parents' place for afternoon tea or for dinner, which gave Alison a welcome break from cooking. My parents could not be persuaded, however, to stay permanently in Australia, as Vater planned to invest some money he received from a war compensation scheme in Germany. Before they left Australia, they invested some of their compensation money in a house at Collaroy, quite close to the beach. They lived there for some time and we would spend our holidays with them. We were all very sad when in February of 1964 they left on the P.&O liner CANBERRA.

Spiritual awakening

Ever since my best friend George Blome introduced me to the Presbyterian church at Pymble, I attended services there. Alison would, whenever she could, go in the mornings while I minded the boys, and I would go occasionally to the evening services. Bob MacArthur's sermons gave me always much to think about, but I was not a regular church goer. Apparently I needed an outside stimulus to make me more aware of the need of attending church services more regularly.

One day two young Mormon men came knocking at our door. As Alison knew that I was interested in religion, she told them to come again in the evening when I would be home. They tried very hard to persuade us to join their church, but something in their teaching didn't seem right to us. I couldn't put my finger on it, so I went to see Bob MacArthur. He was horrified and advised us not to get involved with them. He called their religion a 'sect', and explained that according to them, all other religions were false, and their's was the only true one.

I told him then that they had taken us to one of their services in their 'temple'. During the service the congregation was split up into small groups, and our group was taught something about a 'Baptism for the Dead'. We had found it most odd and had felt so uncomfortable, that we quit there and then.

Bob thought we had done the right thing and he gave me a book by William Barklay to read. It was his commentary on Mark's gospel, which was easy to understand, and it gave me the teaching of our church.

I read it with great interest and soon came back for more. From then on I went more regularly to our Pymble church. One day I asked Bob: "What can I do in the church. I would like to get more involved."

"You can teach Sunday School," he replied promptly.

"What, I teach Sunday School? But I couldn't!"

"Why not?"

"To begin with, I wouldn't know where to start."

"Let me show you the material we use. On this sheet is the plan for one lesson. It is all set out clearly. All you need to do is to follow the directions. With some preparations, you will be fine, I'm sure. You could also attend a course for Sunday School Teachers run by our church. That'll give you more confidence."

“Well, I’ll try, but if I fail, I’ll blame you.”

“I know you won’t fail. God will be your guide and I’m sure you will enjoy it.”

From the following Sunday on I was a Sunday School Teacher.

Teaching helped me to dig deeper into the Christian faith, and every Sunday evening I went to the service. I taught the boys who were in year five at primary school, and were about 10 to 11 years old. They were interested in the material I presented and were a great pleasure to teach. In fact they taught me a great deal, it was a real mutual growing in faith. Bob was right. I enjoyed it very much. The following year I continued with the same pupils, who were then seniors at primary school. I had built up a close relationship with them.

As our wool business prospered, Michael suggested that Alison and I deserved a holiday. We should get someone to look after the children and spend a week away at the firm’s expense. That sounded wonderful, but where could we go? Someone in the Church had a friend who was married to a minister in Fiji. She said that Fiji was a lovely place for a holiday, and we could, at the same time, see what the church is doing there. So, we decided on Fiji. I asked my Sunday school children to make a scrap book about their life here in Australia, to take to a Sunday school class in Fiji. I hoped that they would do the same for my class.

It all worked out better than we could have planned. Audrey Sommerville, the friend of our church member, invited us to her place in Laotoka, near Nadi, on Viti Levu, for dinner, and gave us several addresses to visit on our tour around the main island of Fiji. Her husband Ian was away on church business.

We hired a car and travelled around the island. We had a most relaxing time, and the tropical island seemed a paradise to us. I was particularly impressed with the Navuso Agricultural College near Suva, run by the church. We were shown around the college by one of the Australian lecturers.

Church life and the teaching of the Christian faith was a major part of the curriculum, as well as the agricultural subjects. The students seemed keen and happy. One senior student showed us a fenced-in garden which had been allocated to him for his final year. He had to prove to the College that he was able to look after it all on his own, and I could see the pride and joy in his face as he showed us a beautifully tended garden with a great variety of crops growing.

Seeing the beauty of the place, the purpose of its existence and the enthusiastic students who benefited so much from their training there, I suddenly saw a better purpose for my own life. Had I not also learnt agriculture? What if I could become a teacher at such a school? I suddenly became aware that God was showing me that place to point my life into a different direction. I could see a life with a purpose, rewarding and fulfilling. Until then I knew that I wasn’t happy with my work, but I

didn't know what to do. My subconscious had been prodding and waiting for the appropriate moment to come to the surface. That moment was at Navuso Agricultural College. One could say that it was my Road to Damascus experience. We returned to Sydney not only refreshed, but with a renewed spirit and united in our plans for the future.

Soon afterwards I told Bob MacArthur that I wanted to become a minister. I asked him whether the church would accept me at my age: this was in 1965 and I was 37. Bob was absolutely delighted. He organised a series of interviews, with the members of Session (the local governing body), with Presbytery (the regional body), and the College Committee. The latter consisted of many church leaders, who were curious to know why a person in my position and my experience wanted to become a minister. One of them asked me: "Do you realise that you will go down in salary by about half of what you are earning now?"

I thought this was an odd question coming from a minister and I could only answer, somewhat puzzled: "Yes."

I believed that when God's call came to me, I could put myself wholly into his care, and that he would provide for all my and my family's needs. Then the question of a scholarship was raised. I told them that I had paid off our home in Lindfield, and if we could all stay there, we would not need much. Subsequently I was advised that I would receive a scholarship of \$1,000 per annum.

Then I had to tell my boss Michael Selios of my decision. He was rather disappointed, but didn't want to put any obstacles in my way. He said that the firm would have to be re-structured, as he did not want to run the Sydney office by himself, and he did not wish to employ someone else. He showed great understanding for my decision and was most generous with me. He not only gave me a generous retirement lump-sum, but also the firm's car, which we had been driving. I was able to pay off the rest of the housing loan, and had some spare cash. It was not easy for me to leave Mike and Mac, the Melbourne manager, and the large wool trade family, but I had something new to look forward to. I knew that the challenge before me would fill my life with a purpose and a meaning which I had been subconsciously looking for ever since that fateful night in Posen, when at the age of sixteen I expected to die and when I handed my life over to God.

When Mutter had suggested that I become a business man when I was twenty one, I had never been completely convinced that this was my vocation. It filled a gap, but it could never fill my life. Going into the ministry, however, 'filled my life in every part with praise', as the hymn proclaims, and I vowed that 'all my life, in every step,' I would walk with God. I couldn't wait for my studies to begin.



To become a minister in the Presbyterian Church required a three year period of study as a home missionary, looking after a congregation at the same time, usually in a small country parish. Then a three year course at the United Theological College (UTC) in Sydney. As I was older than most other candidates, and had done some tertiary studies, the College Committee allowed me to start the course at UTC.

As a candidate for the ministry, the Presbytery of Kuringai welcomed me warmly as being under their care and they urged me to get as much practice in preaching and pastoral care as possible. They helped me to get a position as an assistant to Rev. Ralph Maidment in the Parish of Rockdale/Arncliffe. Ralph was Bob Macarthur's father-in-law.

Before I started there, I was invited to conduct services in several congregations over the summer holidays. My first service was at the Presbyterian Church in Avalon, in January 1966. We were staying then at Collaroy in my parents' house. As the main part was let, our family squeezed into the little granny flat for the holidays. I put a whole week's preparation into this service, and needless to say, was very nervous. But Bob Macarthur had given me very good hints, and the day before the service I practiced my sermon on Alison. The service went without any hiccups. When I shook hands with the congregation at the door, I was introduced to three ministers, all on holidays in that area. I nearly fainted afterwards. I'm sure I would have, had I known it beforehand. But they were all very kind and encouraging. My second service was at Beacon Hill, and before my lectures started in March of 1966 I had already preached five sermons.

The Theological Hall was situated at St. Andrew's College and consisted of several buildings, the largest being the Gillespie Library. Joan Humphreys was the librarian, and she was most helpful in explaining how to find the books we were looking for, and some general hints about reading, making notes and writing essays. With her help the settling in was made much easier. The other students knew each other from their home mission course, but for me everybody and everything was new. It didn't take me long, though, to settle down, and I enjoyed studying very much. Due to my age I was exempt from taking Hebrew, but I had to pass a two year Greek course with the other students. They had the advantage of having studied Greek for the last three years, but I quickly caught up with them. I knew that with languages it was just a matter of rote learning, and so I memorised vocabs on the train journey from Lindfield to Redfern or Macdonaldtown, which took about half an hour each way. I felt that the time thus spent was not wasted, and I probably spent more time on Greek than the others, for I passed the requirements after only two years.

The other subjects in our curriculum were: Old Testament, New Testament, Church History, Pastoral Theology, Systematic Theology, and Philosophy. Most subjects were challenging and opened up new fields and

new thoughts for me. At the beginning of my studies I had a rather fundamentalist view of theology, but Dr. Alan Loy in particular presented an alternative view. I was soon persuaded that his way of thinking was far more acceptable and made better sense. However, some other students never got over their fundamentalist point of view unfortunately. We had to read extensively, and as there were only limited copies available at the library, very often the books were out. The library had, however, a complete set of Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics in German. I was able to read this in my own time, without needing to consider others, as none of them could read German. They all thought that I was advantaged by being able to read Barth in the original, but I didn't think so. His style was convoluted also in German and his long sentences could go on for almost half a page. I didn't find it any easier.

When we dealt with the church fathers, Allan Loy asked me to present a seminar on Origen of Alexandria. I took some time over the preparation and felt that I had learnt a great deal from it. Unfortunately, this didn't happen very often. There was only one other presentation on Dorothy Sölle, and one on the subject of creation. I found the latter a most difficult concept to understand. My stumbling block was the word 'creation'. When I eventually understood I realised that I couldn't simply apply the ordinary meaning of the word for the theological concept. Once I had grasped that, it opened up for me a whole range of new insight and understanding. From then on Theology became my favourite subject.

After passing a few exams and essays in the first year, I knew I was on the right track. Sometimes I would type out my theology notes on a stencil and share them with my mates, as some of them struggled with this subject. These notes became very handy a few years down the track.

In May 1966 I started as Ralph's assistant in the Rockdale/Arncliffe Parish. I was paid \$10 per week for it and my duties were to lead two services on Sundays, alternating one in the morning and one in the evening, either at Rockdale or at Arncliffe. I was able to go there by train and leave the car back for the family. Apart from that I was expected to do two afternoons a week of pastoral work. The time there was most valuable to me and I feel that I learnt a great deal from the kind people in both congregations.

One episode stands out more than others. When I went to visit an elderly lady in a hospital, I prayed for her as I usually did, and asked God for healing. After the prayer she told me, that she knew she would not get better again, and that she was prepared to die, in fact that she was looking forward to meet her maker. I had not checked with her before my prayer what she really wanted. I hoped I would not make that mistake again.

At this time the Rockdale Presbyterian church stood in the flight path of Sydney's Kingsford Smith airport. The heavy jets made such a noise, that I had to stop for a minute or so in my sermon or prayer, as I could not be heard. It seems unbelievable that this aircraft noise is still an issue in

1996, and that our politicians have not bothered to solve it for the last 30 years. Even when visiting homes we had to stop our conversation when a plane was flying over. I really feel sorry for the people there who had to endure such noise for such an extended period of time. It seems callous to me and irresponsible.

My position in Rockdale/Arncliffe lasted till September 1967. In November I obtained a job at the Hurstville Grove congregation, to fill in during a vacancy. This ended in June 1968 when a new minister was inducted. The people of Hurstville Grove were also very good to me and always ready to help. They accepted me readily and I enjoyed serving them.

During the term holidays in May 1967, Jim Donaldson, a B.D. student, David Sloan, Jim Harris and I went to Burleigh Heads in Queensland for a Theological Students' Conference. It was wonderful to meet up with students from other colleges. We had good discussions and the seminars were excellent.



1967, our year at St.Andrew's College

From l. to r. Laurie Bailey, David Robson, Barry Baker, Dennis Hesketh, Alister Christie, self, Les Hewitt, Murray Ramage, Ray Osborne, Lionel Robson, Graham Hamill with Mr. Douglas, Joan Humphries, Dr. Brown.

On my return Alison had some wonderful news waiting for me. She was pregnant again, and the due date was to be on Christmas day. By then my studies for the year would be over and I would be able to help with the family.

Alison developed complications with this pregnancy. Tests showed that she had developed Rh factor antibodies in her blood, but we were told that, provided she didn't go full term, there should be no problem. She was induced on 11 December 1967, at the Royal North Shore Hospital. I couldn't stay with Alison, as I had the three boys to look after. I was disappointed that I couldn't be with her until her labour started, as I had done with the others, but there was no way I could have left our three lively boys in anybody's charge for an unknown time. Alison phoned me about lunch time that her contractions had started, and in the afternoon I had a phone call from one of the sisters with the unbelievable news, that we had a daughter. We both were quite sure that it would be another boy, but what wonderful news this was! I left our three boys with the neighbours, and drove straight to the hospital to greet our Margaret Alison.

Early in 1966 I had gone to the office of the Board of Mission in the Margaret Street building. The Superintendent was Rev. Jim Stuckey. I asked him then: "Are there any vacancies in the mission field?"

"Yes," he replied, "There is one in particular which we would like to fill."

"Where is that?"

"In Timor, Indonesia. We had Colville Crowe there till 1962, but since then it has been vacant."

"What will I have to do to apply for that position?"

"Tell me first, when you will be ordained?"

"In about three years. I'm in my first year."

"Well, you're certainly keen, but we can't do anything until, say, your final year. Come back then and we'll have another chat. You never know, the position may be waiting for you."

And it did. When I returned early in 1968, it was still vacant, and Jim told me that it was not likely to be filled by the end of that year. If I still wanted to go there, I should learn some Indonesian in the meantime. I enrolled at Sydney University for an elementary course in Indonesian.

Our language tutor was Yunedi Ichsan, and we were encouraged to use their wonderful language laboratory. I found Indonesian fairly easy to learn, and I again used my travelling time to learn the vocabulary. I practised intensively at the laboratory in my spare time, especially on the right pronunciation and I made good progress. A fellow student, Jeff Robinson, would sometimes come home with me, and our children became very fond of him. Jeff, Max Lane, another student of Indonesian, and I would often sit together and share notes.

Apart from my final year study of Theology and the full University course of Indonesian, I still had enough time to participate in some of the

student activities at Sydney Uni. In 1968 the students began to campaign against the war in Vietnam. As I was also opposed to the war, I took part in several marches through town. It was a time of great political activity among students all over Australia and the rest of the world. The main aim was to stop the war in Vietnam. By getting involved I became more politically aware than before, and I enjoyed being part of what was to become history. I was also present at a demonstration when the Governor of NSW was pelted with tomatoes. Next day the papers were full of that incident. There were arrests, and when we marched, we were never quite sure what was going to happen to us. But I was determined to be a peaceful participant, as I did not approve of the violence of war.

Before the finals I went for two weeks to Leigh College, the then Methodist residential college, to concentrate on my studies and review for the exams. It wasn't easy to leave Alison with the four children in Lindfield all on her own, but if I wanted to pass the exams, I just had to do it. Alison came by car with the family to pick me up for the weekend. That was always a great joy for us all to be together again. I can't really say how much I appreciated Alison's support during these three long years of studying. Although George attended Lindfield Primary School from 1965, and Mark from 1966, she still had the children on her own for most of the day. Whilst I was home usually during peak hour, like bath and dinner time, she carried most of the burden. Without her support I could never have completed the studies. During my first summer holidays I had the opportunity to be attached to George Stewart, then Presbyterian chaplain at Broughton Hall psychiatric hospital at Gladesville. Our lecturer in Pastoral Theology, Geoff Petersen, said that this was the best way to learn counselling.

George taught me how to really listen to the patients. I had to write down our conversations verbatim. I had to do this as soon as possible after our talk. Then I discussed it with George and he pointed out, where I had stopped listening properly, or not followed through with the patient's feelings. I greatly enjoyed my time at Broughton Hall. One of the resident Psychiatrists even suggested that I take on a day group of psychotic teenage boys for group counselling and activities twice a week. They became used to me and related well to my non-directive leadership. I did this until the end of March, when my studies forced me to give up the group. I had enjoyed working with the youngsters and was pleased to be able to repay some of the kindness shown to me at that hospital.

During my second summer holidays I received, through Margaret Mackenzie, a position as wardsman at the Royal North Shore Hospital in St. Leonards. Margaret had come to Australia under our sponsorship. She had been a nursing friend of Alison's in England and we became good friends. My work at the hospital brought in some badly needed cash and gave me also a good opportunity to learn hospital procedures and the occasional time talking with patients. My main task was to wheel patients

to and from the operating theatres and scrub the six theatres once a day thoroughly from ceiling to floor. I got on well with the other wardsmen, although they knew that I was there only temporarily. After my finals I could work there again to earn some money, which came in very handy.



Our children Christmas 1968

The graduation ceremony seemed an anticlimax to me. It was also our farewell from the college and from our fellow students. From then on we would only meet at Assembly time. Michael Groenewegen, who had studied for a Bachelor of Divinity, and I shared the award for highest marks for the final year. All the effort put into studying did pay off eventually. Professor Miller, who lectured us in philosophy, had suggested that I continue studying for a Bachelor of Divinity at London University. They offered an extra mural course, but by then I had enough of studying. Nothing could have persuaded me to go on. I wanted to put my full energy towards being a minister now. It was enough for me to know that I had the ability to succeed academically. I did not care for any letters after my name, or any titles for that matter.

As from the first of January 1969 I was employed by the Board of Mission. They had booked Alison and me into a full time course of pre-mission service training at All Saints College in Haberfield. Frank White was then the Principal and there were quite a large number of outgoing missionaries actually living at the college. As we had a large family and a house not too far away, we could attend most activities on a daily basis. The subjects taught were very varied, from theology of mission,

anthropology, Islam, and principles of scripture translation by Euan Fry from the Bible Society, to immensely practical and helpful subjects, such as what to put into a first aid kit, Sister Mary Lukiss a Professor of Tropical Medicine gave us helpful hints of what to do for malaria, tropical ulcers, and even suggested a few useful handbooks on medicine to buy. We were even told how to preserve books in the tropics. I found most of the course relevant and very helpful.

The devotional life at the college gave us also an example of how to care for our own spiritual well-being. We were all invited to participate in leading the morning devotions, and the ordained ministers were asked to lead the weekly communion service. Frank White invited me to conduct the communion service after my ordination. It was an event that remained deeply engraved in my memory.

My ordination took place on 19 February 1969 in our home congregation of the Presbyterian church in Pymble. The Presbytery had organised it and it was a most memorable occasion. All ministers participated in the laying on of hands, and I still remember the weight felt on my head at the same time as some extraordinary power or strength flowing through me. I was deeply moved by this experience. Jim Stuckey preached a challenging sermon, and I became impatient to go out into the field and serve my Lord.

But unfortunately, things do not always turn out the way we would like. I had to finish the course first, and then even wait longer for our visa to Indonesia to arrive.

As the visa had not arrived after the course had finished in June, Jim Stuckey asked me to help in the office to sort out some of the old records from early missionary days and prepare them for the Mitchell Library. I learnt there quite a good deal about the early history of our church's involvement in Vanuatu and with Aboriginal mission stations in the north of Australia. I also observed the gradual change of mission theology, and thought of Allan Loy, whose lectures had prepared me so well to understand this. The church rejected paternalism in any form and advocated more a partnership in mission.

Apart from the work at the office I continued with my Indonesian language studies at Sydney University and spent as much time in the language laboratory as I could. I knew the importance of actually practicing to speak the language, and that is what I did.

There was great jubilation as a phone call towards the end of August told us that our visas had arrived. Our departure was set for 22 September 1969.

We had some luggage to go by sea, such as a gas and electric fridge, quite a lot of kitchen items, and all my theological books. I would need them in Timor as I knew that I would be teaching at a Theological school near Kupang. We also packed items such as a baby's bath, and all our Persian rugs. Grace Brothers were going to put all our sea luggage into

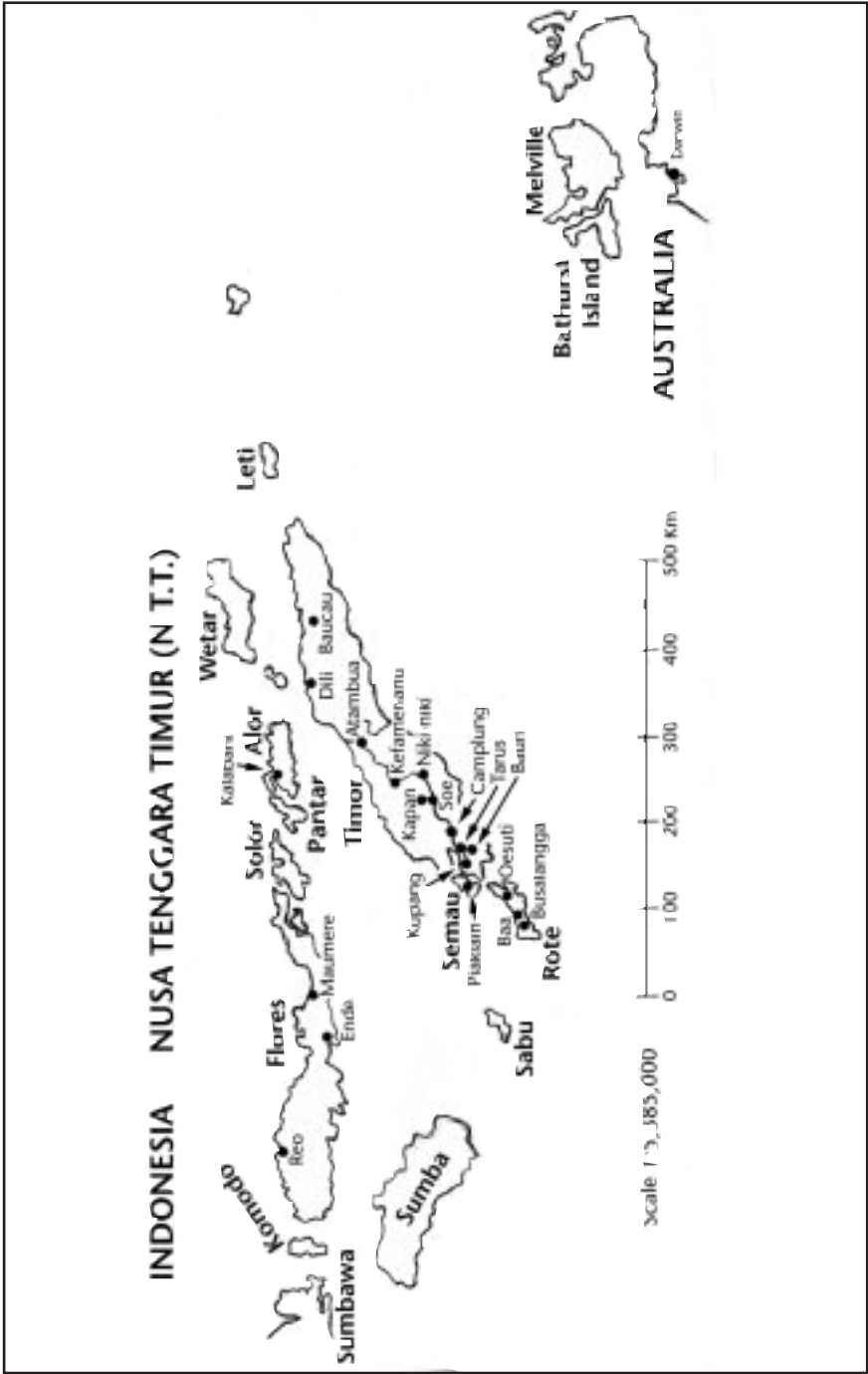
small sea-worthy containers, such as 44 gallon drums, as we had heard from our Methodist colleagues already serving the church in Timor, that the harbour had no facilities to handle larger containers. Our Mission Board had also ordered a Toyota Landcruiser Hard Top, for our work in Kupang directly from Japan. With only hand luggage to prepare for our departure, we had to be careful what to pack and what to leave behind.

We were going to let our house to Robert and Jan Hincks, who were studying for the ministry a couple of years behind us. We stored all our things which we didn't take to Indonesia in our back verandah room and hoped that we would find everything in good order on our return.

Our last meal in Australia was provided by Alison's cousin Barbara Kelly in St.Ives. John Arlom, Alison's friend Margaret's husband, bought our car. It was with mixed feelings that we drove home that night. Where would our adventurous journey lead us, and what could we expect in Timor? Whilst I had read a book on Timor, and we had corresponded with Peter and Jan Stephens, the Methodist missionaries there, we had no idea what we were letting ourselves in for. I felt this was real faith in action.

PART FOUR

INDONESIA



CHAPTER 22

Learning to be a missionary

Four world religions came to Indonesia in separate waves: Animism had been there since pre-historic times, then came Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity in that order. Each new religion was influenced and changed to some extent by the preceding religion, creating an almost unique syncretistic belief, no matter which religion is examined.

The first time the Christian Gospel came to the island of Timor in Indonesia was in the year 1613, but the Gereja Masehi Injili di Timor (GMIT, Protestant Church in Timor) was only established in 1947, after Indonesian independence. It seems a very long road to independence, also for the church, but the influence of the Dutch colonisers was so strong, that even in the church they didn't let go of their grip over the indigenous people until they were forced to. Christians had fully participated in the struggle for Independence and because of this avoided becoming irrelevant for the nation building that followed independence.

Christianity was assured a place in the Indonesian Nation by the preamble of the Constitution of 1945, which reads:

“With God's blessing and moved by the high ideal of a free national life, the Indonesian people hereby declare their independence ... National independence is embodied in one constitution of the Indonesian state, set up as a republic with sovereignty vested in the people. We believe in an all-embracing God; in righteous and moral humanity; in the unity of Indonesia. We believe in democracy, wisely guided and led by close contact with the people through consultation so that there shall result social justice for the whole Indonesian people.”

Although Muslims constitute about 85% of the population, Indonesia did not become an Islamic State. The five principles of the above preamble are called Pancasila, and the first of them, the belief in the one supreme God is often interpreted to mean that atheism is un-Indonesian and therefore against the constitution. It fosters mutual respect and cooperation between people of different faiths and aims at a life of harmony, concord, mutual respect and recognition of the freedom to worship according to one's own religion and faith. The Pancasila was to

guarantee not only tolerance between different religions, but also harmony between the so-called 'evangelical' and 'ecumenical' churches. The philosophy behind the Five Principles was to create a state which was different from either the capitalist or the communist world.

The success or failure of the nation was to be evaluated according to the Pancasila principles. The second principle being Nationalism, with the emphasis on national unity, building up the nation with religious and racial harmony. The third principle is Democracy, which was to create political harmony, not along the way of the Western democracies, where according to Sukarno, the first President, 51% of the people could rule over 49%, but where decisions were to be taken by the traditional way of consensus. The fourth principle is Humanitarianism. This is to safeguard individual human rights and their culture and race. The fifth is Social Justice, where economic opportunities were to be opened for all on an equal basis. These were high ideals.

When we arrived in Timor in September 1969, the church was still struggling with its European heritage. It was then numerically the third strongest church in Indonesia, with a membership of about 550,000 people. The Catholic church had approximately 300,000 members in Timor and its surrounding islands. There were very few other religions present, except, perhaps, in the bigger towns, especially in the capital Kupang. Kupang, on the Western periphery of Timor, is the provincial capital of Nusa Tenggara Timor (NTT) which includes all the surrounding Smaller Sunda Islands, except Sumba. Before we had even been appointed by the Presbyterian Board of Mission to go to Timor, I had tried to read as much as I could about the region, but there was not much available. Ormeling's Timor Problem was the only book I found in the library, and it gave me a reasonable description of its geography and climate, but there was very little about the people and the current situation there.

After our appointment, the church put us in contact with the currently serving missionary of the Methodist church, the Rev. Peter Stephens. He and his wife Jan had helped us enormously when it came to decide what to take with us and what to leave behind, and they never tired of answering questions such as what the temperature would be, whether Kupang had electricity, about doctors, medicines and schools. They even suggested we bring enough toilet paper to last us three years, as that was unavailable in Kupang. We also brought plenty of chloroquin against malaria, mosquito repellents, prickly heat powder, bandages and ointments. It was an endless list, and we were ever so grateful for their wonderful help.

Our last day in Sydney had been very hectic. Our Holden station wagon was sold to John Arlom, who was going to pick it up from our garage the day after our departure. Our neighbours across the road had invited us for breakfast of Monday, 22 September 1969. A large taxi took us all with our luggage to the airport. There was no one to see us off. We would have

appreciated some support at that time, especially as things were really hectic and our last night had not been good. Mark had caught a gastric bug and threw up during the night. We had to expect that the others would follow and had to be prepared. We caught a local flight to Brisbane, where we had to change planes for Darwin via Mount Isa.

In Brisbane, waiting for our connecting flight, Margie got sick all over the terminal floor, and our mood was very low. Had we only stayed home! What had we let ourselves in for? But the journey went on and we boarded the plane for Darwin. On the flight George was sick. Luckily, there were sick bags in the plane and he was old enough to manage on his own. We tried to get some fresh air in Mt. Isa, but instead of a cool breeze, there was a hot dry westerly blowing which did not bring any relief.

In Darwin the heat and humidity hit us as we left the plane. We had booked into the Koala Motor Inn, near the airport. It had a swimming pool, which was some diversion for our children, but because of their gastric bug none of them were really enthusiastic. For me, though, it was some relaxation, although I was very tired. Alison tried to catch up with some sleep, but she was not feeling well either. We all turned in early for the night, and none of us felt like eating anything for dinner. The night was like a nightmare for me. We had two different rooms, with two children each. George and Mark in my room both threw up, and so did Alison. I was feeling weak, but at least I wasn't sick. A taxi took us to the airport the next morning, and I had to help loading our luggage onto the plane. It was a two-engined propeller driven plane, going on it's bi-weekly flight to Baucau in Portuguese Timor, where a lot of Darwin people spent their holidays.

The flight across the Timor sea was not too bad. None of our children threw up, and Alison was beginning to feel better too. As soon as we flew over the island of Timor, our spirits began to lift. In Baucau we had to wait for a small plane to take us to Dili, the capital of East Timor, which was under Portuguese rule. The airport there could only take small planes. We had to wait for a couple of hours, but it didn't seem to matter. The air was warm and pleasant, our children began to play again and take some interest in their new surroundings. Alison and I looked at each other: "I think we will be okay here," she said. "It's so peaceful and relaxing, and the children seem to have got over their sickness."

And so it was. The trip from Baucau to Dili in a small plane was most exciting for our children. They looked out of the windows, and as the plane was not flying very high, they could see details of the roads, unsealed tracks through a very mountainous region, and a few villages scattered around. Dili was a lovely sleepy little town, peaceful and far away from the rest of the world. The Hotel RESENDE was comfortable and our boys came back every now and again telling us of their adventures and what they had seen, such as chickens being killed, a boy with a monkey on his shoulders, and people trying to sell local foods. We had to

remind them of our hygiene rules: not to eat anything from the streets, and no drinking of unboiled water. We all rested in the afternoon and then went exploring in the evening. The local people seemed very friendly and we felt that our children would soon find some friends among the local population.

We had to spend two nights in Dili, and we looked upon this as a well earned rest before we plunged ourselves into our work in Kupang. We walked through town and looked at all major buildings including the Governor's 'palace' with the two guards standing sentry. Our children remarked that it looked a bit like Buckingham Palace. Well — not quite.

Our connecting flight to Kupang was a Zamrud Airline DC3. Our boys managed to get a window seat each, inspite of the plane being fully booked. Everybody had to be weighed, and when we saw the huge figure of the steward we knew why! The flight took us along the north coast of Timor and we had a good view of the rugged and inaccessible mountains of the island. Then suddenly a town appeared below us.

"I can see Kupang," exclaimed George over the din of the roaring engines.

It looked quite impressive after Dili, much larger and bigger buildings. The air strip, however, was not sealed. The plane circled low over the landing strip to chase away some sheep and goats before landing. Then the plane landed in a cloud of dust and stopped in front of some low Nissen huts. As we walked off the plane we saw a family waving to us. That must be Peter and Jane Stephens and their three children, I thought, the only Europeans around. They had come to meet us and took us to their home in Jalan Tugu for lunch. It was a most sumptuous meal of Indonesian food which tasted absolutely fabulous. We all showed our appreciation with a good appetite. What a wonderful welcome! It felt great to have finally arrived at the place of our work.

Settling in took a little longer than expected, though. We had to move into temporary accommodation, a room at Nusa Lontar, a 'Losmen', or guest house. Peter had booked a house for us in Jalan Kartini, about two kilometers from their place, where we could move in four days later. So we made the best of it at Nusa Lontar.

Our children could not be kept inside. They again explored the surroundings, met a crowd of local children and made contact with them immediately. We had practiced some Indonesian at home around the dinner table, which came in very handy at that point. They could jump the language barrier by sign language and their few words they had learnt. One of the boys had a monkey on his shoulders as a pet. From then on it became our boys' ambition to have a monkey too. Then they watched a pig being killed in the back yard.

Peter Stephens showed us the house in Jalan Kartini which we could rent, if we agreed. It had enough rooms for us all, and was quite adequate. We would need our own staff to help with the cooking and cleaning,

though. Peter and Jan had already thought of that. They had engaged a young woman for us, her name was Lisa. She was to help in the house and with the children. But we still needed a cook, and Lisa helped us to find one. She was an elderly lady, and we called her 'Tante', a sign of respect. (Tante means 'aunt' in Indonesian, taken over from the Dutch). We also had to buy a kerosene stove for the kitchen with two burners. The meals Tante created under these primitive conditions were fit for a king. Instead of a table there was a low cutting board with legs on the floor, and a banku or low stool, on which Tante would sit in front of the stove, also on the concrete floor. I had always been fond of Asian food, but what Tante produced was simply exquisite. We were really spoiled by her. Unfortunately, she didn't last long. She found the work too much and had to leave us. Then we spoke to Lisa and asked if she could cook.

"A little bit," she said, "I have never done it before for others (meaning Europeans), but I'm happy to try it."

Lisa's sister was the cook of a German missionary couple. We thought that she could always get some advice from her, but it turned out that she was just too modest. She took to cooking like a fish to water. In no time, under Alison's good guidance, she cooked the most delicious meals. First thing in the morning she would go to the market to buy everything we would need for the day. As our fridge was still to come with our luggage, we couldn't store anything for the next day. So everything had to be consumed by the evening.

Unfortunately, the house was not connected to the town water supply. Most homes without water had someone to roll a 44-gallon drum with water from the nearest well. A student from the college where I was to teach was assigned to do this work for us. His name was Theofilus (Filus for us) Nakmofa, who would live with us. He was a fourth year student at Tarus Theological School. He had been in a spot of trouble and the Rector felt that he would benefit from staying with us.

Tarus was about eleven kilometers from Kupang. Whilst the road was sealed, it was full of potholes. Peter took us all there to meet the students and the Rector, Chris BenoEt. He showed us around and introduced us to the students. I was not quite prepared for what I saw. It really shocked me to see the delapidated state of the buildings, and the utter poverty of the students' quarters. A stone fence marked the area of the property. Inside the fence was a two storey house with two class rooms on ground level, and a dormitory for students on the first floor. The steps had rotted away, only a very simple ladder was leading to the loft, where some of the students lived.

A bebak house (palm leaf stalks tightly stacked in a single row for the wall and a thatched roof) was the kitchen. A big cauldron was resting on three stones and a rickety table completed the kitchen furniture.

A second brick building was the main dormitory, subdivided into two rooms which contained a large number of double decker bunks.

The third building was built from bebak again which contained two class rooms on either side with benches and tables, and a blackboard each. Between the two class rooms was another small dormitory.

Further away I saw a plantation of tall coconut trees with banana trees as undergrowth, and quite extensive rice paddies. All this belonged to the theological school.

I talked to a group of students and was quite pleased that my studies had paid off. I was able to understand most of what they were saying. Then Chris BanoEt asked a couple of students to climb up the coconut trees to get some fresh coconuts down. Our children were fascinated by the way the students climbed up the trunk of the trees in their bare feet. It looked so easy, but when they tried themselves, they didn't get very far. With great skill some other students brought out a parang, a long bush knife or machete, and chopped off a cap from each coconut and presented them to us one by one. The first time I had tasted the juice of a fresh coconut was in Fiji. This reminded me of our lovely holiday there, and this drink was a wonderful welcome to Timor. It tasted just superb, the best drink one can have. I finished it all and the students then split the coconut in half and we spooned out the very soft flesh around the nut shell. Even the spoon was carved out from the shell of a coconut.

I noticed that there were no female students around, which surprised me, as I knew that GMIT had ordained women ministers long before our church in Australia had. I was told that there was only one student. She went back to Kupang each day, staying with her parents. The boys still looked fairly young, I would say all were under 20 years of age. I noticed they had different features: some had longer faces, were quite tall and had straight hair, others had round faces with tight curls and shorter bodies. I was soon to learn that they came from different tribes and different islands, and I was surprised to learn that these ethnic differences could still cause some tension between them. But that was not apparent on the first day. They all seemed very friendly and I was keen to get to know them better.

The student body was divided into four separate years. The senior year would be graduating at the end of 1969, then there was a year four, a year three, and a year one. As there was not enough room, the school did not take on new students when none were graduating. Chris suggested that I teach all of them English to begin with, so that I would get to know them, and he asked me to start the following Monday.

Other staff teaching there apart from Chris BanoEt was Peter Stephens from the Methodist Church in Australia, Kees Oppelaar from the Dutch Reformed Church, and some visiting teachers from Kupang. There was a timetable, but this was flexible, as I was to find out. A number of the Indonesian teachers appeared only occasionally, as they all had teaching jobs at other institutions, and as I found out later, their timetables often clashed, but this didn't seem to concern anybody. I also found out that

there was no staff meeting on a regular basis to make decisions, but things seemed to be working fairly smoothly in spite of this. If a teacher didn't turn up, the students would sit and study or just talk. No one seemed to get ruffled. It was just us foreigners who always seemed to be so frightfully busy, that we had no time to relax. We thought, of course, that this situation needed to be changed. Well, I still had to learn a lot.

Was this the culture shock we had been warned about at All Saint's College? Later on I would learn that there was no need for us to impose our ideas on a people who were used to a different way of life. Would I ever learn this and be able to relax? As I am by nature a very punctual person, I arrived in Indonesia deliberately without a watch, but I found that to unlearn a habit ingrained in culture takes more than leaving one's watch at home.

I tried to immerse myself immediately into the students' way of life, and I welcomed the fact that Chris had suggested to teach English right from the start. I soon turned my lessons into a two-way learning situation.

"You teach me Indonesian, and I will teach you English," was our unwritten understanding.

There were so many theological terms I had to learn, that my little vocabulary book was filling up fast. To my consternation, only three weeks after I had started teaching, Chris said to me one day: "I have to go to Bali for medical treatment for a few weeks and I would like you to teach year four Dogmatics during my absence."

"But Chris, I can't do that. I don't know enough Indonesian yet."

"Oh, don't worry about that. Here is the text book. Just get one student to read a paragraph, and then you can discuss it and let them ask any questions."

"Yes, and then I won't know what they are talking about."

"They will tell you. And besides, it is better you read with them Dogmatics, than no one at all. They won't do it by themselves. You will see, you will learn quickly."

Famous last words, but Chris was right. I had to talk to them in Indonesian, and the students were very helpful and understanding. In fact, because I didn't come to them as the know-all, but more as a friend, I established a wonderful lasting relationship with that particular year.

When the Synod met in November, I attended most sessions. Listening to Indonesian all day long was very tiring, but it was interesting to hear reports from the whole area of GMIT, from the outer islands and the far end of Timor, close to the Portuguese border. I also met some fine ministers who had graduated, some from Tarus not so long ago, others from the SoE school, in the centre of Timor, the predecessor of Tarus, during the time when Gordon Dicker and Colville Crowe were the Australian missionaries in Timor.

Peter was glad to hand over to me the treasurership of the Kolportasi, the Synod Book Shop, which occupied a couple of rooms in the Synod

Office. There were several suppliers, the largest the Bible Society in Indonesia. Stocks were ordered through the manager, Henk Loak. I remained the treasurer until I left Timor. There was quite a lot of work involved with the Kolportasi. My days were filling up with work rapidly.

After Synod we had a staff meeting. Peter Stephens was to go on furlough from December for six months. Plans had to be made for the time he was away. Beginning with the new school year in January 1970, I was to have a full schedule of lectures, all in Indonesian, of course. Year five had left and all the other years moved up a grade. New students were taken in. These were supposed to be the first year intake for the new Theological School that was being built at Oesapa, but the building there was far from finished. The Synod decided later that these students would remain in Tarus until they graduated. I had four classes to teach, and my subjects were to be New Testament exegesis and New Testament theology for all grades. It was a full schedule, and since I hadn't taught previously, I had to prepare for every lesson. I was happy to have brought my theology notes from my student days, they helped me to design a framework for my lectures. As I taught only on three days a week, (Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays) the schedule was not too heavy, and I managed. The other days were filled with preparations, the book shop and all the other jobs which had accumulated in the meantime.



When the Stephens left on their furlough, we moved into their house, which was fully furnished. We even acquired their maid Agus. With the house also came their Landrover. What luxury! Before, I had often just walked to the Synod Office or to the shops, like everybody else in Kupang. It took, of course, more time and was rather strenuous, particularly in the heat of the day. But this also helped to identify with the locals.

I remember once walking to the Office for a meeting at night. Since Kupang had only one electricity generator for the town, the second had broken down, the town was divided into two areas, the upper half, which included the Government offices, and the lower half, which included the city where we lived. Every second night we were without electricity. We called this malam lampu or lamp night. I had to walk to the Synod office on one of those lamp nights in pitch darkness. There was no moon and I couldn't see my hand in front of my eyes, yet the street was crowded with people walking in all directions. I could see the occasional lamp light coming from a house. Nobody seemed to talk, everyone was walking silently in the darkness. I still don't know how I got to the office, but suddenly I arrived there. It was an eerie feeling, almost as if guided by an unseen hand.

We felt very comfortable in Peter's house. Apart from three bedrooms,

there was an office, which could be reached through an outside door from the court yard. As the house was also connected to the town water supply, Filus had gone back to Tarus. But our whole family got very attached to him, and so we encouraged him to come back at weekends. He stayed in the office then.

Through him, other students came and stayed the night. There was plenty of room, and we enjoyed their visits. Lazarus (Zarus for short) Toulasik was a keen and very competent guitar player. He offered to teach me play. Unfortunately, though, my fingers were too clumsy and I never managed to string even the most simple chords. But I bought a guitar with Zarus' help, and whenever he came to visit us, he would entertain us and teach us lots of Indonesian songs.

Before driving to Tarus for my lectures, I had to buy three kilos of meat and two kilos of bones from the market, and for the rest of the week I bought mung beans or kidney beans, another source of protein for the students.

With my agricultural background, and seeing all the paddy fields, the old farmer came out in me. I saw great potential for more intensive farming and had talks about it with Chris and Itje Frans, the rector of the agricultural school in Tarus, which also belonged to GMIT. At that time our mission board sent a letter to GMIT in which they mentioned that they might not be able to indefinitely fund the theological school at Tarus. I asked both rectors whether the land which belonged to the church could produce enough rice to make the school eventually independent from our subsidy. I was told that the school planted rice there each year during the wet season, but the fence was in such bad repair, that the animals from the village destroyed most of the crop, as they were allowed to roam around freely. Also, the paddies needed some fertilizer, which the school couldn't afford to buy. Itje suggested the Presbyterian church might prefer to pay a lump sum to develop the land and perhaps buy a small tractor for ploughing. With that the school would become independent of further subsidies. Itja was a good planner and he and Chris seemed to agree with that scheme. I mentioned it to the Moderator, who also agreed with it and asked me to draft a letter to our church in Australia. This project was called the Self Help Scheme, and it took rather a long time to come to fruition.

To begin with I encouraged the students to plant rice on the four hectares of the school paddy fields. This was much more complicated than I first thought. Although it had rained enough, the soil was rather firm and it was hard work to hoe it. It took almost three weeks of back-breaking work to finish. There were no lectures given during that time.

I spent a lot of time with Itja Frans in the rice fields. One day, a man came from the village, obviously distressed. He wanted to speak to Itja: "Please come quickly. My wife is bleeding to death. Can you take us to the Kupang hospital straight away please?"

I was just about to offer to take them in my car, when something in Itja's voice stopped me from talking.

"What happened to your wife?" he asked.

"She has a cut on her arm."

"And how did she get the cut?"

"Oh, this is too long a story, please come quickly otherwise she will bleed to death."

"Not untill you tell me how your wife got the cut."

"We had an argument."

"Yes?"

"And then I struck her with the parang."

"So you brutally attacked her?"

"Yes."

"Then you can take her on your shoulders and carry her the eleven kilometers to Kupang by yourself."

"But Itja, please?"

"No. God will forgive you only if you do some penance."

With that the distraught man was dismissed.

I marvelled. I would have jumped into this without thinking. But Itja knew that if the man carried his wife through Tarus and all the suburbs of Kupang to the hospital, everyone would know what he had done to his wife, and this might hopefully stop him from doing it again. What wisdom!

The rice grew and looked fine. Unfortunately, though, since the fence was in such a poor state, some cattle got into the rice fields and caused a lot of damage. I urged our mission board to hurry up with the approval of our project, but such things never seem to be done in a hurry. It took months of letter writing and detailed submissions until it eventually was approved.

Barbed wire was bought in Surabaya, Java, through John Rossner, an American missionary, who had supplied Itja with a lot of material for the farming school. It turned out that the small tractor for ploughing was far too expensive. Instead, the school bought an ordinary plough to be pulled by a bullock. Soon a strong fence was erected and a small patch of paddy field bought, to straighten the fence line. But by the time all was in place it was too late for that season.

The plough caused an unexpected problem. There was no one in the village who could use it, and no bullocks which knew how to plough were available. We came across a strange phenomenon: the plough had never reached the island of Timor! In addition, we came up against a social problem. Usually, one farmer in Tarus supplied his herd of cattle to trample down the soil after it was flooded. For that service he would get one third of the rice crop. When he heard what the school intended to do, he objected so strongly, that no one in the village dared to go against him. The plough remained unused in the shed. I had never thought that

tradition and culture are much stronger than good economics. Or was it a form of capitalist power exploiting tradition for its own end?

The cattle were used, fertiliser was spread, the 'miracle' rice was planted and the crop was sprayed with pesticides. The harvest that year became the best they ever had, but I begrudged the one third that had to be paid to the farmer with the cattle.

The first wet had been quite an experience for us all. When we arrived, everything in and around Kupang was bone dry. It had not rained for over six months, not a drop. The ground was bare, and the trees had lost most of their leaves. Only in Tarus near the spring was lush green, everything else looked grey and dusty. When the first drops of rain fell during October, all the children in the neighbourhood, including our children, went almost berserk. They stripped, either to their undies or naked, and danced around in the rain. It was almost like a ritual, the great relief after the oppressive heat of the pre-monsoon season. I would have gladly joined them.

Soon after the first rainfall, the vegetation came to life. Grass and weeds and flowers were sprouting everywhere. It was such a joy to observe the change almost over night. As we lived in Jalan Tugu by the river, we could see the water rising, especially if a north/westerly was blowing. One day the water came right into the back yard, but as we were so close to the open sea, it did not rise any further.

All of us had come down with malaria at one time or another in spite of us taking chloroquin once a week. James had malaria when we were still in Jalan Kartini, quite badly, combined with diarrhoea. He looked so ill and I began to wonder whether we had done the right thing coming with our children to this unhealthy place. Eventually I was struck down with malaria myself. It is a terrible disease, like flu with body aches and pains, but multiplied several times. I could not sleep, yet I was terribly tired and weak. Shivering alternated with high fever in quick succession, and at one point I was feeling so low that I wanted to die. To make things even worse, a cyclone was passing over Kupang. The storm raged for a whole day dumping an enormous quantity of water over the town. Nobody dared to go outside. After it was all over, I felt better, and we went for a drive along the road towards Tenau, the harbour, to look at the devastation the cyclone had brought to one of the suburbs. The homes in the whole neighbourhood had been flattened, including half the wall of a church. We were fortunate that our house was undamaged.

Our court yard had only a fence along the river. Nothing could be left outside over night, as thieves could easily climb over the fence from the river. One day, Filus had been painting a bicycle frame, which we had bought for our Mark. He had left it drying outside over night. Next morning it was gone. To console Mark, he brought from his village one day a baby rhesus monkey. He called him Simpson. He was tied around his waist to a long lead — our boys could not cuddle him enough. They were

fascinated and would spend long hours just watching him or playing with him. Filus couldn't have thought of a better pet for our children.

Our family loved to go Sundays to the beach at Lasiana. If the Stephens didn't go, we really couldn't go either. There was no motor transport in town at that time and Lasiana was about six kilometers from Kupang, on the road to Tarus. Whenever we borrowed the Synod's Jeep from the Moderator, we would buy the petrol at the only bowser in Kupang, near the market. This petrol was never very clean and so it happened that the carburettor and fuel lead would sometimes clog up. The Synod chauffeur, Lippus, called the jeep "oto perang", or war car. One day I was to find out why. With the carburettor clogged up, the car would go best at full speed. We were hurtling along the highway from Lasiana, chickens, dogs, pigs and people scuttling to the side, and our car jumping like a kangaroo. Every now and again it would let off a big bang. The boys thought it was terrific fun, but Alison did not. She had trouble holding on to the front seat, as there were no doors on the jeep. What an experience!

As we had no news about the car our Board of Mission had ordered from Japan for us, we would just have to make do with the oto perang. It was still better than walking.

But with Peter's Landrover, life was much easier. I thought that some of the students would benefit from learning how to drive. It would free me from some jobs, if they drove, and so I asked one day who wanted to learn to drive. There were four students who were quite keen, and one day I took them to a more isolated spot to start their driving lessons. Filus was the first one, the others were Mesach (Mes for short) Beeh, Uli Mone and Otniel Kiuk. They all had a practice run and managed quite well with the clutch and the gears. After several lessons, it was Filus' turn to drive and I asked him to reverse and turn into a lane around a corner. Filus had stopped the car properly, put the gear correctly into reverse and was releasing the clutch slowly, as he had been taught. I sat next to him and was observing his foot work, when suddenly the car reversed down the embankment towards the creek, the opposite direction from the lane, nearly toppling the car over, coming to a stop on the edge of the creek. A few centimeters further and we would have landed in the muddy creek. One of the students in the back seat took fright and jumped out, the other two looked rather shaken. So were Filus and I. I just hadn't foreseen that reversing a car, and going around a corner could be so difficult. I still had to learn a lot!

I climbed into the driver's seat, put the car into four-wheel drive and asked the others to push. It was still leaning precariously towards the creek, but someone looked after us that afternoon. I was able to drive the car back on the road. Filus didn't want to drive after that, but Mes had enough courage to continue. Eventually, three of them passed the driving test, Mes first, then Uli, and Filus last. Otniel gave up after the ditch experience.



I felt that much of our teaching was far too theoretical, especially when it came to teaching scripture in schools. Our year five students could do with some practical experience, and so I arranged Saturday afternoon classes in several high schools of Kupang. My students were split up into three or four groups, and after I prepared them thoroughly, sometimes equipping them with photocopies of handouts, they actually taught the lessons. I went from class to class to supervise them, and if they had any problems, I was there to help them through. Then back at Tarus, each lesson given was discussed and I encouraged my students to help each other improve their teaching methods and techniques.

As Fraternal workers, Peter and I quite frequently received invitations to preach in churches. I felt it would take me a lot of time to prepare the sermons, but quite apart from that I felt that my students needed the exposure to different churches and the opportunity to practice their sermons. So whenever I received an invitation to preach I asked the church whether they agreed to let one of my students preach. I explained that they needed the practice and that I would be there to criticise their sermons. Most churches agreed, and they were happy to have me in their congregation anyway. A number of year five students benefited from this exposure, which they otherwise would not have had.



Since we had Peter's car, we went with our family to explore the inland of Timor over Easter. We drove to SoE, right in the centre of Indonesian Timor, fairly high up in the mountains, where the air was said to be much cooler than in Kupang. We took Filus with us as our guide. The road was atrocious. In one spot everyone had to get out and push the car through a sandy patch with deep ruts. We eventually made it to SoE, a distance of 100 km, in seven hours. We stayed at the Losmen Bahagia, a guesthouse of quite acceptable standards. We visited the two local ministers there who told us about the 'Spirit Movement' and how miracles, such as healings and turning water into wine, occurred regularly in their congregation. I felt that this would be a good place to take the senior year of Tarus for a study tour and explored this possibility.

The frustration of having to do without our sea luggage was getting Alison and me down. There was just no news about it. Eventually we heard that our things had been dropped at Darwin and it was left to us to get it across to Kupang. The only ship that would come occasionally from Darwin was one from the International Oil Company, which had an office

at Kupang. Lou Staisch, the manager, told us, however, that no ship was expected in the near future. We just would have to wait. It was not so bad, as long as we stayed in the Stephens' house, which was fully equipped with fridge and furniture. But when we were to move into the new house in Oesapa in July, what were we to do then? Through our regular visits to the new Theological School, which was being built by Hans Jung, an engineer from Germany, we had seen our house grow in stages, and we were already looking forward to moving in there. Then I was called to the Synod office one day: "The Oppelaars are going to move into the house in Oesapa where you were going to go. Unless your mission board can pay enough money to build another house for you on the complex, you cannot live there."

We were quite taken aback with that news. Why suddenly this change of mind? Was GMIT unhappy with our performance? Hans Jung assured us that it had nothing to do with GMIT. The decision had been taken by the Dutch church, who held the purse strings for the total project.

I reported this to our Mission Board, and also passed on GMIT's request for more funds to build a house for us on the same complex. I couldn't recommend this request to our Board, as the latter had paid for a house for Colville Crowe in SoE, the first missionary from our church, more than ten years ago. If GMIT needed a house for us in Kupang now, they could sell the one in SoE and buy another one in Kupang. If this was not feasible, I suggested that we could rent a house somewhere.

GMIT eventually decided to put us up in the Oppelaars' house in Oeba, which actually belonged to Dr. Abineno, a former Moderator of GMIT and now a lecturer at the Theological Seminary in Jakarta. This house was near the Synod Office in Jalan Merdeka, the main road leading out of Kupang towards Tarus and then into the inland. The Oppelaars also had four children, slightly older than ours, so there would be no problem with space.



The Oppelaars went on leave early in July 1970. The Stephens were expected back at the same time. We moved out of Jalan Tugu on 1 July, and moved straight to Oeba into the house of the Oppelaars. We had ordered some furniture from a carpenter prior to that, and it was a wonderful feeling to be in 'our' house which we could arrange with our furniture as we liked. All that was missing was our sea luggage, which still hadn't arrived. We heard through Peter that it was to be shipped to Singapore first, and then to Kupang. As Frank Lee, the friend I had played tennis with in Sydney, lived in Singapore, I asked him to help us with the transhipment.

Unfortunately, we also had to return Peter's car, and since our car from

Japan had still not arrived, we had to go back to borrowing the old jeep *oto perang*.

Our house had four bedrooms. The children all slept together in one, we slept in the main bedroom, which had a door to the bathroom. The third was our spare bedroom, and the fourth became my office. This also had an external door. A large lounge-dining room extended through the width of the house. We divided it with a curtain made of Timor cloth. Next to the office was the *gudang* or store room, then came the servants room and the kitchen, all with doors opening to the court yard. The servants' toilet was on the opposite side of the kitchen, next to ours and the bathroom, which formed the third wing of the court yard. This made an ideal outdoors sitting place, so we had it all concreted and sat there in the cool of the evenings, like at Peter's house. While the builders were there, we also had the servants' toilet renovated. I considered the hole in the ground quite unhygienic and unacceptable. The new basin was an Asian squat toilet, which had a proper air seal.

While we were sitting outside one evening, someone entered our bedroom window and stole some personal items. This was reason enough to fix some steel bars on all windows. With these we were able to leave the shutters open all night to let the cooler night air in.

In our new house at Oeba we needed two more helpers, apart from Lisa. One to live in with Lisa and to do all indoor jobs, and another just to do our daily washing. Rachel would come after breakfast and leave again after lunch, when all the washing was dry and ironed. Lunch was included for her, which meant a great deal, as most money spent had to go on food. We paid our staff a little more than the going rate in Kupang, which was still only a small amount compared to our salary. It was quite common also in Indonesian households to have helpers, so this was not just a privilege for foreigners. We made it a point, however, to treat them kindly and give them their regular day off at weekends. When we had visitors for dinner, we tried not to make it too late for them.

Alison would usually cook on Sundays and I did the washing up, much to our students' surprise. An Indonesian male would normally never be seen in a kitchen. But they chipped in with the dishes, and I hope we set an example for them to follow.

During the week Alison's day varied in the mornings, but afternoons were always filled with the boys' school work. They attended the local school in the mornings, starting at 7 am. As all subjects were taught only in Indonesian, they needed to do their Australian correspondence courses in the afternoons. Alison supervised all three boys in their different grades, which can't have been easy. In the mornings she would play tennis twice a week between 6 and 7 am, before it got too hot. Twice a week she also taught English conversation at the University. The menu for the day had to be discussed with Lisa, the cook, the daily purchases checked, some visiting was done, as well as shopping. Ready-made clothes

were not available, so Alison's dresses and the clothes for the children had to be made by dressmakers. This took up quite some time and caused some frustrations. Apart from all this there was always Margie to look after. Alison was in charge of running the household, which was quite different from what she was used in Australia, but it was made easier with the staff.

Whenever there were functions on to which I was invited, Alison was expected to attend too. I think in that respect we fitted in very well with Indonesian customs and expectations, as women stood in high regard as managers of the household and in charge of the upbringing of children.

Our family had adjusted quickly and well to the changed conditions in Indonesia. Language after a few months was no longer a problem, and the climate suited us. In fact, Margie, who had suffered from eczema in Australia, recovered completely from it, and apart from the occasional bout of malaria and tropical sores in the first year, we all kept healthy and well.

The isolation was probably more difficult to cope with, especially during the rainy season, when there were long delays in the mail service. Jan Stephens was a great support for Alison, so were the other missionary wives as well as Lilian Teja, the doctor's wife, who was teaching English at the University.

The children didn't miss out on school life with all its fun and excitement, as they attended the local school, but being the only Europeans there made it also sometimes difficult for them. Outside school hours they mainly played with the other European children.

Many of my students from the theological school, who visited us frequently, took great interest in our children, playing cards and other games for hours.

In the back yard was a shed made from beak, where the Oppelaars had stored their old wooden boxes. These were all riddled with termites. When Zarus rummaged through the pile he asked one day: "What are you going to use this shed for?"

"I don't know," I said, "I don't think we need it really."

"How about making it into a Losmen, (guest house)? We will clear it out for you, put up two wooden planks on those beams above the floor, and we are in business."

"What, you mean for you to sleep on?"

"Why not. Then me and my friends can stay here over the weekends."

"That's all right with me. How many do you think this will sleep?"

"I would say up to three on each side."

"Well, you had better tell the others about this. If they want to stay in town and need a roof over their heads, this is where they can stay."

"That'll be great. Thanks a lot."

Zarus, Mes and Filus got working on the Losmen. The old boxes and packing material made a big bonfire and in no time the shed was cleared

out. Next time I looked at the shed it had a name plate hanging above the entrance:

‘LOSMEN BAHAGIA’

Filus had remembered our stay in the SoE guest house of the same name, and as it means “Guest House of Happiness”, I hoped it would bring happiness to our student guests. They even connected it to the electricity circuit. As each guest house should have a register for the guests, I bought a book and Filus or Zarus saw to it that our guests would enter their names and date in it.

After my first year as a missionary, I felt quite settled. The work gave me great satisfaction, and my relationship with the students deepened. I introduced into their curriculum something they had not done before, which was a range of exciting tours, which I hoped would open their eyes to practical issues which they were likely to encounter in their first appointment as ministers. Hopefully, this would better prepare them in dealing with such issues.

Study tours

The students at Tarus were responsive to my teaching, and I felt that we had established a good relationship with one another. I was very happy teaching there. As we had visited SoE over Easter, I suggested to Chris BanoEt that I take the students for a study tour there. It would be a great stimulation for them, and they would benefit from studying the 'Spirit Movement' first hand. If later in their ministry they would come across this phenomenon in their congregations, they would be prepared to minister to all people in a more helpful way. Chris agreed, but there had never been a study tour before, and he wanted it to succeed. We had to plan it thoroughly, and we all learnt from it. As the Theological school had originally started in SoE, the students could also research into the history of their own school.

On a Saturday in June 1970 Albinus Nitti, one of the part time lecturers, and I set out for SoE with eight students (three had already gone ahead by truck) from year five. We used the Synod's long-based Landrover, which had seen better days. It was given to the Synod by our church to be used by Col Crowe during his time in Timor. The object of the tour was to evaluate a wide range of ministries in a country town, where the charismatic movement had had a decisive influence on the whole community in SoE. We stayed at the Losmen Bahagia, all together in a large room, sleeping like herrings on the floor. During the days we visited a variety of community organisations, including some important people in the town, like the Catholic priest, the Police, schools, hospitals, and leaders and elders of the church.

The police told us that since the charismatic movement had come to SoE about two years earlier, crime had come down to almost nothing. People spent a lot of their spare time in the church, in prayer groups, and in teams. These were a small group of church people sent out to other congregations in the vicinity, to spread the 'Spirit Movement'. Through our interviews we heard lots of stories which they described as miracles.

One woman told us of how she had revived a person who had died the night before. One of our students asked: "How did you know that he had died?"

"I could not hear him breathing. He was just lying there stiff and cold."

"Did a doctor or a nurse examine him?"

“Of course not. We don’t have such luxuries here as you have in Kupang. But I know he had died. Then I prayed aloud all night and in the morning he breathed again. The Holy Spirit resurrected him. Isn’t that wonderful?”

Such interviews were later discussed by the students, and most of them agreed that one needed to be more sceptical in evaluating these stories. Another ‘miracle’ was also followed up by the students. It had been claimed, that the SoE church did not need to buy any wine for communion. They just filled a large jug with water, have long prayers over it, and when it is drawn for Holy Communion, the Holy Spirit had turned the water into wine.

Our sceptical students wanted to find out more about this.

“Where is the jug with water kept?”

“In a special room. No one has access to it.”

“How do you know that no one can get into it?”

“It is locked.”

“And who keeps the key?”

“Ibu Nalle”, we were told.

At the next opportunity, one of our students went by himself to visit Ibu Nalle. He was a distant relative of hers, and had her confidence. They talked about other things, without ever mentioning the miracle story. She started telling him by herself and showed him the room where the jug with water stood. He then asked her quite casually, how this water could turn into wine? She said that she didn’t know herself. “It’s the Holy Spirit’s doing,” she said. All she did was squash a few bananas into the water and add some banana leaves to it. When she came back after a couple of days to fetch the jug, the water had turned into wine.

This was all reported during our evaluation sessions. I left the students to draw their own conclusions, but one thing was certain that the people of SoE genuinely believed in these miracles, and that their lives had changed because of them. People were uncritical and uneducated, especially in the outer villages, and once they accepted that miracles happened in SoE, these multiplied almost daily.

The students were left with the task to evaluate the good sides of this movement, and also the negative sides. Many families had split up, when one partner disagreed with it. Some women had gone out with a team, leaving their husbands and children to look after themselves. Teenagers too just left their home and opened themselves to exploitation and manipulation. I hoped that our students, who would be in charge of their own congregations the following year, would be better prepared to deal with such situations.

The talk with the Roman Catholic priest also opened up new avenues of co-operation. Some of the students commented that they had never before spoken to a priest. They realised that they would have much in common with their own ministry.



Some months later I took the same students for a weekend to the island of Semau, where two of our students, Mes Beeh and Eli Kisek came from. The problem we encountered there was a pastoral one. A woman said she was dying, because someone had poisoned her. The students asked, how long had she been sick. She replied for over four weeks. "Then it can't be poison, or you would have died a long time ago," they told her. She just shrugged her shoulders. Then the students were stuck. What would they do next? Normally they would have had a Bible reading with her, a prayer for healing, and then they would have left her. But this would not have addressed her real problem, they reasoned. So I called them into a huddle outside and asked:

"What is her real problem?"

They guessed, but none of them had a clue.

I suggested that a couple of them go back and ask her about her relationships. She may have some deep-seated guilt still unresolved.

The two went back and had a pastoral conversation with her. They found out that she has had a relationship in the past with a fellow, who was now happily married. She didn't want to let him go and her guilt would not let her live in peace. It had literally 'poisoned' her life. The two came back and reported their finding. We then arranged for a devotional which would acknowledge her guilt and would proclaim Jesus' forgiveness, based on the story of the woman caught in adultery. The impact of that devotional was miraculous. She smiled and was feeling visibly better.

In our discussions afterwards it became apparent, that people will often express their problems in a language that they are familiar with from the old, pagan days. The students realised that they couldn't just dismiss a case because of the words used to describe their problems, but that they had to delve deeper until the real hurt comes to the surface.



As I had taken the senior class in 1970 to SoE on a study tour, the senior class in 1971 hoped, of course, that I would do the same with them. The class wanted to go to the island of Rote. We caught a regular steam ship to Baa, the capital of Rote, an island neighbouring Timor to the south/west, the island closest to Australia. Our first activity in Baa was to help the main church collect river stones for their new church building. Then we followed a similar programme as that in SoE, visiting the various civic bodies and see how ministry would touch them all.

One visit stands out in my memory. We went to a local medical clinic, where Ohm Boki (Uncle Boki) was in charge. He had been in charge of that clinic for the last twenty years. He had never studied medicine, yet he told us of some of the operations he had carried out, as there were no doctors on the island. He amputated a leg, without anaesthetics, of course, lanced boils, set broken bones, but never delivered a baby. This was the job of midwives. He seemed to have had a very successful record, as people in the district all admired him greatly and fully trusted his medical abilities. It amazed us all that on the whole island of Rote, with a population of approximately 75,000 people, there had never been a resident doctor.

The Rotinese as an ethnic group, are quite different from the Timorese. They have long straight hair, their features are more Indian looking, they are definitely sea-faring people, with fishing and swimming being part of their culture. Their great cultivating achievement is the Tuak Palm, or sugar palm, which in hunger periods helped many people to survive. They tap the flower and catch the sugary sap twice a day. This juice, when fresh, tastes like sweet lemon juice, a most refreshing drink, and very sustaining, as it contains a lot of sugar. If they want to make some alcoholic drink out of it, they let it ferment for about three days, which they call *laru*. It tastes a little bit like our beer. If they let it ferment longer and then distil the alcohol from it, it becomes *sopi*, a strong drink, reserved as a rule for special festivities, like weddings and funerals.

The island of Rote is divided into 18 kingdoms, which still existed when we did our study tour. We heard stories of tribal fighting between one kingdom against a neighbouring one, with dire consequences. But in general it was said that since Christianity had come to Rote in the 17th century, there has been less fighting among the people. The culture of the tuak palm helped them to survive many 'normal' hunger periods in these islands, the month before the rainy season and shortly afterwards, and of course, during severe drought periods. They are an industrious people and take initiatives when required. They have also settled on the island of Semau, pushing the indigenous Helon people to the north of the island. There are also large pockets of Rotinese in Timor, mainly in Kupang, along the coast and along the main trunk road inland.

Their cloth weaving, done in the tie dying method, the same as on the other islands, has a characteristic black base with red and white patterns, sometimes mixed with shades of green or yellow. Each family or clan has their own pattern. I was reminded of the Scottish clans with their characteristic kilts and patterns. The men wear a traditional straw hat in the shape of hats worn by the Portuguese in the 17th century, including a palm leaf woven feather sticking out at the front.

During our sharing sessions one student came up with the following story:

WHO GETS THE HEAD AND WHO THE TAIL?

“In Rote we seldom hear people say ‘let’s go to a party.’ As a rule they say ‘let’s go to eat meat.’ This expression is, of course, quite accurate, for everyone gets such a big piece of meat, that sometimes they cannot even finish it. What is left of it may be taken home. At a wedding feast, for instance, the food consists of unlimited amounts of rice, boiled meat and black soup. The latter is due to the fact that the goat or pig killed is not skinned but put on the fire just as it is. After it is partly roasted, it is cut into pieces and then boiled.

“Then an experienced person is chosen to deal out the meat to the guests. You can’t take just anyone for this job. The person dealing out the pieces must know whether it is proper to give a certain piece to a certain guest or not. Usually, the animal is cut up according to a set rule and divided among the guests according to their social status. If the guest is a local king, a chief, a village elder, the head of a family, or a foreigner, he gets the meat that is on the head of the animal, as a sign of honouring him. Each other part of the animal is dealt out according to the social status of the receiver. The neck, for instance, goes to the elder brothers; the ribs and sides to the highest females at the party, the mother and elder aunts; the hips to the lower class females and all the sisters. The legs are for children, the tail and stomach for the hired workers, and the flanks are for ordinary people and neighbours.

“For each feast many animals (between 20 and 40) have to be killed. ‘We don’t want to appear mean,’ say people from Rote, ‘What’s the point, otherwise, of working hard all our life, collecting food and breeding animals?’ At other times they very seldom eat rice or meat. Their staple food is corn and tuak (sugar palm juice), fish or prawns. Meat and rice is kept and saved up, as their saying goes: “Have your umbrella ready before it rains.” Their umbrella is a tuak leaf, and if it rains you can’t just climb up the slippery trunk to cut your big leaf then.

“Sometimes rice is being sold, but only for emergency, such as if people need a parang (bush knife), kerosene, beetle nuts, tobacco or clothes.” (see M. Manafe: Pulau Rote).

We discussed this story and learnt from it that Rotinese have a strong tie to tradition, that their society is rather stratified, that they are ready to share, and that they have great joy in celebrating. This would need to be taken into account when they want to minister to them.

This study tour gave our students also a better insight into their own culture and tradition. When we came back to the class, we tried to link the Christian faith with some of their other deep seated traditional beliefs. For instance, in their traditional stories, their creator spirit was called Uis Neno. He manifested himself in the fierce crocodiles, but also in the water

they lived in. From there his power was acknowledged in all water, which was so necessary for life and for the harvest. He was prayed to as the highest spirit in their pantheon. I then explained, had Paul come to Timor today, he would have probably told the Timorese, that the God whom he proclaimed is the same as their creator spirit, Uis Neno.

There were also other aspects of their traditional beliefs which I could link with Christian theology. I could see in the faces of the students that something had clicked. They had always considered the old stories and their old tradition as something pagan and to be left behind. With this new interpretation, they could embrace their old tradition and give it a Christian content. They were feeling that Christ had become incarnate in Timor, or Rote, or wherever they came from. It helped them to understand in a new light what Christ really means to us. I found this approach most exciting. It grew quite naturally out of our reflections on the stories and experiences we had during that study tour.



In 1972 I kept up the tradition of again taking our final year students on a study tour. The students wanted to go to the island of Alor, to the north of Kupang. The new moderator of GMIT, Jos Adang, came from Alor, and so did our only female student in that class, Mintje Matabei, and a couple of others. There were 16 of them all together. The TIRTA KARYA was a large cattle ship, going straight to Kalabahi, the capital of Alor. There was plenty of space on deck for the one night across. We came through some strong tidal currents between the island of Alor and Pantar, but with the large ship we hardly noticed. It did delay our arrival in Kalabahi, though. We were expected to arrive for lunch, but instead we arrived almost at dusk. Jos Adang, the Moderator, greeted us at the wharf and the reception by the people was warm and almost overwhelming. The main church put on a real feast for us, a fine worship service, and showed us to our communal accommodation. They would have preferred to billet us with church families, but our students voted for communal accommodation, except for Mintje. She was allowed to stay the night with her family.

As with the previous study tours, we had a full programme. There was a strong Muslim presence in Alor. We had made an appointment with the local imam or priest. Never before had our students, nor I for that matter, talked to an imam, and they found this session most useful. We were reminded of the Indonesian pancasila, or five principles, which are underpinning the Indonesian constitution. As the first principle says that “all Indonesians believe in the one God,” there must be no competition between the God of the Muslims, the Christians or the Hindus. Both Muslims and Christians worship the same God. The word for ‘God’ in

Indonesian is 'Allah', both for Muslims and for Christians.

This encounter with a representative from the Muslim faith brought about a lively theological discussion, which our students found most enlightening. I hoped it would also help them later on, when they were ministers, to take up contact with their Muslim counterparts and have a good relation with them.

Another point of interest was the church's involvement with agricultural training for their lay pastors. Apart from bringing the Gospel to the villages, they brought with them more modern and better ways of farming, from which the whole village benefited. The whole concept came from a programme instigated by the United Nations, where 'Motivators' were trained and sent into villages as the agent of change. In Alor the church trained their lay pastors to become such 'motivators' in their villages. We visited their school and were most impressed by their agricultural programme, which was compulsory for all. Whilst Tarus had some land to grow rice, here the students were involved in a full programme of agriculture and were taught how to motivate others. Our students could see the advantage of this training.

To my surprise, Filus, who was now a minister on the neighbouring island of Pantar, came to visit us. It was great to see him again. He looked slimmer, though, and the tough time as a new minister in a parish so far away from any of his friends, had caused him a great deal of anxiety and suffering, as if church people were saying: 'Jesus had to suffer, so we are going to make you suffer too.' We gave him the opportunity to share some of his experiences with the other students, and during the ensuing discussions we tried to offer some solutions for Filus' problems. They were mainly connected with the withholding of pay and sustenance for their minister. No doubt the others would encounter similar problems when their turn came to go out into the parishes. Meanwhile, we were looking for some ship to take us back home again, but there was none, and none was expected in the near future. What were we to do? There was no phone connection, a weekly plane from the Missionary Aviation Fellowship (MAF) was the only contact with the outside world. We certainly wouldn't all fit in the four-seater plane, so we were stuck in Kalabahi. Eventually a former pleasure yacht with a built-in motor turned up in the harbour. It was available for hire, but it was tiny. Maybe four would have been very comfortable there, but we were seventeen. But in good Indonesian fashion, the owner assured us that he could take us all. We looked at each other and I could see some anxious faces. Mintje decided that she would fly with the MAF plane, which was expected to go next morning. The others, well, there was no alternative. We resigned ourselves to go on the SILAWATI.

After an extended stay of ten days in Alor we were farewelled next morning with plenty of prayers and an enormous crowd of well wishers. It appeared that the church had very much enjoyed our visit, and so had our

students. It was a warm and tearful farewell. We all managed to scramble on deck. Apart from the two crew, there were four additional passengers! I don't know how, but we all managed to find a spot on deck for each of our bottoms, and the anchor was lifted. Suddenly there was a commotion on shore. Shouting and screaming. Out of the masses of farewelling people emerged the smiling face of Mintje. She had missed the MAF plane and she was going to come with us after all. She had nearly missed our yacht too.



On Board SILIWATI

Very slowly, the SILIWATI pulled away from the pier and chuffed into the harbour. We knew it would take a long time before we were out in the open, and so we enjoyed the scenery and the calm. It was getting dark and a silvery moon made the sea and the surrounding very romantic. But then we came near the spot between Alor and Pantar which we had just casually observed on our inward journey. The churning waters of the changing tide looked quite threatening from close by. My courage sank. I watched with anxious eyes the whirling and swirling waters come ever so close to the rim of the overcrowded yacht. Then we plunged into a huge whirl. We had heard in Kalabahi, that many people had been sucked under water by these whirls, and we all thought, our time had come. Our heavy laden yacht was tossed about like the proverbial match box. A picture flashed into my mind of Paul being shipwrecked near Malta, but there was no beach in sight. We were far away from shore, heading towards the open sea. God must have heard our prayers, for after what

seemed to have been an endless time, the yacht became calmer and held her direction. We could hear the engine chuffing again. We were through! There was great rejoicing by our students, who promptly started singing the Indonesian version of "Now thank we all our God." I must say, I had never more fervently sung, nor found it more meaningful, than at that time, especially the lines:

"and guide us when perplexed,
and free us from all ills ..."

We were free, and we were through!

But our joy was not to last for long. By about 2 a.m. a stiff breeze blew up from the south, where we were heading, and the yacht began to go up and down in the waves. Each time it came down it sprayed us all wet. The moon had disappeared and it became pitch dark. One by one the others near me left the crowded deck and scrambled for some shelter in the back, where there was standing room only. Should I huddle up with them or should I persevere? The decision was taken from me. I became violently sea-sick and the crew told me to go into the cabin, which had four bunks. They didn't want to lose me over-board. Below deck the rocking of the boat seemed even worse. The air was full of the smell of hot engine oil. Poor Mintje was already there stretched out on one bunk, being sick from time to time like myself. Later I heard that only five of our students never got sick. I wished the night would pass, but it seemed to take ages. By first daylight I went up on deck again, and there I began to recover.

We were now sailing in the lee of Timor, which was a great relief to us miserable looking passengers. The sun was warming us again, and a rainbow appeared, spanning over the sea and touching, as it were, the mountains of Timor. God seemed to be saying: "here is my sign of hope for you. I have not abandoned you. Look, there is a bridge from sea to land." From then on I actually enjoyed sailing along the northern shores of Timor, but I still couldn't eat anything, not that there was anything much to eat anyway. Then it got hot. In the afternoon a strong wind came up and the yacht hoisted its sail. We were picking up speed, and no one was sick anymore. No one had any idea how far we had travelled, nor how soon we would see Kupang appearing just around the next corner. We looked out for this sight all day. Then the sun set in the west, but we seemed still far away from any human habitation. After sailing in the dark for nearly two hours, we saw at long last a tiny little light in the distance, then more. This must be Kupang, we thought, but no one uttered a word. It still took us more than an hour before we landed on the beach of Kupang harbour. I phoned Alison that we had arrived. She was greatly relieved as she had not heard anything from us all this time. She came to pick us up by car. There were about six of us, the others had made their own way home. Lisa had something for us to eat, good Lisa, and then I

sank absolutely exhausted into bed, whilst Alison took Mintje and the others home to their place. I was very thankful that all ended well, and that we all had arrived home safely.

The joys and setbacks of missionary life in Kupang

We were very fortunate to have an excellent doctor in Kupang. Very early after our arrival we needed one for our children, and the Stephens suggested their doctor, Te Su Han, an ethnic Chinese and officer in the Police Force, one of three doctors in Kupang. When he experienced racial discrimination he changed his name to Tedjasudhana, a Javanese sounding name. In no time we became good friends with him and his wife Lilian.

In August 1970 Han gave us all a mighty shock. Alison had been to see him with a lump in her breast, and he advised her to go to Darwin without delay to have the lump removed. "One cannot be too careful with these lumps. If they are malignant, they grow very fast".

She was booked on the first flight to Darwin via Dili. There followed a couple of anxious weeks for us in Kupang. She couldn't phone us nor send any messages to us, so we were greatly surprised and overjoyed, when one day she just appeared in the doorway, with the good news that the lump had been removed and that it had been benign. I realised how much we were in God's hands, particularly in a place which had few medical facilities. We thanked God for his continued protection.

Our staff had been absolutely marvellous during Alison's absence. The household continued its routine, except that our children missed out on their English school in the afternoon. But they did not seem to mind!

About a month before Christmas 1970 our luggage finally arrived. We could hardly believe it. We went straight to Tenau, Kupang's harbour, but when we saw the wharflies unloading our things, we received a terrible shock. They brought things to shore almost item by item, not packed at all. Grace Bros. had assured us that they would pack all things into watertight containers, but instead we saw the Persian rugs, kitchen items, even the baby's bath, walking ashore on the wharflies' backs. We were glad to be on hand to watch things, for many items could have just disappeared. As it was when we started unpacking, quite a few items were missing. But that did not dampen our joy. It was really like Christmas for everyone. Long forgotten things were unpacked. We now even had a fridge, which

ran on both kerosene and electricity, but since the electricity supply was so unreliable, we ran it most of the time on kerosene. The fifteen months without our sea-luggage had taught us, however, that one can get by in life without too many material things, which we as Westerners think we need.

No sooner did we have the fridge and our things, when we received visitors from Australia. The first to come was John Cleghorn, who was a student for the ministry in Melbourne. He had been the organist in our Lindfield church. He stayed with us over Christmas and I think he quite enjoyed it. We certainly did. The other visitor was Jeff Robinson, my student friend with whom I started Indonesian at Sydney Uni. He had finished his arts degree and wanted to practice his Indonesian as he was touring the islands. The students from Tarus, who came to our house, enjoyed these young people and they had a great time together. Max Lane, another of my Indonesian studies' friend, also came and stayed with us on his trip to Java and Sumatra. He later married a girl from Sumatra and became a free-lance journalist and political commentator. We met up again when we moved to Canberra.

The difference a car made to our life

Soon after our luggage came we had news that our car would finally arrive. There was great rejoicing by the family, including Mes. He had passed his driving test with flying colours and could see himself already as the chauffeur of a new car. I took him down to the wharf together with our boys, and he was to be the first one to drive the car. He was very proud, and so was I, for he really was a good driver.

To have a car changed our life style quite a lot. I was able to do much more at the school. I would go there occasionally in the afternoons, talk to the students, help some with their work, I did some counselling if they had problems, and on very odd occasions I would share the evening meal with them. The students had no communal meal time, they just came to pick up their bowl full of rice or corn, and would eat their meal in their dormitories. There was no dean of students, who lived in Tarus and would be available when needed, who could give them guidance and counselling and who could share his faith with them. I would have loved to make myself available on a regular basis, but my time schedule would not allow this. Also, a dean or a student counsellor would have to be a local person, who shared their culture and their experiences. In the afternoons the students would often play volleyball with each other, the only recreation they knew.

With the car we also went regularly on weekends to Lasiana, Kupang's best beach, about 8 km from our home. Coconut and sugar palms were

growing right to the edge of the beach. We would park the car under one of those trees, and plunge into the sea only a few meters away. The beach was situated in a bay, and there was no surf, and it was quite safe for everyone in the family to swim. We usually arrived about 4 pm and stayed till the sun set over the island of Semau. The only time we could not swim there was in the middle of the rainy season, December till about March, as the water was rather murky and full of stingers. During that time we went swimming near Tenau. We called it 'shelly beach'. There were a lot of beautiful shells, but the sea went deep very quickly, and further out was a strong current. Opposite that spot was the island of Semau, so there was no surf either, but the water was clear and beautiful. Sometimes we would venture in our car further inland on a Sunday, either for a picnic or to visit a student or church. These trips could turn into extraordinary experiences.

One Sunday we went to Baun, towards the south of Kupang, to meet the family of a student, Zacharias Neno. He also wanted us to meet his minister in Baun. We were just sipping tea at his place when a man came rushing in. A man in the village had been involved in a fight and his leg had been badly cut above the heel. He was lying in hospital and was bleeding to death. Could we please take him to Kupang.

I thought of the terribly rough road, and how a bridge over a river had to be repaired before we could drive over it, that he would never make it. Then I said glibly: "My wife is a nurse. She may be able to help."

With that we all went to the hospital. The 'hospital' was a bebak house with a very low thatched roof. We all had to stoop to get inside. As there were no windows, it took some time for our eyes to get used to the dinginess, before we could see a few empty beds. Further down the ward there was a man lying on a bed, and the nurse crouching by his side. Alison had to use a torch to look at the man's leg. It was bandaged, but a bloodvessel must have burst, as everything was soaked in fresh blood. Alison asked for some fresh bandages, but there weren't any.

"Any sheets which could be cut up for bandages?"

"There are no sheets in this hospital."

"Where is the person in charge of this hospital?" "On weekend leave in Kupang."

Alison was going to use a piece of cloth in our car, she decided. By then I felt a bit dizzy and left the scene in a rush. One by one our boys and Filus also came out feeling quite squeamish. Finally Alison appeared, and I thought she also looked rather pale.

"I just had to catch some fresh air. It's so dark and stuffy in there. After a while, I will be all right again."

She managed to go back again to finish the dressing. She never undid the old bandage, but tied something firm over it to stop the bleeding. A week later I heard from someone that this person had fully recovered. I told Alison the good news and she was greatly relieved.

On another occasion we went again to Baun, in two cars this time, with the family of Walt and Bev Snowa, American missionaries to GMIT, the Evangelical Church of Timor. During the service we suddenly felt the church swaying backwards and forwards. The congregation was just standing for prayer, and the minister kept praying. My first thought was that our children were up to some mischief, pushing and shaking the building, but then I realised that it was an earthquake. How fortunate to be in a bebek church, I thought. Had we been in a brick church, the walls and roof would surely have come tumbling down.

After church we left our cars at the spring and went further down the river for a walk in a beautiful dense forest. When we came back I discovered that I had a flat tyre. I started changing it, when I saw that a second tyre was also flat. My heart sank, as I knew I didn't bring a repair kit with me, nor a pump. I asked Walt, but he didn't have any either. To our great consternation we discovered that he also had two flat tyres on his car. We then knew that some hooligans had been at work letting air out of our tyres. We thought that somebody in the village would have a pump, but there was none in all the village. We had to do something, as we couldn't just wait there for some miracle to happen. We put both our spare tyres on Walt's car, who would go back to Kupang, about an hour and a half's drive, and bring a pump and a repair kit, just in case. Our family had to wait for four hours before we could set out on our homeward journey. By then it was already dark. Reflecting on this episode I realised, how much we depended on one another, particularly in these more isolated areas.



Ordination of 1970's graduates (Agabus the tallest, on his right Filus, on his left Uli Mone, then Jotam Selan and Eli Kisek, last Tinus Saban)

I had another experience with flat tyres. I was on my way back from SoE with six others, from a Synod meeting in 1971. The road had been wonderfully repaired since our earlier trip, and it took now only about four hours to Kupang. We left the Synod meeting at about 8 pm, hoping to be home by midnight. The first flat tyre occurred about an hour after we had left. There were plenty of helpers in the car, and in no time the spare tyre was put on the wheel and the journey continued. Then we had a flat tyre again. As I had the repair kit with me this time, we had to fumble in the dark, but with the help of a torch and willing hands we repaired the tube within about twenty minutes. As I wiped my hands on my trousers, I suddenly yelled out in great pain. Something had stung me on the index finger.

"Can only have been a scorpion," was the re-assuring comment of one of the other ministers.

The finger was hurting so much that I nearly fainted. But there was nothing I could do. I just stood there and let the others finish the work with the tyre. The tyre was put back on the rim, and luckily I was able to drive. It didn't take very long before we could all hear a faint hissing coming from the front. A flat tyre again! The old patch was still in place, but right next to it there was a new hole. We had to repair it again, but I let the others do the work, because of my sore finger. But I helped pumping up the tyre, because everyone had to pump fifty times before the next took over. I think we had several rounds before the tyre was adequately filled.

Meanwhile it was well past midnight. I thought longingly of our nice and comfortable bed in Kupang, but the journey had to go on. We travelled for quite some distance until we could hear again that hissing noise. Another flat tyre! The fourth on our trip. I looked at my kit and said: "This is the last repair we can do, after this we've had it."

Cheerful prospects. Taking the tyre out of the rim and checking the tube for the hole by torch light, had become almost routine. The last patch was on the tube, and the wheel was back. We all crossed our fingers and after a short prayer we continued our epic journey. But, alas, it was not going to be for long. As we drove through the village of Camplong we heard the hissing noise again, and I stopped the car on the side of the road. It was still pitch dark. We couldn't raise anybody, so we thought we might all get a bit of sleep. But to sleep with six men in a Toyota is not so easy. I was so tired, but sleep wouldn't come. Agabus Rajadima, one of our graduates, walked with me towards dawn. He told me how difficult it would be for him to be the minister of a parish on his home island of Sabu. According to custom, the whole family could come and bludge on him, and he simply couldn't refuse. He saw it as his obligation to help, even when he knew that they were taking advantage of him. Then I realised why the Synod always sent people to a different area than their own, where they had no relatives to contend with. It was good to have a

heart to heart talk with Agabus, even if it was at the crack of dawn.

When we returned to our car, someone had obtained a repair patch and we could start working again on the tyre. We hoped that this would be the last flat tyre. But in case of another flat tyre, we knew that we were now in a more populated area, and hoped we would be able to get a repair patch more easily. Unfortunately, this was not the case. The next and final flat tyre occurred in between two villages quite a distance apart. We just sat by the road and waited for a car or a truck to appear to help us out. By now it was well into the morning and it was getting hot. I was feeling hungry and tired and not in a good mood. When eventually a truck came to our rescue, I noticed a very rough patch on the inside of our tyre, which must have rubbed the tube and caused all the flat tyres. I put a sheet of paper between the tube and the tyre and hoped that this would see us home. It did. We arrived back in Kupang about 2 pm, 18 hours after we had left SoE, very hungry and very tired, after delivering everybody to their respective homes.



During the Easter holidays of 1972 our family went touring through the centre of Timor. We took three of our students with us. We thought that they could help us with our boys. George was assigned to Sem Nitti as his 'commander', Mark to Zarus Toulasik, and James to Frans Balla. Our first stop was SoE. The road had been upgraded through UN finances and was by then already vastly improved. We stayed again at the Losmen Bahagia, and went sightseeing around town. It had not changed much since our study tour in 1970. From SoE we took the road to Kapan, 'the apple region' as the Timorese called it. It was one of the highest regions of Timor, and we really felt the cold. There was no heating in the guest house EMBUN MOLLO (Mollo's mist), and sitting around in the evenings we had to wrap up in our blankets.

Eli Kisek, one of our 1970 graduates, was then the minister in one of the villages near Kapan, called Tunua. We had to get special permission from the regional administrator, as normally the road was closed to protect the sandalwood from poachers. The road went towards Mount Mutis, the highest on Timor. It was very rocky and steep, difficult to drive, but we saw the most marvellous scenery. To drive the Toyota on top of a ridge over a grassy surface, with no path or track visible, was most exciting. As we kept climbing and eventually arrived at the top of the ridge, we had the most panoramic view of a wonderful landscape. When we arrived at the village, the church's gong was struck. Somewhat bemused we looked around and saw Eli in the valley, a long way away, riding one of those Timor ponies up the hill. It was incredible to observe the speed with which he negotiated the terrain. Our boys were fascinated and when Eli

arrived, they wanted a ride too, of course. Eli was kind enough to take each one in turn with him on the pony and give them a quick trot around the apple orchard. It was great to see Eli again, and we had to meet the whole congregation for a photo, before we were allowed to take our leave again.

From Kapan we drove back via SoE through Niki-Niki to Kefamenanu, where we had to repair a puncture in a tyre. The WISMA had good food, but accommodation was not so nice. In the afternoon of the following day we arrived at Atambua, where we stayed at LOSMEN SELAMAT. This had good food and good accommodation. We all enjoyed our stay there. Atambua was close to the Portuguese Timor border. The population there is predominantly catholic. We saw their cathedral, a most imposing building. We also visited another former student from Tarus. He complained that he was too far away from Kupang and GMIT didn't support him enough. He felt he was in an outpost. It was here that we celebrated Alison's 40th birthday with some Christmas cake, which the PWMU (Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union) were sending to all missionaries, and which had arrived just before Easter. It was a rare treat. We also experienced our second earthquake in Timor. I was just in the bathroom, when I felt the tremor and saw the water in the container splashing over the rim. But again no damage was sustained, due to their *bebak* style of buildings. This traditional building style seems to be more resistant to earthquakes than our European homes.

We also visited a most impressive agricultural school run by the Catholic church. Then we returned via Kefamenanu, with a stopover night, and then straight back to Kupang with a brief visit to another of our former students. The last stretch was very tiring. It took us over 12 hours driving, but our tiredness was overcome with a lot of singing. Throughout the journey our children did not fight each other, as they usually did when they got bored. Zarus would start a song with his guitar, and everybody joined in. We had learnt many of the Indonesian folk songs, but often it would be just the three students singing, and we would be listening to their harmony. It had been a very successful trip, most relaxing, and enjoyed by all.



Our car was sometimes used by other members of the church for their personal needs, like Chris BanoEt, or someone from the Synod office. One night I was rudely awakened by a loud knock at our back door. Octo Tunliu, a minister in a Kupang suburb, to whom I had given English lessons, stood there very excitedly.

"Please come immediately, my wife is having a baby. I have to take her to the hospital."

I jumped into the car with him, and at great speed we went to his home, which didn't have a driveway. He asked me to help him carry her to the car. He sat in the front with her on his lap, and as I was making for the hospital, I felt like driving an ambulance without the siren. Along the bumpy road I could hear him call out to his wife: "Hold on, my dear, don't push, we are nearly there."

Arriving at the hospital, we had to carry her on a long footpath, which led straight into the delivery room. Octo and I were puffing and hurrying along, and his wife was beginning to groan. With a final effort we heaved her onto the delivery table, struggled out and sank on a bench to catch our breath. We were still puffing when we could hear a loud baby cry emerging from the inside. A boy was born. Octo and I looked at each other and he said: "Another minute, and we would not have made it."

As a reward for my effort, Octo asked me to name the baby, which was a special honour. After consulting with Alison we suggested Mark Stewart, after two of our boys. Then I was asked to baptise him at his church. What a great privilege this was!



The car was not the only mode of transport we used. If we wanted to visit a student who came from the surrounding islands we had to go by sailing boat. Mes had gradually attached himself to our family like no other student. He was to call us Dad and Mum eventually, and he wanted us to visit his parents on the island of Semau. A weekend in July 1970 was arranged, and he took us all, including Lisa and Filus across, in his family's sailing boat. The wind was favourable, and in three hours we arrived in the village of Piaklain, announced by the sound of a coon shell.

The houses in the village were all *bebak*, built haphazardly scattered all over the place. There was no road or path and it was very difficult to find one's way. We were said to have been the first European family ever to have stayed the night on that island. Well, we felt very honoured indeed. Mes' parents were extremely nice to us. They had built especially for us a shower screen near the house, and dug a toilet pit with a low screen not too far away. Normally, people in the villages went into the bush to relieve themselves, but Mes had thought of that too. They had to fetch the water for our ablution from a well about two kilometers away.

Mes' father was the lay preacher in Piaklain and on Sunday we all went to church and listened to his sermon. People had a high regard for him. On Monday we walked to the northern end of the island through bush. There was a lovely sandy beach, but coral rocks prevented us from having a good swim, and as there was no shade, we found it very hot. Our boys had fun riding on the Timor ponies in the afternoon.

Late in the evening we returned to the boat. We couldn't choose the

time of our departure as we had to wait for the high tide. There was no jetty by the water. We had to wade through the murky water on very uneven and sharp coral rocks. They tried to carry our children, but that seemed a very risky business to me, as one could easily lose balance and the water was quite deep. I suggested to make a chain of people and pass goods, luggage and children from person to person. People thought this was good fun and eventually the ladies were also passed this way, only with Alison they had a little more difficulty, as she was not as light as the Rotinese. In the bay there was no wind, and the boat gently rocked up and down. Everyone in our family seemed asleep, except I. The swell made me sea sick. I felt better when after sunrise a breeze came up and we were sailing towards Tenau, where Mes dropped us off. Peter came to take us home again.

Mes was the most intelligent student in his year. I felt that he and GMIT would benefit from his further education. The Christian University at Salatiga offered courses that suited the church and I discussed it with his parents and the Moderator. We were prepared to sponsor him for the duration of his studies. GMIT accredited him as their student, and after Mes graduated from Tarus, he stayed with us for a month, before going to Java. He worked for me as my chauffeur, doing some shopping for us, and making himself useful in many other ways. I was very sad to see him go in the end, but such is life. In the middle of January 1971 he left by ship, and promised to write regularly. He kept that promise throughout his studies and beyond, as a thick file with his letters can testify. This meant a great deal to me, as we had become close friends.



Mes preaching



Uli Mone, whom I had given some driving lessons to, asked Peter and me to participate in an important family affair. He wanted to marry his girl. To get the permission of her family, his family had to proceed in a prescribed way and put the question formally to her family. This seemed a strange custom to me. We first met at the home of Uli's family. Uli himself was not allowed to be part of this official 'asking ceremony'. First the strategy was discussed, who would make the opening speech, who would follow, and then they discussed how much they should offer as the bride price. I presume the reason for Peter and me to be there was to impress the bride's family, and perhaps to keep the bride price down. When the lengthy preliminary discussions had finished, we were ready to proceed to the bride's home. It was bright day light, but custom required that the procession be led by a person holding a lighted lamp. We were very formally received at the bride's home by the father, various uncles, and the village head man. All males, the same as in our party. Then the speeches were made, each side took its turn, and when that part was over, the haggling about the bride price started. In the old days this was usually expressed in heads of cattle, but these families had moved into the modern era, where the price was money. The whole procedure took about three hours, at the end of which we all received a cup of tea and some cakes.



The Police in Timor came mainly from Java. They were charged to look after law and order, particularly after the coup of 1965, when thousands of ordinary citizens, also in Kupang, had been accused of being or siding with the communists, and had been ruthlessly executed, without trials. Since then the general population was very much in fear of the Police. On one of our walks to the city with the family we encountered an incident which illustrates attitudes on both sides, the Police and the people. As we were walking along on the road — there were no footpaths in Kupang in those days — a young man on a bicycle passed us. As he was approaching another group of pedestrians in front of us, a young girl suddenly jumped into his path, colliding with the bicycle and knocking both to the ground. In no time a Policeman was on hand. Without asking any questions he beat mercilessly into the bicycle rider with his truncheon. When we protested and said that he was innocent, his reply was, that he should be more careful.

This incident reminded me of an advice of Peter's, not to stop after an accident, as bystanders often get so enraged that they take the law into

their own hands. It had happened in the past that the driver of the vehicle involved in the accident got killed. With this culture I felt it was quite hopeless to teach our students to stand up for their rights and be more courageous when facing the authorities.



On Fridays I would often bring some students back from Tarus who wanted to spend the Saturday with their families. Some of them stayed with us for lunch. Lisa was good enough to always have some food in reserve, but at times when there were more than usual, she would give us her own portion and sometimes the food that had been put aside for the staff. By chance Alison found out about this and put a stop to it. We didn't mind sharing whatever was there, and for the students it meant a special treat in any case. On one such Friday we just managed to get home before a cloud burst came down. It was absolutely pouring. We had just finished lunch, when we heard water rushing down at the back of our yard. The rain had stopped but there was so much water, that in no time it began to rise and enter our house. We lifted everything from the floors and opened the front door, where the water could escape. But throughout the house the water was about 10 cm deep. It just reached the bottom of our cupboards, and I warned our children not to make any waves, as the water would get onto the shelves. Hans Jung came with his home movie camera to film our family and the floods in our house. After about two hours the water receded, but it left a terribly smelling brown slime behind. It took days to clean it up properly.



The number of English speaking missionaries increased when Walt & Bev Snowa arrived from the USA late in 1970. But GMIT was not the only church to receive missionaries. The Baptist Church had a pastor from the USA and the Church & Missionary Alliance had people from the USA and Australia. We felt a need to have some services in English and invited locals and foreigners to the City Church for a weekly evening service. This went for a while but gradually it petered out. After that we tried more devotional style services in people's homes on a rotating basis. Again this was open to anyone who wanted to come. These devotions were well received, and occasionally we also held communion services in one of the churches. I found them uplifting and particularly when things had been rather hectic and turbulent, they fulfilled a deep-seated need.

On one occasion, we took a couple of visitors, who claimed to be

Anglican Priests. The elder one said that he carried his mother's ashes back to England for burial. We had serious doubts about their authenticity, but their stories were very good, particularly their ghost stories, and we had a lot of fun with them. At the devotions we challenged them to offer some prayers for us, but they graciously declined. We felt then that our suspicions were confirmed, but we let them stay at our place for a couple of nights anyhow. They boarded a ship from Tenau to Hong Kong, and I believe the captain was also conned with their story of their mother's ashes, as he let them travel for free.



Before we came to Timor, I had attended a talk in Sydney by a Canadian, who had introduced a simple method of chicken raising in Africa. I had never forgotten this, and at the appropriate time I discussed this with the students in Tarus. I offered to purchase some one-day old chicks of a proper breed, keep them at our home until they were big enough, and then sell them to the students. They would have to build cages or pens for them according to a specific design. The Canadian had called it appropriate technology for the tropics. The material was to be bamboo, which we would cut in the bush at no cost, and palm leaves as a roof. They would have to buy the feed through me, and I promised them to help with the selling of the eggs. The village eggs from the market were about half the size of our normal eggs, and there was a risk that about half of them could be bad. The normal sized eggs were, therefore, in great demand, especially by all the foreigners. After everything was explained to them, about ten students decided to participate in this chicken project.

I contacted John Rossner, an American missionary from Church World Service overseeing food for works projects. He lived in Surabaya. Through him I ordered about 100 one-day old chicks to be delivered by plane. I had prepared a box for them with a kerosene lamp as a mother-hen substitute, and when they arrived, I went to the airport to pick them up. Those chicks had caused quite a stir. I had to push my way through a bunch of people, all looking and marvelling at the chirping and quite lively chicks. They had never seen live chicks parcelled up and being forwarded by air. They just shook their heads and mumbled: "No doubt about those foreigners. Whatever next?"

When I told the students in Tarus that the chicks had arrived, they began to build their chicken pens in earnest. I helped with the transport of the bamboo, and the students built the pens according to the plan I gave them. The floor had to be at least one metre above ground level, spaced wide enough to let the droppings through, but nothing else. A box for the eggs, and troughs for feed and water. I had to stress that under no circumstances were they allowed to let the chickens run around on the

ground, as they could pick up diseases. So, unlike their village chickens, which foraged all day for themselves, these chickens needed to be fed and watered regularly. I hoped that by association this would also give them an incentive to study more regularly, which they might continue later on as parish ministers. Apart from this I hoped that they would earn for themselves some well-deserved pocket money.

I kept the little chicks in Oeba until they were old enough to go into the pens at Tarus. The great day came. First I had to pass each student's construction, then they received ten chicks each. I hoped that all were females, as ordered. The students were already looking forward to the day when they were going to lay eggs, and I can imagine there was some competition among them to see whose chickens would produce the first egg. The feed was mainly maize with some dried fish, all milled at Itja's agricultural school. I had no trouble selling their eggs, including to Lisa, as they were guaranteed fresh, and a good size.

When the egg business flourished, the other students probably wished that they had also participated in this scheme. But they also saw that there was quite a bit of work involved.

In October 1971 the Japanese Theologian Kosuke Koyama visited GMT and our school at Tarus. As we entered the school ground we came past the row of chicken pens. I had to explain to him what they were and that they belonged to the students. I then took him into our class, introduced him to the students, and he began his lecture: "What do you see when you see chickens?"

I translated for him, and one of the students replied: "When I see chickens I see eggs. I can sell them and make money."

"You are a good business man. We need this kind in our church. What about the others, what do you see?"

"When I see chickens I see God. God created chickens. He created them for us to eat."

"You are a good theologian and obviously a lover of fried chicken. But you still need to study the meaning of this great word 'creation'. And you?"

"When I see chickens I see the difference between man and animal. A chicken doesn't have understanding as I do. We are very superior to chickens."

"You are a good philosopher."

Then he continued telling the students that they had seen something more in chickens, it was not just a chicken, and rice was not just rice. Everything had something more. When they saw chickens, and saw only chickens, their life would be dry and uninteresting. People would not come to them as ministers and listen to the message of Jesus Christ if they were 'dry and uninteresting' persons. They were now studying theology, and theology required the mind to see something more in the ordinary things. They must be able to see the power of the Creator himself in a

chicken, even though a few hours later it might become 'fried chicken'. (K. Koyama, *Pilgrim or Tourist* p.5-6)

The students enjoyed the talk by Kosuke Koyama very much. He started with something familiar, and then led them to a new insight. He was able to make complex things simple, the mark of a great theologian.

Agabus, who also had chickens, told me when I visited him at his congregation, that he crossed the hens he had from me with a village rooster. The offspring were more resistant to diseases, and the eggs were still a fairly large size. I thought this was quite an exciting development, as I had to give an injection against Newcastle disease each year to all the chickens from Surabaya before the wet season. The ministers in the villages could not obtain the vaccine.



In May 1971 we expected about 40 young people from Australia to come to a work camp for the church. Peter had done all the preparatory work for it. The Australians were to mix with 40 young people from GMIT for three weeks and their main task was to erect three windmills in designated areas for village water supply and irrigation. Unfortunately, there were a couple of glitches, none due to the organisation. The problem was, as usual, the air lines. GARUDA was not flying to Kupang, and MERPATI had only a most irregular service. At first the whole party got stranded in Bali. On 4 May 1971 the first twenty arrived, including the leader Vern Prowse and Denis Towner. On 11 May some more arrived, on 15 another group, and on 17 May the last group arrived with GARUDA. This was GARUDA's first flight into Kupang since February. On 25 May the first group from Australia had to leave again. The material for the windmills had arrived so late that Bill Gresham, an engineer, had to stay back to finish the job. But we organised other jobs for the work party, such as a basket ball court each in Tarus and Oesapa, duck-breeding pens and runs in Tarus, and some repair work on some Synod buildings. A lot of lasting friendships developed, and Bill Gresham started courting Thien Lahallo while he was staying with us to finish the wind mills. We became good friends with them both.

One incident from the work party stands out in my memory. The group of 80, together with a village congregation, had a sing-along in the church. We had a bilingual song book published for that purpose, and the groups were learning each others folksongs. The Australians sang with gusto some Australian folk songs, such as 'click go the shears' or 'tie me kangaroo down, sport' and so on. When the turn came to learn some of the Indonesian folk songs, the minister came running to me and told me to stop the singing. He would not have them sing such secular songs inside his church! It took quite some explaining that they had been

singing secular songs before, albeit Australian, and I pleaded with him to allow the young people to share their culture in this way. Eventually he agreed, but still shaking his head.

Filus had recently passed his driving test, and he was of great help during the work camp. Unfortunately he was involved in an accident, which was not entirely his fault. He had to go through a creek in Tarus, as the bridge was being repaired, and his breaks were wet and slippery. When a car approached him from the opposite side, he stepped on the breaks but they didn't grip. To avoid a collision he drove the car into the ditch. Bill Gresham was his passenger, and both landed in hospital with minor injuries. Bill's head had left a dent in the steel frame of the car, which is probably still there. To my great regret, this was the end of Filus' driving career. As far as I know, he never had enough courage to drive again. Or was it because nobody entrusted their car to him?



Early in 1971 I had a clash with Chris BanoEt, the Principal at Tarus. I was thoroughly frustrated as he wouldn't call a meeting to discuss the curriculum. He wanted me to teach in addition to my New Testament subjects also Pastoral Theology for all classes, and for year four elementary Philosophy. I had asked him several times to call a meeting, and when nothing was done, I called a meeting myself. This brought about an immediate reaction, as it was unconstitutional. Chris immediately suspended me from teaching at Tarus. Then a meeting took place without me, where my suspension was ratified and all the other items I wanted discussed came also on the agenda and were decided upon. I was certainly the looser, and had the Moderator of Synod not intervened, I could have been thrown out of Indonesia. But Chris and I made up again. He forgave me, and I think from then on we had far more regular meetings. I was restored to the staff, and the year's work went ahead full steam. Later on I was appointed as Assistant Rector.

After the Oppelaars had gone on furlough in 1970, I became the treasurer of the school. The main funds for the running of Tarus came from our Presbyterian Church. Here too a lack of meetings caused me a lot of frustrations. Decisions were often made by Chris himself. We had talked about purchasing a motorbike for the school before, but nothing had been agreed. One day I was presented with a receipt for the purchase of a motorbike. I was somewhat flabbergasted, as our Board of Mission in Sydney had asked me to send them the price for a new motor bike. When I saw the receipt, however, it showed a price more than ten percent above the one I had been quoted.

My conscience would not allow me to ignore this. I felt that I had to report it to the Synod. This caused quite a stir. There were some who had

a personal grudge against Chris. They wanted the matter to be brought before the Synod executive. Most others, though, were angry with me for mishandling such a delicate matter. Chris and I were both called before the executive, with Peter Stephens also in attendance. We both had to tell our side of the story. Chris brought in all sorts of issues, such as the difference in salaries and my easy way with the students, which I thought had nothing to do with overcharging the school. But the meeting didn't see it my way. They accused me of not handling the incident in accordance with Indonesian custom. I should have gone to see Chris personally and everything would have been rectified. But instead I made Chris lose face before others which is a grave mistake. Moreover, because of the great economical gap that existed between fraternal workers and indigenous people, the incident needed to be seen in the light of this great disadvantage. It was also pointed out to me that the different values which existed between our two cultures have contributed to this 'misunderstanding'.

I was boiling inside, but Peter managed to calm me down. I could not see for the life of me, what they were talking about. Had I gone crazy? Was I still in the church, or in some secular organisation which had different values?

Then Chris was also told that he did wrong. So we were both wrong, and under God's forgiveness we should now shake hands and forget the whole incident. We shook hands, but thereafter I handed in my resignation as treasurer. The church leaders were quite unhappy about that. They wanted me to continue keeping a tab on Chris, but I felt this was hypocrisy, a double standard, and I couldn't continue as treasurer. Someone else had to be found.

It took me a long time to get over this episode, and longer still to be able to reflect on it and learn from it. It is very hard for us westerners to put ourselves into the skin of an Asian. To recognise and to appreciate an old culture and tradition really means to be able to think and feel like one of them. This episode, more than any other, perhaps because it caused me so much anguish and heart ache, was like another conversion experience. It taught me to be far more sensitive to people, particularly if their economic basis was so different from mine, and to avoid paternalism at any cost, as it is so hurtful.



The effect of years of paternalism by the foreign mission boards had been paralysing. It suddenly dawned on me that GMIT's attitude towards aid was really due to our insensitivity over all those years. Our church in Australia had always been telling GMIT what they were to do with funds sent from Australia. It may have been done in consultation, but the

ultimate power and decision was with the Australian church. In the present case, GMIT had agreed to the Self Help Project at Tarus, receiving a lump sum for making the rice fields viable in lieu of an annual scholarship. And yet, when the Theological Academy at Oesapa (ATK) was running, GMIT still expected our church to pay a scholarship. Had our church in Australia, and the Dutch church for that matter, made GMIT so dependent on our aid that they didn't look for resources within their own church? Or could it be that our church was unwilling to share its resources generously with GMIT? It may have been both, of course, but the negative effects of paternalism were there.

It was not easy, though, to immerse myself fully into Indonesian culture. I saw one aspect of it as very detrimental to the church, and I raised it with the leaders. GMIT seemed to be unable to deal with people in their ranks, who were either dishonest or incompetent and who caused a lot of harm, not only to the people it affected in the congregations, or the agencies of the church, but also to the image of the Christian church as a whole. It frequently happened that if the church became aware of such a person, he or she was either promoted out of their job, causing harm in their new positions, or more often GMIT would sweep it under the carpet and do nothing about it. In this case it became quite intolerable for people who suffered under that person. I saw it as culturally determined, because the people abusing their power often came from a particular suku or tribe, in which they or their family were royals or high up on the social scale, and no one from a different suku dared to intervene.

On reflection, the misuse of power was probably practised in GMIT as it is in our church in Australia. But it was still frustrating, for instance, when Peter and I had nominated an intelligent student from Tarus to go for further studies to the Theological Seminary in Jakarta (STT), that this was rejected outright by the executive of Synod. I felt that perhaps the student didn't have the backing of his suku, or some other standards were applied in his case, but for us it seemed clear that the church missed out on training a future leader, and we felt sorry also for the student, having given him false hopes.

It gradually dawned on me that precisely at the point of conflict and frustrations, the real missionary work is being done. The Gospel always brings an element of foreignness with it, and an exchange of personnel is the best way to bring out this otherness in the church. Otherwise a church could fall into the trap of tribalism or mono-culturalism, and thus lose its right to be called a church.



Trip to Pematang Siantar, on Sumatra

During the wet season of 1971 we felt rather cut off from the rest of the world. GARUDA had stopped flying to Kupang altogether, and MERPATI would come only on the very odd occasion. Mail was one of the casualties as a result of this. Sometimes we would receive a large batch of mail, all by sea. The Post Office in Jakarta had instructed the sorters to send our mail on at the first available opportunity to Kupang. If this was a ship, no matter when it would arrive in Kupang, all the mail would be put on that ship, if it was a plane we received the mail very quickly. Sometimes we would be without mail for four or five weeks. I don't know what we would have done without Radio Australia in those days. It was the only communication which kept us in touch with the rest of the world.

It was during this time that GMIT wanted me to join four other members of Synod to attend the Assembly of the Indonesian Council of Churches (DGI) in Pematang Siantar, Sumatera. Because of the unreliable air traffic, I decided to go by the Motor Vessel EGON. This was a coastal vessel, a front end loader, which could just land on the beach anywhere and lower it's front on the sand, from where it could be loaded. The crew of the EGON rented out their berths to passengers. Another minister from GMIT, Iban Laiskodat, was also on board the EGON with his family. He was to become the army chaplain in Bali. He hired one berth, so did I. He shared it with his wife, and I felt I had to offer to share mine with their little son, although it became rather cramped, and the cabin was stuffy and hot. I preferred to sleep on deck, on top of copra bags. However, I kept the berth for rainy days.

Our first stop was Maumere on Flores. I bought some fruit there, as I could see that food was going to be a problem for me. The ship had loaded many bags of copra and coconut oil, and a lot of new passengers. They all slept on deck. The next stop was Reo, at the western end of Flores. The weather was fine and I had plenty of time for reading and relaxing. The light house crew on Pulau Kelapa changed, the family had to serve on that island for six months. What a life, so isolated and far away from other people! The EGON went through scattered volcanic islands. They all had a cap of clouds around their peaks. It looked like fairy land.

We also stopped on the beach off the island of Komodo, where the famous komodo dragons, the largest of the monitor lizards, still live in the wild. Unfortunately, we couldn't see any from the ship. We were advised not to go on the island, as the komodos were liable to attack unsuspecting tourists. They could easily kill a person.

On Sunday Iban Laiskodat held a Protestant service in the front part of the ship. We had sailed past the islands of Sumbawa and Lombok, and could see in the distance a very high volcano emerge above the mist. This was Gunung Agung of Bali.

The rations on board the ship were rather spartan. Perhaps adequate for Indonesians but not for hungry Australians. A plate full of rice with a little bit of greens, occasionally a small fish, but plenty of sambal, the hot chilli paste, three times a day. By the time we arrived in Benoa, on Bali, my body was aching for some protein.

I spent the last night on deck again, on the copra bags. It was a beautiful, balmy night. The only disturbance was every now and again a jet plane taking off right above our ship from the international air port. The noise seemed to go right through my bones. It was a terrible experience. The EGON was anchored outside Benoa harbour, as it couldn't enter at low tide.

In Denpasar I went to the nearest restaurant and ordered a plate full of fish. I still remember how delicious that was. I also attended a Barong dance, the eternal conflict between good (Barong) and evil (Rangda). The Barong is a shaggy lion-like animal with bulging eyes and a snapping jaw, which takes two men to animate. The Rangda is queen of the witches, a terribly fanged hairy creature with magical powers. There is also a monkey in this dance to amuse the audience.

Next morning I went by bus to Singaraja, on the north coast of Bali and wanted to go from there on to Java. In the bus I met a minister from the Bali church, Rev. Gana. With typical Indonesian hospitality, he invited me to stay at his home. He drove me around town on the back of his motor bike. A delightful fellow.

The following day was a Hindu holiday in Bali. There were no buses going to Java and I had to go back to Denpasar, to catch a plane to Surabaya. I stayed a night with John Rossner, who showed me the sights of the second largest city of Indonesia.

I continued by night bus to Jogjakarta (Jogja for short), to the Protestant Seminary, called Duta Wacana. GMIT had two theology students there, Immanuel Bire and Ayub Ranoh. I stayed the night at the home of Dr. Widjapranawa, a lecturer at Duta Wacana. The two GMIT students and I went the following day sight seeing around Jogja, saw the Kraton (Sultan's palace), the museum, and later we went to see a film and to a restaurant for a good meal.

Next day we went on a tour to Borobudur. The name comes from Sanskrit, meaning 'Buddhist monastery on a high place'. Built in the 8th century a.d. it is one of the world's most famous temples made of grey sandstone. It rises in seven tiers to about 40 meters with a large stupa on top. The stone walls are carved with pictures from the Ramayana (the Sanskrit epic of Rama). It was being repaired at that time from a grant through the United Nations, but even with the scaffolding around, it was a most impressive monument.

From Borobudur I caught another bus to Salatiga, where I met Mes, who was enrolled at the Christian University Satia Wacana. His hair was cropped short from the orientation week, and he constantly wore a cap

with the university insignia. I thought this suited him, he looked really cute. It was like seeing our own son again after a long absence. I had missed him, and he was also a bit homesick for Kupang. He had organised for us both to stay with the van Emmericks, an Australian missionary couple teaching at the university.

As the following day was Easter, Mes got me up at 4 am. The students marched with torches through Salatiga, singing Easter hymns. Although there were a lot of Christians living in Salatiga, the majority were Muslims, and I thought about their feelings being woken up so early by the students, but they seemed to enjoy themselves. On Easter Monday we went on an excursion with some other Timorese students to Kopeng, an extinct volcano overlooking Salatiga. Mes also showed me around the university, and I met some of his lecturers. Broto Semedi, his theology lecturer, was most interesting. After talking with him for more than an hour, he wanted to invite me to give a series of lectures on Christology sometime in the future. I felt very honoured but I had to decline owing to my commitments at Tarus. But Broto insisted and suggested that I give twelve lectures in three weeks, rather concentrated, but better than nothing at all. Well, with such persuasive power I couldn't resist. I agreed, but at some time in the future.

From Salatiga I went by night train to Jakarta. At the Indonesian Council of Churches (DGI) I met the other delegates of GMIT. I was to stay at the DGI guest house, where I met Eugene Carson Blake at breakfast, the then General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, who was heading for Pematang Siantar too. A charter plane took us to Medan, and then by bus up the mountains to Pematang Siantar. We were accommodated on the campus of the Nommensen University.

The Assembly was a huge event. The opening took place in a sports stadium with thousands participating. The minister for Religious Affairs from Jakarta opened the Assembly. There was folk dancing and lots of choirs and speeches.

On the Sunday of the Assembly, all members of the assembly went on a picnic to the island of Samosir, in the middle of Lake Toba. This was obviously a tourist spot. Several ferries took us across. We were shown a traditional Batak house. Legend has it that all Bataks came from the island of Samosir. They are now spread all over northern Sumatra, and most of them are Christians. The first missionaries to this area were Lutherans from Germany before the first World War. They now make up the largest Protestant Church in Indonesia.

At the final session of the Assembly, all participants formed a chain by holding hands, and then shook hands with everybody. By then I was feeling homesick, and tried to go to Kupang on the quickest way. Sleeper from Jakarta to Surabaya, overnight again with John Rossner, and next morning to the airport by MERPATI, although they had told us the night before that they couldn't fly to Kupang, as the wind in Maumere was too

strong. It turned out that there was no 'wind' in Maumere. I was still perplexed about the attitude of the airline, although by then I should have known better. I'm learning very slowly! In Kupang the whole family was there to meet me. How precious, and how good it was to be home again.



In 1972 a new electricity generator was installed by the Council. This meant that from then on all of Kupang had electricity all day and all night. We could hardly cope with such fantastic luxury! We would be able to use a fan now for the very hot and sticky days and especially for my afternoon sleep! Rumour had it even that Television would come to Kupang. Would we then stop watching our monkey Simpson in the evenings, when he performed his antics for us? And what about my excuse that I couldn't work at night by lamp light? I could see that the pace of life would change drastically. But I needn't have worried. Television never made it to Kupang in our days.

From 10 June 1972 we took seven weeks' furlough to visit our families in Europe. As the Jungs were packing up to leave, having finished the building of the ATK (Theological Academy of Kupang), they asked us to take their eldest daughter Birgit with us and deliver her to her grandparents at Brussels. Well, one more child, having already four of our own to travel with, it was all the same to us. We took our time to get to Jakarta, stopping at Bali for some sightseeing, then to Surabaya, where we again enjoyed John Rossner's hospitality, and then to Salatiga to visit Mes. This was the first time we met Thres, his future wife. We went together to the Borobudur and to Solo, where we visited the Kraton and the Zoo. At the Zoo Mark and James must have annoyed an elephant. Whatever it was, the elephant took revenge by squirting them with some filthy water, much to their dismay and to our amusement. In Jakarta we had just one afternoon to hire a taxi who took us around most sights, including the newly erected giant Istiqlal mosque. From Jakarta we flew straight to Brussels, where we delivered Birgit safely to her grandparents, and made our way via Ostende to Dover by ferry, where we were met by Alison's parents. A wonderful family re-union. We stayed at Goldstone for five weeks. Our children especially loved the cool weather and the country life with their grandparents.

On our way back we stopped at Hannover, where we were picked up by Vater and Mutter. They had hired a V.W. Combivan, big enough for our large family. Tante Alice, Mutter's sister, let us stay in her house at Masherode, near Braunschweig for the fortnight of our visit. We made a few tours around the countryside, saw castles, and even visited Onkel Werner and Tante Margaret in Göttingen.

Our return journey took us via Frankfurt to Jakarta, where Alison and the children went straight to Kupang, while I caught a plane to Semarang, and by taxi to Salatiga. Mes didn't meet me as he thought I would arrive later. This visit was to fulfil my promise to Broto Semedi to give a series of 12 lectures on Christology.

Mes had managed to find the home of a lecturer, who had gone on leave, for us both, where we spent endless evenings in deep and very meaningful discussions. The students I was to teach were all from year three and four. I enjoyed these lectures very much. Since I had mentioned the German Theologian Bultmann several times, they promptly called me 'Bultmann'. The Timorese students in Salatiga, about 70 of them, organised themselves into a fraternity and went with me as their patron on a tour to Borobudur. My farewell was done in typical Javanese fashion, warm-heartedly and with lots of songs and jokes. Mes accompanied me to Surabaya by train, where we stayed a night with John Rossner, before Mes returned to Salatiga, and I to Kupang. It was hard to say good-bye to Mes. He had looked after me so well and we had become close friends. When would we see each other again?

It was wonderful to be re-united with the family in Kupang after three long weeks. I didn't realise how much I had missed them until we were together again.

At Tarus things had gone smoothly during my absence. School had not yet started again after their very long holidays. They didn't seem to have missed me. I began to prepare inwardly for our departure at the end of the year. I knew it would be difficult. Chris wanted me to come back again after our furlough, in spite of all our differences in the past. But unfortunately, this could not be. Alison and I had agreed before we left Australia, that we would not separate from our children. Two of our children were ready to go into high school. We felt that the standard for Primary School had been quite good in Kupang, but for high schools it was really inadequate. So we had to make the very hard decision, for me at least, to return to Australia for good.

I received a list of vacant parishes in Australia, but I felt I could not start negotiating with anyone before our return.

During September Agabus Rajadima and Tinus Saban invited me to visit them in Rote. I took the MAF plane to Baa, borrowed a motor bike from Logo Haba, another ex-student, and went first to Agabus at Busalangga. He had problems with some of his elders, who followed the 'Spirit Movement', the charismatic movement we had studied at SoE. They had already split his church. He had dissolved his Elders' Council, and wanted to replace them with only those who agreed with him. I had to point out that the Church is the only organisation that includes like and unlike, and that he really had to work hard to bring about unity, not uniformity. Poor Agabus really needed my prayers and support, and it was good for him to be able to share his problems openly with me. He was also in financial

trouble with some books he had ordered from GMIT's bookshop in Kupang. He sold them to people, although he knew that they couldn't pay him.

"How are you ever going to pay the bookshop, if you don't get the money from your members?"

"Perhaps I shouldn't sell them any books," he agreed. "But this is evangelism, they should read them."

"Maybe you could lend them your books?" I suggested.

Poor Agabus, it's so hard for a Timorese, or in his case a Sabunese, to say 'no' to people.

Tinus Saban's parish was at Oesuti in Bilba, at the other end of Rote, about 40 km over walking paths only. The motor bike was ideal for such a trip, but it was not easy to find the way. The path went up and down, sometimes over rocky ground, or through creeks, and sometimes through sand. I twice nearly came off, but did not hurt myself, as I was riding very slowly. It took me over two hours to get there. His problems were different from Agabus'.

He was firm on his salary demands, and had no financial problems. As he had several preaching places, he prepared the elders to help him preach. He set lectionary readings and sermon outlines for them as they were rather uneducated, he said, and wouldn't be much help without it.

Tinus was in a parish where the previous minister had been killed by one of the parishioners, who was still in jail. Apparently the conflict between the minister and elders had not been resolved peacefully, and tension had built up over some time until it eventually boiled over. The people were known for their violence, and Tinus was scared of them. I urged him not to shelve disagreements, but to work through them as they turned up. People are often violent because they feel hemmed in, but if he gave them the opportunity to talk things over, and plenty of time for that, he would find that they might come around to his way of thinking. Sometimes he should also give in to their demands, as authoritarian rule also contributed to violence.

In the evening there was a large gathering of people from his congregation. I took the opportunity to talk to them about the love of Christ, how he forgave people, and how we, as his followers, must do the same. I mentioned in passing that I had to give my usual lectures at Tarus the next morning, and that I would be leaving before sunrise for Baa and then by plane to Kupang airport, where Alison would pick me up and take me to Tarus, all within three hours. There was stunned silence.

"How can you do that?" they wanted to know. "It takes us at least two days to go to Kupang, if the wind and the tide is right."

The concept of having to rush to your next appointment, and the speed of motorbike and plane travelling was totally foreign to them, and completely incomprehensible. I pondered about it on my quick return, whether we have gained anything by rushing everywhere, and seldom

take the time to think things through or meditate.

Mes' family in Semau wanted to give us an official farewell. They insisted that we go there, although Mes himself was not present. We went by perahu motor (sailing boat with motor) and because of the headwind it took us over three hours. We arrived very late and our children were extremely tired. As we were sitting in the lounge room, we could hear some chickens cackling outside. I said to Alison: "They are catching the chickens for our evening meal."

And so it was, but our children couldn't wait. They went to sleep without a meal. Next day a big pesta or party had been arranged with the traditional Rotinese gongs and sasandu, a string instrument. With the help of a battery projector we showed some slides which we had taken at our first visit two years earlier, and then there was dancing and merry making. It went on and on, and I finally said that I had to go to bed. That didn't seem to bother anybody. Ibu (Mum) had given us her bed in the front room, which was right next to the gongs. The bed was far too short for me and with that constant noise I didn't sleep much that night.

Next morning I had to lead the service and preach the sermon. I had chosen the passage about Simon Magus in Acts 8:9-25, because until then, black magic was still being practiced and was a big problem to the church in Semau, in spite of all people being nominally Christians. They still believed that people got sick because of someone using magic against them. They prayed for that same type of magic to use against others, and thought that money could buy it. Such prayer was no good, I said, for it comes from an evil heart. They should listen to their minister, as with the help of the Spirit of Jesus, who had overcome all evil, magic had lost its power.



Our Family, just before leaving Kupang

In preparation for our move back to Australia, we had to pack our big luggage, which was to be shipped by sea. I had designed a beautiful teak desk, which was built by a local cabinetmaker. It was my pride and joy. I was determined that it should go with us back to Australia. I bought some more teak boards to build a crate around the desk. Also some of the children's desks and two bedside tables were crated to go with us. And all my books had to be packed! It was physically a difficult job, and the accumulated dust on the books over the last two years gave me a shocking hay fever. My nose was just pouring, and it was so sticky and hot that perspiration was streaming from my body. Not a pleasant memory. Then we had to get someone from customs to check the crates for any illegal goods, and only then could we nail everything down.

We had hoped that the shipping company would be able to put iron bands around our crates, but no luck. They didn't have any bands, and we couldn't buy any in the shops either. We had to resort to the usual Timorese way — improvise. Some shops still had some old iron bands around from their crates. We asked for those and also borrowed the tool to fasten them. Next day the shipping company sent a truck to pick up our luggage. The crate with my desk was so heavy, I had fears that they would not be able to heave it on the truck, but plenty of manpower did the trick. I followed the truck, as I feared it might not get to Tenau, but I needn't have worried. They loaded it on the ship without dropping it into the sea!

We were sitting outside in the cool of the evening, when we heard through Radio Australia, that Whitlam and the Australian Labor Party had won the election. Tears came into my eyes. Could it be true that we would come back to Australia under a Labor government, the first since my arrival in Australia? There was great rejoicing in our family.

At Tarus I had to set exams for year three and five and marked all the papers. I felt depressed, for apart from some, they were all below standard. Maybe it was because my questions were too difficult? But there was no time to ruminate on that. Farewells everywhere, and everyone wanted me to either preach the sermon or make a speech. I don't quite know how I managed to get through it all. Looking back now, I must have been walking in a haze. My heart was aching, for I had come to love the work and especially the people I worked with. At a staff meeting, one of those rare occasions, it was decided that six of the poorest students of year three would have to leave the school to become lay pastors, whilst the others were taken up into year four. Of year five, all students would graduate, the congregations for their placements were decided upon, and two of them, Zacharias Neno and Frans Balla, were to be given scholarships to continue their studies at Salatiga. Both of them were quite outstanding in their achievements, Zacha more in the field of literature and theology, Frans more for languages and Old and New Testament. This gave me great personal satisfaction, as particularly Frans had been like another son in our home.

The farewell at Tarus was set for our last evening in Indonesia. It also became a Christmas party for the school, where I preached my last sermon. A lovely dinner followed, and then it had to be, farewell to the students. How can one become so attached to so many people? I had to give each one of them a big hug, and deep down I had hoped that they would be able to see us off at the airport the following day. But none of them came.

We had sold most of our furniture beforehand. The next morning was like a big market day. People came to pick up their purchases, and small items from the house and kitchen were given away. Simpson, our monkey, would go back with Filus.

Chris had invited us all to his place for lunch, and to take us in our Toyota to the airport. There was, of course, a good reason for doing so, as he would get the car keys and the registration papers. He and I both had agreed that the car should continue to serve the theological school at Tarus, of which he was still the principal. Unfortunately, this had never been officially ratified by the Synod, because there were so few meetings.

At the airport there were hundreds of people seeing us off. I booked in our luggage with 20 kilos excess, which we had to pay for. I too stepped on the scales. I weighed 78 kilos, my lowest I can recall.

Then farewells again. When I saw the large number of ministers, all of whom had been my students at one stage, I lost it and sobbed like a child. Agabus just took me into his arms and supported me along the tarmac, right to the stairs of the plane. I couldn't think, my whole body and soul was bruised and aching.

We arrived in Darwin after dark. No one at customs bothered looking at our luggage, nor did I have to pay any excess baggage. A very warm welcome to Australia after three and a quarter years! I still felt too dazed to appreciate being back in Australia. The emotional farewell from all my friends in Timor had been too much.

A meal at a simple restaurant turned out to be a most exciting event for our family. Everyone ordered something we hadn't been able to have in Timor: salads. What simple joys. The plane to Sydney took off after midnight, and we arrived there about 7 am on 22 December 1972. Two taxis took us quickly to 24 Bent St. Lindfield. We found everything prepared for us, even a new Holden station wagon waiting for us in the garage. I felt better for the first time since we had left Timor. It was good to be home again.

The rainbow never sets

PART FIVE

MINISTRY IN AUSTRALIA

CHAPTER 25

Albion Park

Life in Indonesia, absorbing a different culture and working with people who had different values, had changed us. One doesn't know that until one comes back home. At All Saints missionary training college we had been prepared to receive a culture shock going into a different culture, and that had been very helpful. But no one had prepared us for the culture shock in reverse, when we arrived back in Australia. It hit us on the first day. While it was wonderful in one way to be back in our familiar surrounding in our old Lindfield home, the crass commercialism of the pre-Christmas season, even in the Lindfield shops, simply knocked us over. Had the world gone crazy, I thought? It depressed me no end.

Our home didn't look too tired from the wear and tear of several different tenants. Our belongings were still on the verandah where we had left them, and it was a pleasure to see our old familiar things again. Our children started to play with their long forgotten toys, and never thought about their tiredness.

Last minute shopping at Lindfield seemed so easy after Kupang. Our children were happy with small presents. We resolved to resist the buying frenzy for as long as we could. Willi Toisuta, the only person from Timor we had met before going there, and his wife Jenny, invited us to their place for a barbecue over the Christmas days. We also met an Indonesian couple there who were now living in Australia with their children. As we were sitting around the swimming pool, watching our children chasing each other and frolicking in the pool, someone commented: "It seems rather odd. Here are Indonesian children talking to each other in English, and Australian children, talking to each other in Indonesian."

We all laughed. It was true. Our children were used to speaking to each other in Indonesian, as they usually mixed with their Indonesian friends. It came quite natural to them, but being back in Australia, it sounded somewhat funny. Unfortunately, though, they soon forgot most of their Indonesian, except for George, who went back for a visit in 1977 and brushed up his language then.

We spent some relaxing weeks in our home. One day I went to our Board of Mission office. The General Secretary was no longer Jim Stuckey, but John Brown, who had just started in January. He had served as missionary in Korea for many years. He gave me a long time to get things

off my chest, the problems we'd had in Timor, how I thought aid was corrupting the church, about paternalism in mission generally, and about what I had learnt in Indonesia. I felt that here was a person who understood my concerns, someone who was himself looking for new ways for the Church to be in mission together in five continents. I had confidence in him and knew our church would be led well into the ever changing future.

Time went on and I still hadn't heard from any church who was looking for a minister. I began to wonder whether there was any congregation who wanted me? Or did I have to initiate something? Confused and bewildered I one day visited the Superintendent of the Home Mission office and said: "I'm still on the market!"

He obviously didn't like it and asked me to come back the next day.

"Meet the Moderator of the Illawarra Presbytery," he said, "He will tell you something about a vacant Parish."

"Do you know anything about the Congregation of South Illawarra?" he asked me.

"Not a clue. I don't even know where that is."

"It's south of Wollongong and includes Dapto, Albion Park and Oak Flats. Did you hear anything about it when you were in Indonesia?"

"We were very isolated there and mostly personal news and letters reached us, very little about the church. Why are you asking?"

"Well, that may even be an advantage. I won't tell you anything about it either. It's better you hear it first hand."

I looked blank, but left it at that. A meeting was arranged shortly afterwards with Douglas Parker, the minister of Thirroul, who looked after South Illawarra during the vacancy, together with David Banks, the Session Clerk. Then the church asked our family to come and meet the elders and members of the three preaching places in Dapto. After the meeting they showed us the manse on the Princes Highway in Albion Park Rail. It had actually been built as a manse with a separate door to the study, but the house itself was tiny for our family. An open plan lounge/dining room, three bedrooms, a bathroom and one toilet only. Alison and I looked at each other: "Well, we've put up with a lot of restrictions in Indonesia, what's stopping us here?"

We agreed, and a call was issued in no time. We moved into the manse on 19 April 1973 and the induction took place on 26 April. The call was signed by 87 confirmed members and one adherent. The wording of it sounded rather quaint to me:

We the undersigned Communicants of the Congregation of South Illawarra Presbyterian Church, being desirous of promoting the glory of God and the prosperity of His Church; being destitute of a fixed Pastor, and being satisfied by good information, or our own experience, of the soundness in the faith, piety, prudence, and other Ministerial

qualifications of you, the Reverend Dieter Tieman, Minister of the Gospel as well as of the suitableness to our edification of the gifts bestowed upon you by the Great Head of the Church, do hereby heartily invite, call, and entreat you to undertake the oversight of our souls, and to execute all the parts of the pastoral office among us; and upon your acceptance of this our call, and being inducted into the Charge by the Presbytery of Illawarra, we promise you all due respect, encouragement, and obedience in the Lord, and engage to contribute to your suitable maintenance as God may prosper us. In witness whereof we have hereunto subscribed our names, this first day of April 1973.

I had not realised that they were 'destitute' of a fixed pastor. In fact they had been vacant for a rather long time, more than two years in Dapto, and over a year in the other parts. No minister seemed to want to go there. Gradually their past history became known to me. Presbytery had made it into a new charge only in September the previous year. Originally, Dapto had formed a congregation with Unanderra, and Albion Park and Oak Flats had belonged to the Shellharbour congregation. During the turbulent years of the anti-Vietnam demonstrations of 1969/71 Malcolm Black was the minister in Dapto. He was actively involved in the demonstrations, I was told, and had even been jailed. It was mentioned that he neglected the congregation because of his political involvement and therefore, the Dapto congregation had become smaller and smaller until at the end only a handful of people attended the services. Malcolm Black's ministry was terminated by the Presbytery, and there had been a big row at Assembly, the state-wide governing body of the church, as he had appealed against the dismissal. All this had passed me by while we were in Indonesia. Maybe it was good that I had heard nothing about it beforehand.

Meanwhile, a retired minister, Jan Groenewegen from Kiama, had built up the congregation again almost to its former strength. The people had welcomed us warmly, and we felt accepted and I enjoyed my ministry there, the first in a congregation. I was fortunate that there were people who helped me settle in. Mrs. Vi Duncan from Dapto was one of the most supportive of all. She had remained a loyal member throughout the turmoil. She remarked that when our family was presented to the Congregation, myself in the lead, followed by Alison, George, Mark James and Margie last, standing there like organ pipes, she knew in her heart that we would be all right for South Illawarra. She would tell me about what was going on in Dapto, who needed a visit, or who might be in trouble. She was always a wealth of information, but never the gossiping type. She became an elder at the age of 79. Thanks to people like Mrs. Duncan I was able to find out how things were done in the church, without treading too much on people's sensitive corns.

Services on Sundays commenced at 8 am at Oak Flats, 9.30 at Dapto, and 11.15 at Albion Park. This did not allow me much time to talk to people after the services, which I regretted. Also, after three services, I felt quite exhausted, but as there were no evening services, it was not too bad. Our children went to Sunday School at Dapto, as this was the biggest centre where Sunday School was at the same time as the service. Also, having only one car, it would not have been possible any other way, as I was able to return the family home before going to my last service at Albion Park.

With the help of a young teacher we started a youth group at Dapto and encouraged the youth of the other centres to join. It ran reasonably successful for some time. I tried to teach scripture in schools. One day I lost my temper during a class in James' year. One boy was behaving particularly badly and I threw the blackboard wiper at him. Fortunately I missed, but it made me realise that I was not cut out for teaching scripture.

There were three hospitals which I had to visit when someone from our church was ill, Wollongong, Warilla and Kiama. Visiting people on our list was high on my priority. I felt, that this was the best way to get to know my people.

Many parishioners, especially in Dapto, came originally from Scotland. They found employment in the mines around Wollongong. After hearing Indonesian all day, my ear had trouble getting used to another 'foreign language'. It wasn't easy, but gradually I learnt.

Coming home from a conference on Small Groups, led by John Mallison, I was keen to implement one idea of his straight away. He suggested to invite every member of the congregations in groups of about 15 to 20 over a period of three weeks to the manse. It would help to get to know them better, and to open the manse to them would tell them that I was approachable. It would also help to establish a good relationship, not only between us and them, but also with each other. I asked each elder to help me with the people under their care, and while the time of these 'parties' was extremely hectic for all of us, it was well worth while. It created goodwill and co-operation amongst everyone.

When Eric Knight came to the Dapto Methodist church in 1974, he encouraged me to attend a Ministers' fraternal. It met once a week and we received a lot of support from it. We also organised seminars at Dapto High school, which was a much better way of teaching scripture than individual classes. I am sure the students also enjoyed it much more.

As my social conscience had been awakened during my student days, I became more and more politically aware. One day the Rev. Jan Groenewegen of Kiama invited me to join an Amnesty International group. As I had experienced Human Rights violations in the anti-aircraft unit and as a member of the Hitler Youth myself, I didn't need much persuasion to join. This was in November 1973. At first I was a fairly

irregular member, but gradually I became more involved and later I took on the convenership of the Kiama group for two years. This slow conversion towards justice in the world went hand in hand with my concern for peace, as I realised that there can be no peace without justice.

I also publicly supported John Kerrin, a local Labor candidate standing for election in the seat of Robertson, which caused some upheaval in the congregation, but I managed to weather the storm.

I soon realised that if I didn't take regular days off, I would never get any time off and I would work myself to the ground. So Mondays were reserved for my own enjoyment and relaxation. The best way to keep away from working was to go outside. There was a large space behind our back fence which looked like another building block. Part of it belonged to our block, the other part also belonged to the church which they wanted to sell. I marked the border where eventually a fence was erected. Our Mark found some weekend work on a chicken farm with Mr. Orange nearby. He gave him an obsolete chicken shed. This was erected along the fence line, with a run towards the side fence. On the opposite side was plenty of ground for a vegetable patch.

I hoed it all myself and found that this hard physical work was a good way of relaxation, apart from achieving some good crops from the garden. Lindsay Clifford, then Principal of Albion Park Primary school, entered into a friendly competition with me, over as to who was going to get the first ripe tomatoes. He usually won by a week or two, and I came first only once. But we always managed to get our first tomatoes before Christmas. Mrs. Duncan gave me some Loganberry plants, which also grew well in my garden. I grew enough vegetables to meet the family's need during the growing period. I loved my Mondays, but quite often my day off was filled by a funeral or some other emergencies. Alison was a wonderful help taking all calls on a Monday, sorting out true emergencies from those which could wait a day.



While we were still in Indonesia, Gerda had sold our parents' house at Collaroy. Our share had been put into a fixed term deposit with the bank. Unfortunately, by the time we returned from Indonesia, property prices had risen in Sydney to such an extent, that all we could buy with the money was a batchelor flat in North Sydney. It had a lovely view of the harbour, though, and it brought us a regular rent. As we didn't need the money we could make plans for the future. With four children growing up we wanted to have something more substantial to give them for the time when they wanted to launch out by themselves. I didn't trust banks and life insurance companies, as all they were interested in was making profits for themselves. We decided that property in Sydney would be the best

investment for them. If one of them would want to buy their own place, we would sell the flat and give them the money for a deposit on their home. There shouldn't be too much of a disparity between flats and homes, whether the market went up or down.

From then on we earmarked all the money we received from our investments as our children's in a separate trust account. Over the years this accumulated and we bought another flat near Kings Cross and when a flat became available in the same block at North Sydney on the sixth floor, we bought it, in George's name.



In 1973 the world was in the midst of an oil crisis. The oil producing Middle Eastern countries had finally realised their economic power, formed a cartell, the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and petrol prices began to rise rapidly. As we had just the one family car, which I also used on church business, our petrol bill was quite considerable. I worked out that we would pay less for petrol, if we bought a second car. So in August we became a two-car family, with a second hand Leyland Mini Minor, bought for the reasonable sum of \$1675. It made a big difference to the whole family. The large Holden Station Wagon was used by Alison on family business, and the Mini was used by me exclusively on church business. My calculations had been correct, at the end of each month our combined petrol bill was lower, as the Mini was very economical on fuel.

To our great joy, my parents came for another visit to us in December 1973. Gerda, who was married to David Prior since 1969, had bought in the meantime a terrace house in Paddington, and our parents were going to stay mainly with Gerda, as our house was too small. They came to us for Christmas, though, and when we went to Gerroa on a fortnight's holiday in a newly bought tent, they stayed at our place. We picked them up each day by car to spend as much time with our family as possible.

When we came back again, George and Mark agreed to sleep in our tent in the garden, so that their Oma and Opa could stay in their room. James moved together in with Margie. They stayed with us until after Vater's 80th birthday on 15 March 1974. A few days later we saw them off at Sydney airport. This was to be the last time we saw Vater, who died just over a year later after his 81st birthday. Whilst my parents stayed with us, Vater had news that his brother, Onkel Werner had died. This shocked him visibly, as it came unexpectedly, and Vater had been nearly four years older than he. Throughout their life, they had been very close.

Vater had been very popular amongst any people who came to know him. Utterly reliable and extremely honest, he stood straight and didn't bend with the wind. I had great admiration for him, and always wished to

emulate him in all my ways. He found it perhaps a little difficult to share his feelings, though, and was rather a pessimist. He didn't like changes, and it was he who didn't want to stay in Australia after their visit in 1964. In money matters he was very careful without being stingy. He had a very good business sense. Very early in our life he had taught us to value money and use it wisely. He would never gamble. He loved music and used to play the piano. Mixing socially, he was rather shy, but he could make good speeches. His heart has always been in agriculture, and there were not many people who knew more about it than he. I believe he never got over the loss of my brother Günter and the loss of our farm in Poland after the War, although he never talked about it. The end came after a relatively short period in hospital in Göttingen on 1 May 1975. I had always admired and loved him very much, and at the news of his death I acutely felt the distance which separated us. With him went the child in me which had always found comfort and re-assurance in his presence.



The Church Union issue became quite prominent in my life, beginning from September 1973, when all members in congregations in the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregational churches in Australia had to vote again, whether they wanted the three churches to become one church. The first vote taken in 1971, when we were in Indonesia, had been declared null and void. I had not been present at any of the debates in Presbytery nor at Assembly, but for me there was no doubt that church union was the way to go ahead. Since early in my church life I had been interested in the World Council of Churches and found it inspiring when people of all different races and denominations were able to sit together, discuss things, and worship together. In my opinion, division was not God's intention, and all divisions which do occur in the Christian church are due to human weakness, failure and error. Of course I didn't agree with many things in other churches, but that was not enough reason to maintain division. I believed in unity, not uniformity, in co-operation, not separation, and above all in tolerance towards others. Also, I was naive enough to believe, that disagreements in the church would be dealt with in a Christian way, without cheating, coercion and intrigue. I was to be very disappointed in this respect before long.

Our Presbytery had drawn up a voting register of 'Congregations' in July 1973 which showed our three preaching centres as one congregation. The word 'parish' was not used in the Presbyterian church, and I became confused with the term 'congregation', which sometimes described an actual congregation, other times a cluster of congregations.

When the voting results were passed on to Presbytery, we listed them separately, one for Dapto, where from 60 communicant members 48

voted, 38 for union, 10 against. Albion Park had 24 communicants, 16 voted for union, 8 against; and Oak Flats had also 24 communicants, 23 voted for union, 1 against. The total was 77 for union, 19 against.

My confusion became apparent, when our Congregation's return to Presbytery had a list attached of the eight members of Albion Park, who voted against union, as I thought this was required. Four years later, unfortunately, this mistake was used by the opponents of church union, to take away the property of Albion Park Presbyterian Church and hand it to the Continuing Presbyterian Church. I felt ever so guilty towards my people at that church to have failed them. They were the ultimate losers.

The events unfolded in the following way:

The Illawarra Presbytery issued a Church Union Vote Analysis for its meeting on 27 September 1973, showing South Illawarra with the above total figures only, thus indicating that it was a Uniting Congregation. These figures were also passed on to the State Assembly body in Sydney, without the list of Albion Park members who had voted against Union. From then on it was understood by all that South Illawarra would be going into union with all three preaching places.

Almost three and a half years later, on 24 February 1977, our Presbytery Elder and I received a Notice of Motion for Presbytery on 3 March 1977 from the Presbytery Clerk C.R. Thomas, completely without any prior warning. It read:

That the Presbytery:

a) note that within the Parish (sic) of South Illawarra, the congregation of Albion Park voted to remain in membership of the Presbyterian Church of Australia continuing to function on the Basis of Union (1901) following the inauguration of "The Uniting Church of Australia".

b) note that the Kirk Session of South Illawarra submitted the form "Session Return to Presbytery 1973" showing separate returns for each congregation within the charge, together with a list of members of Albion Park who have voted to remain in the Presbyterian Church.

c) note that the voting figures for the Parish of South Illawarra as a whole were:

* Question a. "Yes" 81; "No" 15. Question b. "Yes" 19; "No" 77, whilst for the congregation of Albion Park, within the Parish (sic) of South Illawarra, the figures were

* Question a. "Yes" 17; "No" 7. Question b. "Yes" 8; "No" 16. showing that one third of those who voted, voted to remain in membership of the Presbyterian Church.

d) declare under section 18 (c) in the schedule of the 1971 enabling acts of Parliament that the continuing congregation of Albion Park cannot be related to another continuing congregation.

e) request the Property Commission, through the state negotiators, to

provide the congregation of Albion Park with a Church and Manse in accordance with their intention as expressed in their voting figures.

This motion was passed by Presbytery on 3 March 1977 in spite of the fact that Max Fox and I, together with Ron Sharp and Syd Mawby, challenged the competency of this motion, as it contravened the decision of Presbytery on 26 July 1973, which stated that South Illawarra was one congregation.

The fateful list that contained the names of eight members of the Albion Park church who had voted to remain Presbyterian, is the sad evidence of legalism and fraud. One lady had never been to church since my induction in 1973 and she had moved into a nursing home, out of the area. One was married to a Methodist and was now worshipping in that church. One lady had never intended to vote for the continuing church, and she would not claim minority rights. Another lady was now happy to join the Uniting Church. So was a couple, who would not claim minority rights. This left two members who genuinely preferred to remain in the continuing Presbyterian church, one an elderly lady, another a farmer and Elder, and active member.

My deepest hurt was the fact that the opponents of church union had used deception as their weapon, instead of coming clean. Had the people who genuinely did not wish to join the Uniting Church made a request to keep one property within the Parish, I'm sure nobody would have objected. The members who voted for union would have gladly given them one. But to try to achieve this by devious means was quite contemptible.

There was no alternative for us but to give notice that we would complain to the General Assembly of NSW against this decision.

The NSW Assembly met in May 1977. The Moderator usually asked Presbyteries during the sessions to share afternoon tea with him on a rotating basis. This was as a rule a welcome diversion from often tedious business. On the day my complaint was to be heard, the Presbytery of Kuringai was invited for tea with the Moderator. However, no one knew when it was to come before the house. It was well known that the great majority of the Kuringai Presbytery were in favour of Union. The assistant Moderator called for the next item of business at the time when all the Kuringai members were at afternoon tea. My complaint was called for, and I and Max Fox made our speeches. When news filtered through to those at afternoon tea, that my complaint had come before the house, they all came rushing back to participate in the debate. Meanwhile the Moderator had also come back to again chair the meeting. He happened to be against union, and before the vote was taken he announced:

“May I remind the brethren who have come in during the debate that it is customary in the Presbyterian church to abstain from voting, if members have not heard the whole debate from the beginning.”

My heart sank. This would mean that we would certainly lose the complaint. Procedure and etiquette seemed to be more important than people in the Presbyterian church.

In my speech I had said:

As the minister of the special Charge of South Illawarra, I am speaking here not on my own behalf, but on behalf of the people who have called me to be their minister ... On the basis of a request by the Very Rev. Fred McKay, one of the Uniting negotiators, to state what minorities of members within the Presbytery who voted to remain Presbyterian were unable to be related in membership to a continuing congregation in the locality, Mr. Thomas gave notice of motion to do three things:

- 1) to make Presbytery believe that there was a continuing Congregation, namely Albion Park, within the Uniting charge of South Illawarra.
- 2) to declare that the whole “continuing congregation of Albion Park” cannot be related to another continuing congregation.
- 3) request the Property Commission to provide the congregation of Albion Park with a church and manse.

I challenged the competency of this motion because the premise was wrong: Albion Park was never seen as a separate congregation, as you can verify for yourselves in all statistics of the voting results ...

Also, Presbytery actually requested property for the Continuing Church, which they have no right to do, as such can only come from Members who in 1973 voted “Yes” to question B. Thus Presbytery infringed on the rights of individual members and of Session, who were not given any opportunity to make any comments to Presbytery on a matter that deeply concerned all members.

So in actual fact, instead of simply debating a reply to Mr. McKay’s letter at Presbytery, i.e. to ask Session to report to Presbytery as to whether the 8 people who voted “yes” to question B in Albion Park can be related to a continuing church, Presbytery decided to debate the motion as you have it before you ...

At a congregational meeting on 3 April, after Presbytery had passed this motion, not one person who had the right to claim minority rights, was willing to exercise such rights.

In passing the motion before you, Presbytery violated the rights of the people who have called me to be their minister, and on their behalf I am asking you, Moderator, that this Assembly may judge this case, so that justice may be done to all concerned.

Max Fox also spoke on our behalf. Then during the debate the list of names we had sent erroneously came up again, but it was clear from the voting, that the issue was not judged on its merit, but rather on party line,

i.e. those who were for Union, except members of the Kuringai Presbytery, voted for us, and those against Union voted against us.

When our complaint was dismissed, we appealed to the General Assembly of Australia, our highest court, but as I was not a member there, Max Fox was to bring it to the Assembly in June, but I don't think it was ever heard. Events overtook our concerns.

Very late on Saturday, 18 June 1977, when I had already gone to bed, Fred McKay phoned on behalf of the Negotiators to tell us that we had lost the Albion Park church building to the Continuing Presbyterian Church. I was devastated. It was my sad task to inform all three churches during the services next day of this decision. As we had an evening communion service in the Presbyterian Church in Albion Park, we made it a special occasion. 21 of those who had worshipped there for years, some of them since childhood, came for this closing service. It was an emotional occasion for most, this last time to worship in the place they loved, which held many fine memories for them. I admired their courage. Some picked up a few items which had sentimental value to them, and carried them out of the church over to the Methodist church, which from now on would be their new spiritual home.



Our relationship within the Illawarra Presbytery began to polarise early in 1975. I had been elected Interim Moderator for Thirroul, i.e. Presbytery contact person for a vacant congregation. I attended most of their selection committee meetings and encouraged them to find their own minister. Several people made enquiries and listened to services and eventually came up with the name of Max Fox as their choice. After due consultations and interviews the congregation decided to call Max Fox as their next minister. At Presbytery I was about to move that Max Fox's call be sustained, when Bob Thomas rose from his seat and moved that Max Fox's call not be sustained. I was dumbfounded and confused, and didn't have the experience to deal with such tactics. I fumbled and stuttered: "Hey, you can't do that."

But Presbytery just steamrolled me. It came to a vote, and Bob Thomas' motion was approved.

Then I came to my senses: "I'm the interim moderator of Thirroul. I've attended most of their meetings, and they genuinely want Max Fox as their next minister. What is so sinister about him? Why are you doing this to one of the congregations under your care?"

Their suggestion was to start 'de novo', all over again from scratch.

I was furious. A lot of time wasted, and bitter feelings stirred. After the meeting I heard that those who were anti Union didn't want Max Fox, because he was a good debater and strongly in favour of union. What a

disgrace, I thought, interfering in the business of a congregation without any good reason. This was sheer politics. I was disgusted.

The reaction to this decision of Presbytery was a unified congregation. With one or two exceptions, they all rallied behind Max Fox and saw to it that he was called the second time. When the call came before Presbytery this time, I was better prepared. There were also about 30 members of the Thirroul congregation present to reinforce their determination. When it came to the vote, we won by one vote, the thinnest of margins, but we won. From then on many issues were decided on party line, but our Uniting people always seemed to be in the minority. We began to call it "the bad presbytery".

Meanwhile, parallel structures for the Uniting Church had been established. As only few ministers from the Presbyterians were coming into Union, I was nominated to become the chairperson for the Uniting Presbytery. However, I felt that I was not experienced enough, also my concept of leadership may have clashed with that of my Methodist colleagues, so I declined.

By 1975 our Parish was well organised, and when church union was delayed until 1977, we decided with our three churches to unite all our services with the Methodist congregations at the beginning of 1976. Our finances, however, had to be kept separately. I had an excellent relationship with the Methodist minister, Eric Knight. We met at least once a week and decided all major activities together. Glenys Irons from Oak Flats became our secretary, and we issued a combined monthly newspaper for all, which Glenys called "METHO-PRES", a humorous allusion of the two joining denominations. After union it became "CROSS-FIRE", denoting parts of the Uniting Church emblem and hinting at a vigorous debate in the publication. The co-operation with the Methodists was such a wonderful contrast to the bickering of the Presbyterians, that my sanity was quickly restored.

Through John Brown's recommendation I was elected to the state Commission of Ecumenical Mission and Relations (COEMAR), the successor of the old Board of Mission. I usually caught the train for Sydney to attend the meetings. Later this led to my membership of BOEMAR, the national mission board of our church, and when the Joint Board of Mission was established before Church Union, I was also elected to this. The time I spent under John Brown's general secretaryship was a most inspiring and rewarding one. Many policy changes were initiated during that period, particularly with regard to Aboriginal ministry. I became a friend of Charles Harris, who was also a member on the board and who later became the first president of the Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.



Mes Beeh, who was still studying at Salatiga, Indonesia, during 1974, indicated that before he could finish his degree, he had to do some practical work in a church for at least six months. Remembering from my days in Indonesia that mission is always both ways and that we would benefit greatly from Mes' presence in our church, I suggested to our Session that he become my assistant with no extra cost to the church. They were quite happy about that. He was to come from Darwin just before Christmas 1974. Fortunately he was delayed, otherwise he might have flown into cyclone Tracy. Darwin was closed after Tracy, and he had to come via Bali, arriving on 8 February 1975.

It was a wonderful re-union, and he settled back into our family as if he had never been away. We put up his bed in the office, which was rather crammed, but there was no other space. He accompanied me on all church business, and gradually I was able to send him off visiting on his own. In his outgoing way he quickly won our people's hearts. They readily accepted and loved him. Don Erickson, the minister then in Griffith, invited him for a couple of weeks there, also John Cleghorn, who knew him from Kupang, asked him to come to his parish at Bairnsdale, Gippsland, Victoria.

Mes experienced first hand my troubles at Presbytery, and he was very supportive. I don't know what I would have done without him in those difficult days. We had long talks together, and he showed great maturity for his age. It was so wonderful to be able to reap some benefit from our contribution to his education. Mes left us again shortly before Christmas 1975.

Indonesia–Australia mission group

When Mes was still with us, John Brown, the General Secretary of BOEMAR, commented that his presence in the Australian church illustrated that mission was both ways, in our case not just from Australia to Indonesia, but also in reverse. He was the Timor church's missionary to our church. Following this both Mes and I were invited to a conference sponsored by the Australian Council of Churches (ACC) to build closer relations between Australian and Indonesian churches. From both sides there was a 'desire to share one another's burdens in a way that was different from the traditional one way mission movement'. At this conference, five persons came specifically for this meeting from Indonesia, while four participants were already working in Australia, like Mes. 12 participants came from various Australian churches.

A pre-conference visit to Wollongong for some Indonesian delegates was organised by me. They saw the work the Good Neighbour Council did with migrants, and our Session Clerk David Banks showed them his high

school where most pupils were migrants themselves. Then we had a talk with the minister of the Port Kembla Methodist church about their programme with migrants, and finally we visited the steel works and had an interview with their Superintendent of the Employee Services and their Welfare Officer. Other delegates had visited Newcastle and various church programmes.

During the discussions it emerged that churches both in Indonesia and Australia had been looking for a more liberating style of co-operation, more church to church, rather than mission board to mission field. Both wanted to share the decision making process. Until then it was a one-way traffic. An Indonesian church would ask an Australian church for help, and the Australian church responded with some aid or personnel, always making decisions according to their priorities. By this concept of mission, all power lay in the hands of the Australian church, and the Indonesian church was left powerless. This had been my concern when I was still in Indonesia, and I felt greatly privileged to be part of and through my own experience be able to contribute to these discussions.

We also looked at our two different family structures, which had wide ramifications on our attitudes towards one another. The strong family relationships in Indonesia resulted in an acceptance of responsibility for all members of the extended group, providing social security and a style of life which placed high value on adjustment to other points of view and at arriving at consensus. This developed into a general attitude which was seeking to see the nation as one family engaged in one task. The emphasis was therefore, on "both and".

In contrast, Australian society was dominated by the nuclear family, individualism and individual possessiveness with a strong tendency to be more interested in "either/or" than "both and" issues.

The view of the family appeared to influence also the view taken of 'development'. The word in Indonesian is *pembangunan* or building/constructing, with the emphasis on the goal, that which will benefit all, whereas in Australia the stress is on the release of growing power, serving more the individual. The very strong competitiveness of Australian society seemed to be producing an attitude of ruthlessness toward other people and their opinions. Rather than discuss seriously different ideas, Australians tend to 'rubbish' others. This was seen by Indonesians as arrogant, paternalistic and domineering. They also saw that the churches didn't challenge the values of the acquisitive society, nor did they help people to face and make changes.

Our discussions led to a recommendation that the mission of the church in both countries would be greatly enhanced by the establishment of an Indonesia Australia Mission Group (IAMG). It was hoped that this group would become a forum where decisions were taken jointly.

These were high ideals, but the structure of the Australian churches didn't allow for a smooth development of this concept. It might have

taken a long time to get all ACC churches to agree to such innovations. Meanwhile, John Brown pressed for a first meeting in June 1975 with at least two members from the Uniting churches, Jill Perkins and myself. John wrote in a letter to me:

Our reasons for asking you to participate are as follows:

- a) You have lived in both Indonesia and Australia and understand both countries.
- b) You speak Indonesian.
- c) You participated in the initial consultation here in Sydney three weeks ago and therefore have some understanding of what has already taken place.
- d) You are a sensitive person who express your own views confidently but at the same time are very sensitive to what other participants are saying and also to what they are not saying, but what is implied or lies hidden behind the words they say.
- e) You are from a congregation which has participated in a programme where an Indonesian has been brought to Australia to work with an Australian group.

I was pleased about John's comments, but not too happy to go, if he was not going to be one of the delegates. I said so to him, as I felt that he had the vision for this new relationship and we needed him there. He did come with us to Bali from 18 to 20 June 1975, and our meeting endorsed the concept of a joint decision making about resources of people and funds.

Then we fell into the trap of the old pattern again when a list of programme priorities was established. None of us realised at the time that by drawing up such a list we maintained the old relationship of mission flowing from affluent Australia to the needy Indonesia. We had wanted to get away from this and establish mutual programmes, where both the DGI and the ACC would be involved. John wrote to us that he was disappointed with the result. There were, however, some programmes mentioned, although not included in the list, which contained aspects of mutual mission. These were: the establishment of a Cultural Communication Centre at Salatiga for Australian language students or missionaries going to Bali or Irian Jaya, and Indonesian missionaries coming to serve Aboriginal communities in Australia. Also, the Indonesian Student Christian Movement (ISCM) had some good Leadership Training programmes implemented, from which many present church and secular leaders had graduated. It was suggested that the Australian SCM could learn from the ISCM and run a similar programme for future Australian leaders.

A second meeting was proposed for 1976 in Darwin, but it never came to it. Events on an international level forced a change of plans. Indonesia

had invaded East Timor just at the time when the World Council of Churches (WCC) was meeting in Nairobi in December 1975. John Brown, an Australian delegate, was instrumental in drafting a motion for a plenary session of the WCC, condemning the Indonesian invasion. He was accused by the Indonesian delegates that he never discussed this motion with them, but it stands to reason, that since they were totally opposed to such a move, they were unwilling to discuss any motion that had anything to do with it. When it was passed by the assembly, the Indonesians feared that they would have to answer for it to their authorities. Fortunately, this did not happen, but they were most upset about this whole business. For a long time relationships between the DGI and the ACC were frozen.

After much pleading they finally agreed to meet again. A delegation of ten from each council met in Jakarta from 7 to 11 December 1976. I was one of the Australian delegates.

The event at Nairobi came first on the agenda, with a very frank discussion. It became clear to me, that we were dealing here with an example of our different culture, in particular, our different family structure, as we had discovered at Sydney. The nuclear family in Australia, emphasising the individual and seeing issues “either/or”, and the extended family in Indonesia with its emphasis on the well-being of all, seeing issues “both and”. Our discussion revealed a totally different approach we had towards the State and justice in general. While we didn’t resolve any problems, we became more aware of each others points of view, and that was already very helpful. To deepen our understanding of one another, it was suggested, that at our next IAMG meeting, the subject of justice ought to be discussed, as seen from our two different perspectives. The meeting also agreed to send an Indonesian minister to the ACC in Sydney, mainly to minister to Indonesians living there.

In March 1977 the ACC passed a resolution to appoint a person on a part time basis as secretary for an Indonesia Desk. I was approached to fill this position. I was offered \$1040 p.a. to work one day a week at the ACC office. This offer was discussed with the Elders. I would pay my remuneration into the church account, as I was not working on that day for the parish. This was accepted, and in July 1977 I started as Secretary of the Indonesia Desk at the ACC office in Sydney. I travelled by train each Wednesday, consulted with Jean Skuse, the General Secretary, also with John Brown occasionally.

The work consisted mainly of following up resolutions of the IAMG meetings, and planning for future meetings. My first major job was to prepare for the arrival of Musa and Mary Sinulingga with their three children from Sumatra. They were the first Indonesian missionaries to Australia, ministering mainly to Indonesian protestants living in Sydney. An Indonesian speaking congregation had to be established. We tried at first to keep it under the ACC, not linked to any specific denomination,

but unfortunately this didn't work out, due to internal conflict. Eventually the congregation and the Sinulinggas came under the administration of the Uniting Church.

One day an Indonesian young man came to the office looking very distressed. He told me that he had arrived in Australia on a visitor's visa, which had expired months ago, and he was now on the run from the Immigration Department. He hadn't told anybody, as he feared he would be deported, but he felt confident enough to tell me all about it. He had wanted to study in Australia, but ran out of money. Willem was then working illegally. His boss knew that he was an illegal migrant and so exploited him to the hilt. He received only just enough money to live on, but had to work hard for long hours without ever receiving any overtime payment. He was really in a fix, as he couldn't even tell his friends at church for fear of being reported to the authorities. He had reached the end of his tether, both physically and emotionally. Could I help him?

I listened carefully to him for a long time, but what could I do? I felt so sorry for him. Whatever possible action came to my mind had to be discarded again as he was an illegal migrant without any rights. A terrible position to be in. At least I offered him to see me each Wednesday if he liked. He came regularly for a few weeks to pour out his heart. Then I heard an announcement over the news, that the minister of Immigration had issued an amnesty for all illegal migrants in Australia. At our next interview Willem was beaming. He had already heard the news, but was sceptical. Could he trust the authorities? Or was it a ruse to catch people like him? I was able to reassure him that this was a genuine amnesty, and helped him to make the appropriate applications. In no time he received a resident permit, and with that a new lease of life.

The next meeting of the IAMG was in Sydney from 23 to 28 July 1978 with seven participants from each council. I did all the preparations and organisation for it. Justice Robert McGarvie from Melbourne was our keynote speaker on Justice in Australia, and Dr. Simatupang brought to us the Indonesian perspective. This meeting helped to consolidate our work together, but no new initiatives were taken.

From 17 to 21 March 1980 the fourth IAMG meeting took place in Jakarta, with nine participants from each council of churches.

The fifth and final IAMG meeting was held at Morpeth near Newcastle from 19 to 24 October 1981, which I organised again, with the help of Martin Chittleborough from the ACC. Dick Wootton spoke to us on the effects of Trans National Companies (TNC) on both Australia and Indonesia. It was acknowledged that in some instances the TNC's had grown to such an extent, that they have become more powerful than sovereign states. Apart from the benefit they brought to countries, there were also many negative sides. The churches had the prophetic role to warn governments and people of these and they had to stress that people take priority over profits.

In countries where workers were exploited, it actually hindered development. A concerned Indonesian commented: "How can a Christian, with his freezer full of goodies, pray genuinely: 'give us this day our daily bread'?" There was no easy answer to questions like that.

The Indonesian delegates also wanted to know what the ACC had done about the disgraceful situation of our Aborigines. We were able to report that the ACC had invited the WCC to send a fact-finding team to Australia, which received widespread publicity. The team exposed some of the terrible conditions our Aborigines endured on the fringes of our white society, and the bias against them which they frequently experienced at the hands of Australian law enforcement agencies.

After this meeting I resigned as the secretary of the Indonesia Desk. I had moved to Canberra in the meantime and to my regret it was just not possible to make the time. I had enjoyed the work tremendously. It had given me a rare insight into ecumenical work on an international scale, and I found it most rewarding.

Mission tour

John Brown wanted me to be the tour leader of the first Mission Tour sponsored by the Commission For World Mission (CFWM) from 8 to 29 September 1979, visiting Bali, Java, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore. I was in two minds about it. Alison could not come with me, and it went against my grain to be staying in luxury hotels. The tour cost \$2295 per person. On the other hand it gave me an opportunity to see other places where our church was working with indigenous churches, without having to pay anything. Our Council of Elders encouraged me to go, and so I went.

We stayed the first night at Dhyana Pura, which belongs to the Bali Church. From there we visited a Christian village in Blimbingsari, meeting church people, and talking to the locals. We were pleasantly surprised to see some church buildings that looked like a Hindu temple. They had used the typical Balinese style to say to the world, 'look, here is a Balinese Christian church, not a foreign religious building'.

Some parts of the church service had also been indigenised. At the dedication of the offering, for instance, a couple of Balinese girls took the offering and dedicated it in their lovely traditional dance.

The minister of the Blimbingsari church told us about an Australian missionary worker who had died from an accidental fall while helping to build the church. He was charged with negligence, being responsible for the building project, and in his defence he said: "If your Honour wish to put me to jail for this offence, I urge you to do so. It will give me a unique opportunity to preach the Gospel to the unconverted every day. I would

only ask for one thing, don't send me to jail for just one year, make it two. The longer I spend in jail the more people I will be able to reach."

He was declared 'not guilty'.

After the usual tourist sights in Java we also made a very short visit to Salatiga, the Christian University where I had been a guest lecturer in 1972. Willi Toisuta was now the principal, and it was good to meet him again. In Jakarta I met Frans Balla, a former student of mine, who was now lecturing at the Theological Seminary there.

We met two people from the DGI (Indonesian Council of Churches) who spoke about some of their programmes, which our group found interesting.

In Kuala Lumpur we met someone from the Australian High Commission who was dealing with Indochinese refugees. In Penang we stayed at a hotel right next to a beautiful beach. I was able to talk to the locals, as Malaysian is almost the same as Indonesian. After our morning devotions in the hotel, I gave a bible to a waiter who asked for it. He was a Muslim and had never seen a bible. The ethnic Malays are not allowed, by law, to become Christians. The churches there are mainly ethnic Chinese. I noticed also that since Malaysia is a Muslim State, they do not allow Christians to use the word Allah for God, as it is customary in Indonesia. This is to emphasise a profound difference between the two religions.

In Bangkok we met leaders of the Church of Christ in Thailand, who briefed us on the Church's social programme. The following day we stopped at a Christian centre in Klong Toey, renowned as one of the worst slums in the world, where it is easier to get drugs than rice. At Bangkok's rubbish dump, in Onn Nuch, the smell was so strong that some of our ladies refused to get off the bus. The church had a medical clinic there, and had started a school, now taken over by the government. At that time they provided a pre-school and occupational training for young adults. A bee-hive of activity, and I thought a very worth-while ministry of the church.

In the country side I noticed sugar palms being tapped just like people in Rote used to do. Then it struck me, that the features of the Thais were very similar to the Rotinese. Could there be a link? I will probably never know.

A train journey over the 'bridge on the river Kwai' was interesting. In the train we met some students from Bangkok who practiced their English on us. Chiang Mai, in the north of Thailand, had a thriving christian community. Thailand's major theological seminary was in town. What impressed us most was the way they expressed the gospel through traditional Thai dancing and in the Thai way of life.

The church also ran a large hospital for the treatment of leprosy patients, 300 inpatients and 2000 outpatients. It was built on an island of the river Ping, where once a white elephant had died. As this spelt bad luck for the local buddhist community, the church was given the whole

island by the Prince of Chiang Mai. The church had tried to buy some land before to build such a place, but couldn't get the permission. This was a most impressive institution. I bought a small carved wooden cross there and a red preaching scarf, all made by the rehabilitated patients. I also met a former student from All Saints College, who was still working there at the hospital. She had married a local, and was a fine witness for the church.

A short bus trip took us to a jungle post where elephants were working in the teak forest. The 'Mahouts' were skilfully directing the elephants by sitting on their heads and tickling them behind their ears with their feet.

At one evening meal we were able to taste local Thai food. I had ordered the hot variety. The waiter came back, quite concerned that I would not be able to eat it. I said: "It's quite all right. I'm used to it."

The waiters and our group were all watching me as I relished eating this truly hot dish. They seemed to be surprised to see a westerner liking their hot food.

An overnight stay at the Oriental Hotel in Bangkok was most embarrassing. Some local church leaders, who were to give us a talk about their work, apologised when they arrived late, as they couldn't find parking facilities. They had never been at that hotel. All rooms had wonderful views of the Chao Pya river, of course, but what had this luxury hotel to do with mission? I thought it represented the very opposite of what we were trying to do in the church. I included these comments later on in my report to John Brown.

Singapore was a pure tourist affair except that Tosh Arai from the Christian Conference of Asia gave us a talk on their work on human rights in Asia, and their social concern. A year or so after our meeting I heard that the CCA had been thrown out of Singapore because of their strong commitment in this area.

A member of our tour happened to be John Cleghorn's mother. He had visited us in Kupang in 1969/70 while studying for the ministry. She wrote this comment on the tour:

"It was an unforgettable experience, where we met the people, saw spectacular sights, and studied the church in action. The mission of the church came alive as we travelled through Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore. No ordinary tourist would travel through wonderful tropical scenery to Blimbingsari, a tiny christian village in Bali, or experience such an interesting personalised tour of the Leprosy Hospital in Chiang Mai. Our group of 16, from three states in Australia, was escorted by the Rev. Dieter Tieman, who for three years was a missionary in Indonesia. He was our guide, interpreter, and mentor in every sense of the words, looking after our material, physical and spiritual needs at all times. Who has ever experienced a complete church service conducted on a bus at 7 am, which we did last Sunday,

as we drove to the River Kwai? The collection was donated to the Church of Christ in Thailand.”

On our last day in Singapore, I held the morning devotions in the hotel’s dining room. We ended our tour with a communion service, complete with bread rolls and grape juice in wine glasses. The waiters and other guests looked on. To many of our group this became more meaningful than celebrating communion in a church. There was a strong element of witnessing in our act.

My overall assessment of this mission tour had been quite favourable. I commented to the CFWM, pointing out the positive aspects. But I also had to make some critical comments:

“The tour cost is excessive. With actual costs available now, Crossways (the church’s travel agent) should be able to budget a tour well below the \$2000 mark. If this would mean accommodation at less exclusive hotels, all the better. The group enjoyed the stay at Dhyana Pura, and I submit that there are similar places in Jogjakarta, Jakarta, Bangkok and Chiang Mai. The fact that we stayed at first-class hotels throughout (except Dhyana Pura), personal contact with local people was made more difficult, it looks bad from the local church’s point of view if Australians, interested in mission, stay at these hotels (it betrays almost an insincere attitude) and it made it more difficult to have group interaction, reflection and devotions.”

I also suggested to cut out Kuala Lumpur and perhaps Singapore, but then I had been to Singapore before and shopping does not interest me.

Annual holidays

As we had bought a tent and our experimental camping in 1974 in Geroa had been successful, we decided to take our holidays in summer somewhere at a beach. The Arloms, our friends from Canberra, usually went in their caravan to Batehaven, so we followed them in 1975 there. The caretaker of the caravan park, however, didn’t like tent people, and since we had put our tent about a meter across an invisible line, where caravans were to go, he made us shift the tent. We were all furious and vowed not to come there again. But it was good to be together with John and Margaret and their two children, Steve and Jane. John had a boat and he took us fishing on the river occasionally.

From May till July 1975 Alison went to England and Germany with Margie, and left us “boys”, including Mes, back at Albion Park Rail.

In the August school holidays we went for a week to Canberra, staying

at the Arloms. From there we took the whole family skiing. George and Mark quite enjoyed it, but Mes, James and Margie got too cold. On our way back we discovered that the water in the radiator had frozen and we had problems with the cooling system. Eventually, though, it thawed and we were able to drive back.

The summer holidays of 1976 and 1977 were spent at North Haven Caravan Park near Laurieton. I took my whole quota of four weeks holidays at once, as I hadn't been able to relax enough after only two weeks. By then we were experienced campers. Instead of putting all our luggage on the roof rack of the station wagon, we had a tow bar fixed and borrowed a trailer. There was usually something flapping in the wind on the trailer, but I don't think we ever lost anything. Before the tent was up I was usually tense and bad tempered, and those who helped putting it up copped it (usually our boys).

"Dad is in his holiday starting mood," they would comment graciously, but once it was all up, the stove and chairs and trunk with provisions in their usual place, I sat on my reclining chair and announced: "Now my holidays have started."

From then on there was peace. We developed a roster system for duties which everyone found very good. One person was on duty all day. He/she had to buy milk, bread etc, lay table for breakfast, lunch and dinner, cook (usually dinner only) and wash up and sweep the tent. On that day the person on duty would be the slave of all, but for the other five days it was absolutely heaven, sheer luxury, like in a five star hotel. There was only one condition. No one was allowed to criticise the cook. They could cook what they liked, and prepare dinner as late or as early as they liked. It was surprising how our meals improved with more experience. But when Mum cooked, everyone agreed that it was still the best.

The family knew my weakness for apple pies. One day we bought one for each of us. When Alison bit into hers, it turned out to be a meatpie (with cream). She went back to the shop and had it replaced with a proper one, the meat pie with cream, however, was fed to Timmy, Gerda's dog she had given us on loan, main course and sweets all in one, were the comments. One night we were all disturbed by Timmy. He was always tied to the centre pole, but that night someone had tied him to the stool. He must have heard or seen a possum near the tent, for he was rushing out, dragging the stool behind him with a tremendous clatter and banging.

After we returned from our evening walk one day. Alison exclaimed: "Oh, it's raining. I can feel it on my face!"

We looked at each other, but none of us had felt any rain. Then a possum came down from the tree, and we all began to laugh heartily. Alison was not amused.

One day we went fishing. The boys had got a fishing rod each for Christmas, and I felt it my duty to show them how to cast a line.

"That's how you do it," I said, and with the swinging of the body I

slipped on the wet rock and fell into the water, getting wet all over. I can still hear the laughter of our boys today!

These were some of our experiences which were told and re-told and formed a treasure of common memories. This gave quality to our time together, and looking back on our summer holidays, our children feel that they have been the highlights of their growing-up period.

Our nephew Ian Chandler from England was with us on some of those holidays, and we always enjoyed his company. It meant that we all had a little less space on the ground, but nobody minded.

In 1977, after Gerda's wedding with Fawzy Mansour from Cairo, Mutter came with her to visit us at camp in Laurieton. She said that she would have preferred to camp with us, but of course there was not enough room, so they stayed at a motel instead.

Mark had been invited by one of his friends to a camping ground near Milton called Lake Conjola. He came back most enthusiastic about this place and urged us to go there for our next holidays. It had a lake open to the sea, and an open beach. It seemed ideal. However, it was so popular, that we couldn't get a booking for the first two weeks of our holidays. We decided to go first to the mountains and then booked Lake Conjola Camping Ground for the last two weeks in January.

We left early in January 1978 to camp by lake Eucumbene, quite a change from the sea-side. It was very cold and windy there. We toured a cave, went on top of Mt.Kosciuszko and on the last day we were driven away by a sudden storm. Everyone had to hold on to the tent poles, otherwise the wind would have blown the tent away. We decided then that we didn't like it in the mountains.

After spending a night at a motel, we went to the coast to Lake Conjola, which was fabulous, just how we imagined it to be. Rather squashed in between other tents, but one got used to it. Facilities were nearby, quite adequate, and the lake was great. The only problem was that before our fortnight was over it started raining and the wind blew the tidal water back into the lake and it began to rise. The tent between us and the lake was already under water, when we decided to pack up and leave for home. Before we left, though, we were able to book the same site for next year for all of the four weeks holidays.

From then on we went to Lake Conjola each year until and including 1986. We weathered quite a few storms in the tent, but the camping ground was sheltered from the southerlies by a big grown-over sand dune. George would often help tightening the ropes at night when it blew up, but James didn't like the wind. He would put his pillow over his head. Only once did we have to take our mattress/sleeping bags up, because of floods, but it was only for a few hours. For the last three years we had the site right next to the lake which was marvellous. We would often sit in our chairs, turn the kerosene lamp off and watch the moon light glistening over the lake. In the evening we could see kangaroos grazing on the other

side of the lake, a picture of peace and tranquillity. I was often reminded of Sapowice, where I grew up. I remembered sitting on our terrace there in the evenings, overlooking our lake in moon light. There was a resemblance.

On moonless evenings, and the tide going out, we went prawning with our kerosene lamp. When they were running we just scooped the prawns with our nets from the surface, and one night they were so plentiful, that we filled half a bucket full. Unfortunately, though, and our children will never forgive me for that, I had spilled some kerosene into the bucket when filling the lamp. I didn't realise that and we put the prawns into that bucket. When we had boiled the prawns and were looking forward to a sumptuous meal, they were all tainted with kerosene taste. We had to throw them all away.

Our children still tease me about another thing. When Alison and I were tired, I just said: "We are all tired now, let's go to bed."

They would have preferred to play games all through the night, but such is life in a tent together. One night I was rudely awakened by a pull on my toe. I sat up with a start only to see the figure of Mark standing at the foot of our mattress: "Dad, you're snoring!" I was not amused.

One day we were swimming in the open sea, Mark and James on their boogie boards, I just paddling along. Suddenly Mark shouted: "Shark!"

I had just seen the tip of a fin quite close to me. My heart sank. Then I saw two fins appearing between me and Mark, and instantly I realised that these were dolphins, and not sharks.

"You stupid boy!" I shouted, "giving me such a fright." He just laughed. Boys will be boys!

Alison and I went often for a long walk along the beach to the rocks or beyond, almost to Mollymook. It was so relaxing to walk on the firm sand together, with a cool sea breeze and the waves and just sand dunes, often with not a soul in sight.



Before George turned 17, I gave him a number of driving lessons around our home and in Albion Park in my Mini. He picked it up quickly and soon after his 17th birthday he passed the driving test in Kiama. Mark also learnt from me, so did James. We practiced on the lake side of the railway, a quiet spot, and on the new estate at Albion Park, particularly for hill starts. After George could drive, he helped Alison and me considerably by taking the others to and from sports events and to school functions, apart from the fact that he didn't have to be taken anywhere himself.

George finished school in Oak Flats with the leaving certificate at the end of 1977. He had been working very hard, and Alison and I thought it would be good for him to take a year off studying and travel around. We

paid him the return flight to England, with first stop Germany at his Oma's place in Göttingen. He attended the Goethe Institute there to build up on his school German. He became quite fluent. On a trip to Poland, Mutter showed George Sapowice, our old home. After that he stayed with Granny and Grandpa Chandler in Goldstone, where he helped on the farm. He also made some trips around England and Scotland and Europe. Before he returned home, he also went to visit Gerda and Fawzy, who were living then in Dakar, Senegal, West Africa. In 1979 he started at Sydney University to study Political Economies. He boarded at Wesley College the first couple of years, and the last two years he shared a house in Newtown.

Mark completed his leaving certificate in 1979. He also took a year off, but didn't want to follow his brother's footsteps. He went on the Indian Pacific train to Perth and then hitch-hiked around the south/western tip of W.A. and across the Nullarbor. Then he went to New Zealand for an extended skiing holiday.

James had his leaving certificate exams in 1980 in Oak Flats Highschool and Margaret finished Primary School at Albion Park Rail the same year.

Alison's Mother visited us from England for the first time in April 1979, soon after her Father had died. She stayed with us until November, when Mutter visited us over Christmas and the summer holidays. She came with us to Lake Conjola, where she stayed in our caravan, which our boys used as their room at Albion Park Rail. She stayed with us till March 1980.



Wedding of Jeff and Andrea

Jeff Robinson, my friend from Sydney Uni, with whom I did Indonesian together, married in December 1979. His bride was Andrea Marshman and they married in West Wylong. They asked me to officiate. I felt very honoured, and Alison and I both enjoyed their lovely country wedding.

Duncan Speirs had been a member of our Dapto Congregation. His father had been a minister in the Presbyterian church, and since the baptism of his children I had quite a lot to do with him and Gai. He came often for a chat, with some theological questions, and he found our talks useful. After we had left Albion Park, he candidated for the ministry, which pleased me very much.

Eric Knight and I had agreed to give the parish about 18 months notice, that we both would be leaving at the end of 1980. Settlements procedures in those days were fairly new and we had our name put on the Synod list. I was looking for another parish in a country town with a good high school, as Margaret would still be with us.

In April 1980 I received enquiries, which eventually led to a call from a Canberra Parish, North Belconnen & Wattle Park. It wasn't quite 'country' as I had indicated, but we were very happy to go there, particularly with regards to James and Margaret, as there were excellent schools in Melba, the centre of the parish, and James had his eye on the Australian National University, where he wanted to study science.



The work at Albion Park, Dapto and Oak Flats had been very rewarding. The three centres had integrated well with the Methodists, and Eric and I had a vision for the church to eventually split into two separate parishes. Dapto was strong enough to stand on its own feet, and the southern end would grow and could also become an independent parish. To break the link of 'former' Presbyterians and 'former' Methodists, we had to go at the same time, otherwise the incoming minister might just continue to work with the people from the former denominations, as we continued to do.

Eric and I had worked well together. We were among the few where team ministry worked. None of us acted or was assigned as 'senior' minister, and we discussed and planned frequently together. We had good support from Glennys Irons, our secretary, and many other faithful members. The Methodist circuit and the Presbyterian Parish had the same boundaries.

Leadership within the parish was not easy to come by, and when we asked for volunteers, people would usually say: "I can't do that!" There were some who did not co-operate with the ministers, but I guess that is typical for all parishes. We tried to bring people's own agendas in line with those of the parish as a whole. Only in some cases this was not possible,

The rainbow never sets

and then there was trouble. But I cannot emphasise enough, how wonderful the people were, and leaving them at a time when we could see some results of our ministry, became very hard.

Canberra — Melba

On 20 January 1981 we arrived at 18 Alpen Street, Melba ACT, coming straight from Lake Conjola, our favourite holiday camping ground. There was a notice on the door to phone Doug or Jean Morgan, who would have the key. The house looked friendly and welcoming, with our furniture already arranged as we would have done it. It was a wonderful surprise. Soon we discovered, though, that about one third of our things were still missing. They had been left at Albion Park, because the removalist couldn't fit them all into his van. The Morgan family invited our whole family for dinner that night. It was such a warm welcome, we were quite overcome. It meant a great deal to us.

The church had a Parish Centre in Chinner Crescent, Melba. This had been the minister's residence, but our predecessor stayed at his own home. When the church knew that we were coming, they had asked us, whether we wanted to live there or in another house. We left the decision to them, for it depended whether they wanted to keep a Parish Centre or not.

They decided to buy a new house, especially for us, and when they showed us the house in Alpen Street, we were very happy indeed with their choice. It had a lovely view and was sunny and friendly. It had only three bedrooms, but next to the lounge was another room which could be converted either into another bedroom or as the study. At first I had it as my study, later I moved the study to the Parish Centre. Mark discovered a room under the house, entrance from the garage, which had a floor, but no window, only vents. He adopted this as his room, put up some of our Timor cloths as room dividers, and with his bed and some shelves it made a nice little den for him.

After our first service in Melba I had another pleasant surprise, when a young couple came to see me, saying: "We'll do it?"

"Do what?" I asked, somewhat puzzled.

"The news sheet, of course. You asked for someone to do it, well, we'll do it."

I had asked in the news sheet for a volunteer to do it on a weekly basis, but when someone actually came forward, I was stumped. I had so often asked for help for this or that in the past, but no one ever volunteered. Was this going to be the pattern here? Actually, it was. It turned out that this church had a lot of talent and people were willing to take over jobs

and leadership.

There was, for instance, Sunday school. We had a roster for two full teams, six weeks on and six weeks off, and because of that, it was so much easier to get more teachers.

The congregation of North Belconnen met in Melba Primary school hall on Sundays at 9.30 am. They had started meeting together with the Anglicans, but since about two years before we came they had formed two separate congregations. Sunday School, however, was still done together. Each fifth Sunday was also a combined service. Brian Carter, the Anglican Minister, was most co-operative, and we organised quite a few combined activities. People knew each other well, and there existed a friendly spirit all round.

I also enjoyed a good ministers' fraternal in North Belconnen, which was very supportive: Brian Carter from the Anglican Church, Ken Shakespeare from the Baptists and a minister from the Church and Missionary Alliance. We met once a week and could share with one another any problems we would encounter.

Near the Parish Centre was Baringa Gardens, a Housing Commission project with 410 government flat units for the underprivileged. A number of our members worked on a voluntary basis with people from there. We also had an op-shop with second hand clothing, a wonderful opportunity for people just to drop in, in a non-threatening environment. We often found that we were able to help them.

As we had such a variety of talents at Melba, I encouraged a lot of lay people to preach or take the whole service. I made myself available to help with the preparations, and over the time a good number of them took the opportunity to preach. John Braakman became a candidate for the ministry from Melba, and others took some courses at the ELM Centre (Education for Lay Ministry) to eventually become fully qualified lay preachers.

We had a couple of visits from the Indonesian Congregation in Sydney, which I helped to establish, led by their ministers Musa and Mary Sinulingga. They were billeted with our members, and both hosts and visitors enjoyed the cultural exchange.

One of the hardest part of my ministry was to watch some of our best members die at an early age. There was Doug Morgan, an elder and chairman of the Council of Elders, from whom I had so much support when settling in and who had been like a brother to me. He died of cancer in 1982. Then another elder, Bob Johnston, died suddenly of a heart attack. Another elder in Wattle Park, June Southwell, also died of the same cancer Doug Morgan had. A cot death was another such tragic event, where I felt completely helpless and was reminded that my only strength came from above.

A young man, still in his teens, died of brain haemorrhage. He had been in church only a couple of days before. His parents were given the option

of donating his organs. They kept him on a respirator and to look at him, no one would have known that he was brain dead. I worked with the parents through the issues which enabled them to make a choice. They agreed to donate all his organs, and his mother said: "this would have been what he wanted."

Another time of great stress was when Steven Crean from our congregation got lost skiing in the Snowy Mountains. I saw his wife frequently as the days dragged on with futile searches. Eventually a memorial service was held at St. Andrew's Presbyterian church, as his father, Frank, had been treasurer in Gough Whitlam's government and was well known in Canberra. There were over 500 at the memorial service. Steven's body was eventually found late in spring, when the snow had melted. It is assumed that he got caught in a blizzard and lost his bearing. His ashes were scattered at another brief ceremony at the Scout camp near Green Hills in the ACT.

When Thien Gresham became ill with cancer, I was greatly distressed. Bill and Thien had met in Kupang at the work camp we had organised. He had stayed with us during his courting time. They had become good friends of ours, and since we had moved to Canberra, we visited each other regularly. Her long suffering was carried heroically by both. Bill asked me to conduct the funeral, which I gladly did for a good friend.

I also found counselling couples with marital problems very stressful. Unfortunately, we had more of them than the average in Canberra. I would spend sometimes with the couples hours, even late into the night. My aim was to help them see that their relationship had broken down, and that it was useless to apportion blame on just one partner. If there was no hope of mending the relationship, I tried to help them separate with dignity and without recriminations. But most of the time I didn't succeed, and they ended up in court fighting each other and often losing half of their assets in the process. One partner usually left the church while the other found support from our members.

There were three hospitals in Canberra. Woden was quite far away and so I would not call in there unless I knew of someone being a patient there who came from our Parish. But I regularly went once a week to Calvary and Canberra to visit members from our Parish. Later I was appointed the Uniting Church chaplain for Calvary Hospital, visiting all U.C. patients once a week. This would take me usually a whole morning or more, but it was very rewarding to bring comfort to people in distress and to show them that God loved them.

On the few occasions when I had no meeting to attend at night, I would make appointments to see couples for pre-marriage counselling or for a baptism interview. The latter was always a good opportunity to lay before the young couple their responsibilities as parents for the spiritual welfare of their child. I told them that as physical hunger comes to all of us, so does spiritual hunger. If that is not satisfied through the church of

their choice, the child may get caught up in some of those queer sects, which may lead them away from the parents and from the true faith. I always stressed God's love for them, as shown in giving them a child, and challenged them to respond accordingly. I hoped that our talks gave them enough material to take their vows seriously.

With most evenings gone, visiting our members other than for emergencies, was practically impossible. I considered visiting very important and most of it was done in the late mornings or afternoons. To meet people on their own ground gave me a much better insight of who my parishioners were and what their needs were.

An alternative of meeting people in their own homes were our dinner groups in Melba. They were a wonderful way of getting closer to people. They were arranged in such a way that four couples would meet four times a year at each other's places. The rotating groups would change each time, giving participants the opportunity to meet a larger number of people over dinner. There was plenty of time to talk leisurely with the dinner guests and I was able to meet them on a deeper level than any casual meeting at church would allow. It created many friendships and provided a good atmosphere among the members of the congregation. In a town where the extended family was generally missing, it also gave people a good night out.

We had a refugee committee in Melba which sponsored refugees from Cambodia. The first to come was Nay Sin, a widow with her two daughters. A third daughter was sponsored with her husband Leng Diep and their two children. It was wonderful to see how our members went out of their way to help them settle into the Baringa Gardens flats, taking them to government and health authorities, furnishing their flats, and helping them financially. They would attend church services regularly, although initially they would not understand much English. Later I found a Cambodian who had been in Australia for much longer and who was able to interpret for them, especially at bible studies. But their English improved quickly.

Soon more members of the family were sponsored. They were stranded for a time at a refugee camp in Thailand. Thai authorities would not give them refugee status, and we made several unsuccessful attempts to get them to Australia. Our own government was also slow to respond. The Thai government considered them 'illegal refugees', as they had arrived in the camp after a certain date. One of Leng's aunt was there with her two children. The daughter hid during a raid by the Thai border police in an empty drum, where she died of suffocation due to the extreme heat. This story was published in the Canberra Times and eventually the whole large family, including the aunt with her surviving son, arrived in Canberra. Our church helped them all to settle in their new homes.

It was very rewarding to see most of them establish themselves fairly quickly, moving out of the government flats into their own homes, and

buying their own cars. Leng eventually started his own business importing computers, and he provided employment for a number of his own family.

Ann Freeman was one of our organists in Melba. She started a choir for juniors, calling it 'Joy Singers', who enlivened our morning services wonderfully. It was a joy indeed, not only for them to sing, but for the congregation to listen. She also produced several musicals, such as "Sir Oliver's Song", "Kid's Praise", and "It's cool in the Furnace". The cast included young and old and through rehearsals and performances the bond within the congregation was strengthened. Ann fulfilled a most valuable ministry to us all through her musical talents.

Neville Ross became a minister in Association, as he lived in Melba and worked in the public service. He was of great help to me, accepting to do services when I was either away, or just to give me a break occasionally. One day his wife Esme, proposed to start an aged care group at our Parish Centre. After a few hiccups she got a group going, fully supported by members from our church. They met at first once a fortnight, later on a weekly basis. Our members would drive frail or aged people to the centre for a programme, giving the carers a break and providing them with activities and fellowship. This group started in October 1982 and was still going strong when we left in 1990. Later on a dementia group was added.

Bill Rosier, and later Michael Brown, were also ministers in Association. I really appreciated their assistance, as I was able to draw on their strength in times of crisis, and they were always willing to help with funerals, weddings and communion services, especially when I was away for the CFWM or the ACC. Bill also led a very successful parish camp at Greenhills Conference Centre near Canberra.

Twice a year our Melba congregation organised a camp at Burrill Pines beach, near Ulladulla. There were eight self contained units and ample camping ground. On our first trip we stayed in a unit, but the beds were so uncomfortable and it was so noisy, that we preferred to sleep in our tent. People arrived in the afternoon of Fridays, and stayed till Sundays after lunch. There was no heavy programme, just relaxing and being with the others from the church. The kids always loved it, especially Saturday nights concert. There was great participation by all, and it brought people closer together.

Early one morning we were all roused when it was still dark, to look at Hailey's Comet. We could see it quite clearly over the sea.

One Saturday, on Alison's and my wedding anniversary, we left our tent to have dinner at Ulladulla. When we came back, the months long drought had truly 'broken'. Our tent was sopping wet and had nearly blown away, had it not been for some kind hands, who rescued it. We slept that night in one of the units with another family. It was still raining, when we left on Sunday afternoon. Luckily, the soil was so sandy, that no one got bogged, but the return trip to Canberra was horrible.

During the holiday period in January we had often arranged an outdoor service together with the East Belconnen congregation. This took place under the trees of the Lake Ginninderra park. Their minister Rev. Graeme Watkins and I usually shared in leading the services, and we had some wonderful services in God's beautiful part of the world there.

With my background at the ACC and involvement with Indonesia, I received an invitation to join the Church's Commission on International Affairs (CCIA). I met very interesting people through this Commission and I enjoyed very much the work we were doing.

One area in which I became actively involved in through them was working for peace. There already existed a Christians for Peace group in Canberra, and eventually enough people in our Melba church were interested to form a peace group within the church. This caused initially 'un-peace'. Some members insisted that the church had nothing to do with a peace group, nor should there be a peace group as part of the congregation's activity. It required some persuasion and some good theological points in sermons to help the congregation as a whole to see that "Blessed are the peace makers" is actually a Christian response to the gospel. One family felt they had to leave our church because of that, but there was nothing we could do about it.

Another way to promote peace opened up for us, when I met a young Danish man on the train from Sydney one day. We got talking together and he mentioned that he was travelling with a SERVAS recommendation. I had never heard of this organisation. It was started after the war in Denmark, to promote peace and understanding among peoples of all nations. The SERVAS accredited traveller would buy a book with addresses of hosts in a particular country, and then contact people on that list, asking for free hospitality for two nights. If it suited the host, the traveller would stay there, and share something of him or herself, of their country and learn something of the host country. I was very taken by the philosophy behind this organisation and invited the Danish man to visit us too. After his visit we became members of SERVAS as hosts and we had, over the years, many interesting guests from overseas staying with us. I could see how getting to know people from other countries was a wonderful way to promote peace in the world.

We often talk about conversion in church, but most of the time this is being used in a very narrow sense. Throughout my life I have experienced that I needed to be converted in many areas, one of them was to use inclusive language. I attended a seminar initiated by members of the CCIA group, where the presenter addressed us all as: "dear women", he talked about "her attitude", or quoted from the Bible "will a woman gain anything if she gains the whole world but loses her life?"

I had the acute feeling that I, as a man, was being excluded. That, of course, was the whole point of the exercise, and it hit me like a sledge hammer. If women feel like this when they are addressed as "men", and are

talked about as “him” or “his”, then I didn’t want to be part of that. From then on I was very conscious of inclusive language. I have to thank Nancy Shelly, a Quaker member of the CCIA, for allowing me to experience this conversion. We became good friends and shared many CCIA tasks together.

When Bishop Desmond Tutu from South Africa came to Australia in 1984, I was as a member of the CCIA invited to a speech at St.Mark’s. I was able to bring Alison and her mother along for this memorable occasion. Bishop Tutu’s humour and humility left a lasting impression on me. He exuded the optimism of faith. In those days the situation in South Africa was still rather bleak. He didn’t even have South African Citizenship and was travelling on a travel document, not a passport. Quoting from Ephesians 1:19, he said:

“How great is God’s power at work in us who believe. It is the same as the mighty strength which he used when he raised Christ from death.’ That strength,” he said, “is in us who believe and with that strength we will win in South Africa!”

And as he said that he finished with that famous, infectious giggle. What prophetic words!

To meet people of this calibre gave me renewed strength and encouragement. I often needed a spiritual re-charge, as I found my ministry at Canberra very draining. Our monthly Theological Table Talks at the Forrest Uniting Church were another way of re-charging. Ministers in the UC and lay people were invited to present papers on various topics, which were then discussed. I presented a major paper on the church in China after returning from our Long Service Leave. These discussions were usually very interesting and stimulating. They also provided some fellowship with other ministers in the area.

We were told at College that sermon preparations should be started ideally on Tuesdays, but I rarely got around to it before Saturday mornings. By then I felt the pressure really on as I had to finish the work by the evening. I would often come home by 4 or 5 pm, quite drained, but at least everything was prepared. I never left it till Sunday mornings, or as some ministers said, they let ‘the Holy Spirit prompt them’ during the service, when they had no time to prepare.

As my workload mounted, some of my administrative work got left behind. The Elders suggested to take on a typist and hand over completely the weekly newsletter. At first we relied on several volunteers, but the work became too much and eventually it was decided to employ Helen Watson on a part time basis. She and her family had newly transferred their membership to our congregation, when she started as our secretary in 1986. She edited our news letter and took on other jobs, which I found most helpful. She continued in that position until well after I left Canberra.

Canberra — Wattle Park

The second congregation of the Parish was Wattle Park. It was just across the border in NSW. It had a history of nearly one hundred years of continuous Methodist services. Its members were descendants of the pioneers who had settled in that area in the 1860s and 1870s. They were farmers, who grazed good quality merino sheep on their properties.

Some other members had moved on to small properties more recently, which were too small to support a family. They were called hobby farmers, as they either had a job in Canberra or were retired. Others came from the North Belconnen area, who preferred to worship in a church building.

The church building of Wattle Park was made of blue granite, mixed with orange and cream stones, to give it a beautiful appearance. It could seat, at a squeeze, about 100 people. It was a well-maintained property.

My induction took place in this church on 31 January 1981. As Wattle Park had always been linked with a larger church, first with Queanbeyan, and later with one of the Canberra churches, this was the first induction ever held there.

The congregation was more conservative than Melba, but its stability and solidity complemented it well. I had good support from its members, and it was very rewarding to serve them. I sometimes said, that Melba gave me the stimulus for innovations and experiments, whereas Wattle Park kept me sane.

The service started on Sundays at 11.15 am. It only took me about five or six minutes to get there from Melba.

The two congregations of Melba and Wattle Park had been joined into one parish just before we came to Canberra. They were so different in approach, activities and interests, that I didn't feel the church would benefit by merging all the committees. That meant that we had two Councils of Elders and two property committees with the appropriate meetings and activities. My diary became so full, that there was hardly an evening left where I could stay at home.

The top priority for Wattle Park became the preparation for the Centenary celebration of the church in 1982. A book was printed for this occasion, entitled "Wattle Park 1882 – 1982", written by Ron Winch in co-operation with Beryl Southwell. 1000 copies were printed and it sold out within about a year.

The Centenary on 6 and 7 March 1982 was a wonderful celebration. A former minister, Ron Howe, led the service. There were about 200 people in attendance, 100 in the church and an overflow of 100 in the adjacent hall. A huge tent had been erected for some of the activities. Invitations had been sent out to all people who had some connection with the church. Even my former colleague of South Illawarra, Eric and Verna Knight, came for the occasion, as Eric's father had been a minister of the Queanbeyan circuit from 1945 to 1949. Eric had fond memories of this church as a child, coming there by horse and buggy from Queanbeyan. Through this centenary I learnt quite a lot of the local history, but even more so from Ron Winch's book.

When I came to Wattle Park, Neil and Elinor McDonald were looking after a youth group, which met Friday nights. Their main activity was table tennis. The young people were a good mix of youth from both congregations. They formed a fellowship together, meeting at the hall, and eventually we started an evening service at Wattle Park with that group, which was quite successful for a time.

Long and lasting friendships, and quite a few marriages, resulted from this group. Our James, for instance, went with two of the boys from the church on a cycling holiday around Tasmania, and with another for an extended tour around the world. Later on a bush band was formed with members from this group, which called itself STRINGY BARK, which was quite successful for a number of years.

The fellowship group eventually disbanded, but a couple of years later a new group started. When the National Christian Youth Convention was scheduled for Perth in 1989, this group raised enough money to send six of them to Perth, which was quite an achievement.

As dinner groups were very successful in Melba, we tried to do the same at Wattle Park, but it didn't work. We had to think of a different format, and eventually we decided to have 'dinner discussions'. Members of the congregation would meet as one group in each others' homes, sharing food, and having a discussion on a set topic afterwards. These discussions were stimulating and informative and we had a lot of fun together. It was not as intimate as the smaller groups at Melba, but it was less threatening for shy people, and provided an opportunity to invite outsiders or newcomers.

An adult daughter of an elder at Wattle Park had intellectual disabilities. Her name was Jill. She usually liked to come to church, but she found it hard to remain seated, especially during the sermon. She would sometimes walk to the front and tried to talk to me, or to someone else in the congregation. Her mother was uneasy about Jill, and really didn't like bringing her to church. We discussed Jill at an elders' meeting and we unanimously decided that she was part of our church. If anything, she was enriching the congregation with her presence. It made everybody feel better after we had discussed this openly. God had a place for everyone in

his kingdom, and no one was to be excluded.

The Wattle Park elders organised a monthly prayer breakfast. This developed into a support group for them, where we could share and learn new things from one another.

The annual Harvest Festivals of Wattle Park were quite famous in the district. They went back to the early days of the church, when the services were held in the afternoon, and the produce was sold the following Monday. In my days it was held on the third Sunday in March. First came a very special church service, often led by an invited preacher. The church was usually filled to capacity. Then the ladies served a most delicious meal in the hall, and then the produce was sold. Apart from the usual garden vegetables, fruit, jams and cakes, one could also buy a live sheep, still on a trailer. Whenever Mother was with us she had great fun in selecting and buying a sheep for us. This was later slaughtered by the farmer and we filled our freezer with the meat.

Wattle Park reflected more a typical country congregation, where it was more difficult to get lay participation at services. People seemed to prefer to sit in their pews and let me do the whole service. But gradually this was also changed. I was particularly pleased when one member of the youth group showed gifts for preaching. David Southwell had come through Sunday School at Wattle Park and was studying at the ANU. When I suggested that he preach a sermon he was at first doubtful. But then I told him that I would help him in the preparations, and he accepted. I think he got as much out of it as the congregation, who were thrilled to have one of their own young people standing in the pulpit. He also enjoyed it very much, for he preached several times while I was there.

As Melba had no church building, Wattle Park church was widely used for weddings. Sometimes people just liked the look of the church and asked me to marry them there. This was often a good opportunity to remind them of what the church stood for and pre-wedding interviews took up quite some time, as I conducted about 45 weddings during my time in Canberra and each couple had between three and four sessions with me. Initially I used a self-designed questionnaire as the basis for our discussions. After I had taken part in a training course for a pre-marriage counselling course called 'PREPARE' I used their questionnaire, which had about 120 statements to which couples had to reply whether they agreed or disagreed. The forms were then fed through a computer, and the print-out results became then the basis for our discussions.

A few couples became aware that they were not yet ready to commit themselves to each other, and the wedding plans were cancelled. I considered this successful counselling. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, I will never know how many of the marriages I conducted were successful, and how many have failed, but I can only say that I considered the pre-wedding counselling of utmost importance.

Canberra Presbytery had appointed me to a settlements committee at

the Yass parish when it became vacant. It had annoyed me in the past how ministers in that position have often influenced the parish to appoint a minister of their choice, rather than one which the parish wanted, regardless of whether he or she was suitable. I didn't want to make the same mistake. I let the settlements committee work at their own pace and make their own enquiries from the list of available ministers. It was sheer coincidence that the committee decided to call Rev. David Sloan. After they had made their decision I told them that I knew him from my student days and that I thought they had made an excellent choice. I realised then that it could have been easy for an outside observer to jump to the conclusion, that I too had influenced the selection committee in their choice, when in fact I hadn't.

Family and holidays

When we moved to Canberra, George had been at Sydney University for two years. He graduated in 1984 with a Bachelor of Economics (hon.) degree. Towards the end of his studies he lived for some time in our old house in Lindfield, which he shared with some friends. He moved to Melbourne in July 1984, when he was offered a job through the Rev. Dick Wootton at the Social Responsibility Department of the Uniting Church. We visited him there a couple of times and met a lot of his friends from the church and from a support group. He seemed very happy to live in Melbourne and liked his work.

Just after our move to Canberra in 1981, we took Mark to Hawkesbury Agricultural College at Richmond, where he studied Agriculture. He showed us around the whole complex and we were quite impressed with the facilities there. He stayed at the College for most of the time and graduated in 1985 with a Bachelor of Agriculture degree. After his graduation he rented a small farm from one of his lecturers on the banks of the Hawkesbury River, called Nunyara. We visited him at this idyllic spot several times, where he raised chickens, strawberries in a tunnel house, water melons and vegetables. Anne Mussared, his girlfriend from Hawkesbury, had moved in with him for her final year.

In January 1987 Mark and Anne were married by me in Adelaide. Both our mothers were staying with us then. They flew to Adelaide, while the rest of us, including nephew Ian Chandler, went by car there in one day. I was very pleased that Mark and Anne had asked me to marry them, but at one point in the service I nearly choked with emotions. Our first son going down the aisle with his wife! It was really a wonderful wedding. I felt honoured to be asked to conduct it, and afterwards at the reception the Mussareds didn't spare anything to make it a most memorable occasion.

Even the barbecue the following day at the Mussared's home was a great success. More relaxed than the reception, of course, and so very friendly. According to a long standing Mussared tradition, all the young people were asked to pose for a photograph under the balcony. As everyone was jostling for a position, someone from above poured a couple of buckets full of water over the group. After this, a riot started, or rather a water war. I don't think anyone got away completely dry, not even

Granny! ... and an excellent time was had by all.

From the day he was married we no longer called Mark by his first name, but Gunter, which is his second name. There had been so many Marks in his year at Hawkesbury College, that everyone began to call him Gunter, and since Anne met him there, he was known by her family only as Gunter. He also preferred it.

In 1981 we were left with just two of our children staying with us. James and Margaret had each their own bedroom. James had finished school at Oak Flats and like his brothers, he wanted to take a year off studies. He chose to go to New Zealand for skiing and continued from there to Tonga and Fiji, which he enjoyed very much.

In 1982 James enrolled at the ANU (Australian National University) for a science course. He moved to live permanently to our caravan in 1985, when my mother came to live with us. At the end of 1986 he graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree and worked for a while at a plant nursery at the Belconnen Mall, before getting a job at the plant research department of the ANU.

Soon he wanted to buy a house for himself and persuaded Margaret to go halves with him. Alison and I had invested money for the children in a trust account. It came originally from our parents and from invested earnings and we had told them that it was to be used only for a deposit on a house. We had eventually bought three flats in Sydney. When James and Margaret decided to get their share of the money out, the trust account was dissolved. They bought a very nice house in Clutsam Place, Melba, not far from us. James moved in first, in June 1988, and rented rooms out to some friends from Uni and others. Margaret moved first into the caravan when both our mothers visited us, but later decided to move in with James.

Schooling in Canberra for our Margaret was no problem. At Albion Park Rail she had some experience of open plan schooling, which she could continue at Melba High. She settled in quite well there, but of course, missed her old friends very much. As parents we had not taken enough account of the trauma our children go through after a move.

Margaret was very keen to learn to drive. As soon as she was able to get her learner's permit, I took her around for driving lessons. We started at the new suburb of MacKellar, where the roads were already in place, but hardly any houses, which was an ideal place to start learning. She picked up driving very quickly, and soon she would drive me to my appointments and got a lot of practice that way. I booked her for her driving test on her 17th birthday. She was quite unhappy about that, as it would spoil her birthday, she said. However, she passed the test with flying colours and later said that this was her best birthday present. I was mighty proud of her. From then on she borrowed my Charade many times, but I couldn't help being a little over-anxious. Whenever she didn't return with the car at the time she said she would, I was worried. My

fatherly concern did cause a few tears occasionally.

In 1988 we celebrated Margaret's 21st birthday at a large hall near Lake Burley Griffin, with the Stringy Bark bushband from our church providing the entertainment. It turned out to be a lovely family affair, with plenty of her friends in attendance.



Canberra was a good place for gardening. As in Albion Park Rail, I tried to keep the Mondays free and went working in the garden, to avoid the telephone. In winter of 1981 Mark and James helped me digging large holes in our back-yard, filled them with compost and manure, and planted five triple grafted trees, an apple, plum, pear, peach-nectarine and almond tree.

The vegetable patch had to be started from scratch, requiring quite heavy physical work, which was good for me. The soil was very poor, but with lots of sheep manure from our Wattle Park farmers and our own compost, I gradually improved the soil and had some success with vegetables. The boisonberries were also doing well. I had learnt from Albion Park that they needed regular pruning, which made them much more accessible for picking. Canberra was also much drier than the coast, so the garden needed quite a lot of watering.

Occasionally, Alison and I would go for bike rides, either around Lake Ginninderra, or sometimes we took the bikes on our car and went around Lake Burley Griffin. Especially in autumn these rides were most memorable.

Our family continued spending the summer holidays at Lake Conjola. When Mother Chandler came to visit us in the summer of 1981/82, we didn't think that she could cope for four weeks in a tent. We had met a widow at Milton Uniting Church who was letting a unit in her back yard to holiday makers. This seemed an ideal situation, as it was not far from our camping ground at Lake Conjola and it worked out very well. Someone would go to pick her up by car, and in the evenings we would usually walk her home. She visited us again in the summer of 1984 where we made the same arrangements.

After Lake Conjola, Mother wanted to see New Zealand. She invited our Margaret to join her for company, which she enjoyed very much.

When Mother came again in December 1988, we gave her a special treat for her ninetieth birthday, on 20 March 1989. We had booked her on a hot air balloon. She was as thrilled as a teenager, climbing into the basket at the crack of dawn, and enjoying every minute of it, including the champagne at the end.

My Mother came to visit us for the summer of 1982/3. She arrived with a severe salt deficiency, owing to some tablets she was taking. She had

been looking forward so much to spending Christmas with our family, and although the doctor had suggested that she be admitted to hospital on Christmas Eve, we didn't have the heart to do it. We put a couch into the lounge, and she was present for the whole celebration, but I doubt that she would have remembered anything about it. By the end of the evening she was so poorly, that we decided to keep watch over her all night. Everyone volunteered to go on the roster, even Sue Chandler, who was also with us that time. It was marvellous, how the family rallied around her.

On Christmas Day we had to admit her to Calvary hospital. By then she was so bad that she didn't recognise anyone. She was put on a drip immediately, but even when I went the next day to visit her, which was my birthday, her mind was still not back and she didn't recognise me. But she slowly improved and thankfully her mind returned without leaving any permanent damage.

At Lake Conjola Mutter was able to stay in the unit where Alison's Mother had stayed the year before. We would take and fetch her by car, but towards the end of the holidays she was able to walk the distance, at least one way.

For our silver wedding anniversary in 1984, Mother visited us again together with David and Sibyl Chandler, the Knights, the Eckels, and some others of our wedding guests 25 years ago. We invited our former minister, Bob MacArthur, to conduct the service on the following day in our Melba congregation. In this way the whole church participated in that thanksgiving service.

As a special treat we bought ourselves tickets for a three-weeks safari tour to Central Australia. We had a most enjoyable time. We even climbed Ayers Rock, but I would never have made it without Alison, as I discovered that I was petrified of heights. I had never given it a thought before, and not until we reached 'chicken rock' did I realise that there would be a problem. But with Alison's encouragement, and by using the chain both up and down (going backwards), I managed. It was a unique experience.

In March 1985 Mutter had suffered a kind of heart attack when she was holidaying in the German Alps. Gerda and I were greatly concerned that she would not be able to look after herself any more. We decided she should come to live with us permanently. Gerda went to Göttingen to help with the packing, and Mutter came to us via Cairo, arriving on 26 October 1985. We tried to make her room as comfortable as possible, with her own pictures surrounding her, and we even bought some furniture and a TV for her. She recovered well enough to come with us again to Lake Conjola after Christmas. This time she stayed in her own tent, next to ours, which we made quite comfortable for her. It had always been her dream to camp, so at 83 this dream came finally true. I think she quite enjoyed it there. Luckily, the weather was very good that year. This was also to be our last time at Lake Conjola.

Mutter broke her leg in January 1988. As it was still a holiday period, and no orthopaedic surgeon was available to do the operation immediately, she was immobilised in traction. The operation was done a fortnight after the break occurred. But by then she had suffered a stroke, and never fully recovered from it.

Eventually Mutter was discharged from hospital and returned to us. Slowly her walking improved, but her orientation was gone. She couldn't even find the toilet by herself. Also her short-term memory was gone. Alison nursed her and saw to her every needs in a most selfless manner. As often as I could I would talk to her in the mornings before work. Her memory of the past was fine, so we talked at length about the good old days, when we were young. Each afternoon someone would take her for a walk. I usually took her at weekends and once or twice during the week. The Department of Community Services provided a companion for her twice a week, to give Alison a break.

When Mutter's health deteriorated considerably in July 1989, we let Gerda know and she immediately came over for a fortnight. This gave her a new lease of life. During this time her only great-grand son Henry also visited with Gunter and Anne. He made such an impression on her, that she didn't forget that he was in the house. When they had gone, she still asked to see him.

The end came swiftly and mercifully. Owing to poor circulation a clot had developed in her leg. She was admitted to Woden Valley Hospital on 11 August, and died in the early morning hours of 16 August 1989. I received the message of her death in Sydney, on my way to an important meeting between the ACC and the Indonesian and Melanesian Council of Churches in Port Moresby. Alison made all the arrangements for the funeral, which took place on the day of my return, 23 August. My good friend and colleague Graeme Watkins from East Belconnen took the funeral. The crematorium was absolutely packed with mourners. In the few years of her stay in Australia, she had made many friends through her out-going and friendly nature. She had been a wonderful mother, mother-in-law and Oma to us all. A plaque in her memory was fixed to a memorial wall in the garden of Wattle Park church, where she always worshipped.

Consultations with neighbouring churches

Synod meeting at Manokwari — July 1984

In July 1984 I went for the ACC (Australian Council of Churches) to a Synod meeting of the Protestant Church of Irian Jaya (GKI.Ir.Ja). Tension between the West Papuans and the Indonesian military had increased considerably since the beginning of that year. Over 10,000 refugees had fled across the border to Papua New Guinea. Arnold Ap, a prominent church leader, anthropologist and folk musician was killed by Indonesian security forces in May 1984. The world media had become interested in this conflict. The ABC screened a Four Corner's programme on James Nyaro, the leader of the Operasi Papua Merdeka (OPM — Free Papua Movement) after Ap's death. It was difficult then to get a visa for Irian Jaya, but mine was approved at the last minute. The situation was tense. Papua New Guinea didn't want the refugees, but could not send them back for fear of a global outcry. The ACC felt it was important to stand by the GKI in its current struggle. As I spoke Indonesian, the ACC expected me to report back on the true situation in Irian Jaya, rather than having to rely on a possibly biased report from an Indonesian source.

The indigenous population of Irian Jaya is of Melanesian descent. Because of geographic isolation, individual tribes had developed their own languages, often completely different from one another. The highlands in the inland were the most densely populated areas. Some of the hill tribes had first come into contact with the outside world as recently as about 50 years ago. Their culture was diverse and uncoordinated, going back over many centuries. The common language linking all the different tribes together had been for a long time Indonesian, long before it became the adopted language of Indonesia. Since Irian Jaya was annexed by Indonesia in 1967, the population had become more conscious of their ethnic difference from the rest of the Indonesian people. It wasn't just the colour of their skin, but their different culture and their affinity to the land, which set them apart from

the others. I thought how similar this was with our Australian Aborigines and their claim for land rights.

This awareness became accelerated by the transmigration policy of the Indonesian government. The Irian Jaya people felt threatened by the 'assimilation' policy and feared that their Melanesian distinctiveness and culture was going to be lost. For the first time in their history they felt united by that threat.

The Synod meeting took place in Manokwari, on the north/west side of Irian Jaya. The airport was nestled into a high mountain, which came close to the sea, not leaving much room for the planes to manoeuvre. Only smaller planes could land there. I had to change planes on the island of Biak, and breathed a sigh of relief when we landed safely at Manokwari.

There were representatives from all 30 Presbyteries at the meeting. It emerged that their main concern was, how to cope with the transmigrants. Large areas of their land had been taken away and given to the newcomers from Java or Bali. The latter were mainly Muslims and non-Melanesian, whereas the ethnic Irian Jayans were nominally all Christian. The indigenous people didn't want to share their land with them. The military commander of the Province, Brigadier General Sembiring Maliala, a Christian from Batak, North Sumatra, spoke to the Synod meeting at length and invited each Presbytery to tell the meeting about their complaints. One by one they reported of serious clashes between the immigrants and the locals.

According to their ancestral traditions, their land was not seen as being owned by them privately, nor by the community, but they could use it for growing and harvesting food. This concept was more akin to biblical land ownership in the Jubilee passages. The immigrants built fences around their allotted areas, and the locals complained that they couldn't even walk through to get to their land. They accused the immigrants of deliberately interrupting their Sunday services, and in some instances their church buildings had been burnt down.

Many reported rape, torture and killings by the military, especially in the area of Tembagapura, where the giant American-owned mine of FREEPORT operated. They complained of the rivers being 'poisoned' and their livelihood gone. Many considered themselves as second class citizens in their own land. The Indonesians dominated all political and economic life and looked down on everything Melanesian.

The military commander promised that he would investigate all their complaints and see to it that justice was done with regard to the indigenous people. He also assured them that the Government was trying to win their hearts. There was little evidence of that, however, as the military might of Indonesia seemed to crush any indigenous aspirations.

The Synod later adopted a resolution, that the church was to ask the Legal Aid Institute (LBH) in Jakarta to open a branch at Jayapura, to help them in their fight against government excesses.

When I saw a television crew filming the whole procedure, I was naive enough to ask, whether this was for the news on Television. I was given a definite “no”. These people filming were from the military security, I was told.

Kenneth Davidson in an article in the Age (31/5/84) wrote:

“In the past five years, about 8,000 families have been shifted from Java to Irian Jaya, on to three, four or five hectare plots in order to subsist together with cash crops such as coffee or rubber. In the next five years, the Indonesians plan to move another 80,000 families, so that by 1990 there should be about half a million of Javanese origin in Irian Jaya on top of an estimated one million Melanesians. I don’t think much imagination is needed to see what the effect of this will be on the indigenous population, or how the indigenous population will react.”

A brother of one of OPM’s leaders spoke to me secretly. He pointed to his black skin and curly hair and said: “We are losing our identity in the present struggle. Go and tell your churches in Australia, that we will never agree to an integration with Indonesia. Our brothers and sisters are across the Papua New Guinea border, they have the same colour of skin and the same curly hair. One day we will be one nation.”

This left a deep impression on me. Several other lay people and some ministers told me that they were afraid to talk to me. They knew that there were spies among the delegates, who would report them to the police.

One person said that they had been forbidden to talk to me, but he just ignored it. He talked to me openly after a meal and told me about a lecturer at the Theological School at Abepura, near the capital Jayapura. After a student demonstration one day, he suddenly fled across the border to Papua New Guinea.

He also knew Arnold Ap personally. Ap had been imprisoned without trial for several months. Everyone in church and community held him in highest regard. He helped people to become more aware of their own culture and history, which went against Indonesian policy. The evening before he was killed he had been visited by a member of the church. Nothing suspicious was apparent then, which went against the official Indonesian report that he had been sick. Apparently the Indonesian government had given orders to release him, but the prison authorities didn’t agree with this. In the early morning of the following day he was found shot outside the prison gate. The official version was that he had been shot after an attempt to escape, but no one of those who knew him believed it. His body was given to his family in a sealed coffin and his family was ordered not to open it. They did open it, however, and saw that he had been tortured. They knew then that the official version was a cover-up of his murder. A very sad story, indeed.

At the Synod meeting was a missionary from Germany, Günther Kreis, who worked for the church in the Balim valley in central Irian Jaya, a very isolated community. We had a lot in common, not just that we both spoke German. We shared a room and talked heart to heart half into the night, a wonderful and rare occasion. He promised to visit us in Australia with his wife in November, but they never came.

On Sunday the Synod celebrated the centenary of their church. Two German missionaries, Ottow and Geissler, had landed on the island of Mansinam, not far from Manokwari. The church staged a re-enactment of that landing, choosing a Dutch official and me to represent these missionaries. We were rowed in an outrigger to the beating of drums and stepped ashore while the 'natives' were trying to fend us off waving fiercely their spears and shields. After we said we had come in the name of God in peace, they gave us permission to step ashore. With the re-enactment finished, everyone, more than a thousand people, were invited to a wonderful feast.

On my return to Canberra I reported fully to the ACC, and also phoned Foreign Affairs to share with them some of the stories I was told in secret. This was the least I could do, I felt, in return for the trust shown to me at Manokwari. They seemed very interested, but I was disappointed that no action followed, at least nothing officially. I had also mentioned that public statements by foreign governments are often taken notice of in Indonesia, although this was never acknowledged. For instance, the Dutch Foreign Minister had once questioned the Indonesian government on 'mysterious killings' which were then happening in and around Jakarta. These suddenly stopped thereafter. Regrettably, no Australian government has ever followed that example.

I was also able to pass on a request from Irian Jaya, not to return any refugees forcefully from Papua New Guinea, and I also mentioned their concern about the misuse of power by the American Company Freeport Inc. near Tembaga Pura.

Tripartite meeting at Bali — November 1985

The situation of Irian Javan refugees in Papua New Guinea kept deteriorating. More and more people crossed the border from Irian Jaya, and the refugees received international attention. A delegation from the Australian Council of Churches (ACC) and the Melanesian Council of Churches (MCC) visited some refugee camps in July 1984. They met church members who were teachers, civil servants, lawyers, university lecturers and three ministers from the protestant church in Irian Jaya (GKI). They were told that the main opposition to the Indonesian occupation of Irian Jaya came from the church, both Catholic and

Protestant. They were also told that the reports of suffering were not exaggerated. Their own relatives had been killed, young women raped by the soldiers, there was widespread looting and land was being confiscated or crops burnt. They felt second class citizens in their own land. Indonesians dominated all political and economic life and looked down on everything Melanesian. They estimated that since 1969 (the year Indonesia took possession of Irian Jaya) between 150,000 to 200,000 people had been killed.

This visit led to the decision to hold a Tripartite Meeting between the ACC, the DGI and the MCC, as the tense relationship between PNG and Indonesia had also spilled over to the churches.

In June 1985 Phil Erari, then secretary of the GKI, sent a paper to the church councils with the views of his church on programmes to be implemented. It took the position that all its programmes should be based on the three principles of self-dependence, self-esteem, and social justice. Erari describes that development in Irian Jaya was being perceived increasingly as being done to the people, not by the people, a 'kind of Indonesian colonialism', he wrote. Because of wide-spread social injustice in Irian Jaya, human rights had been violated, and their self-esteem had suffered badly. The churches and council of churches would need to address this problem urgently, he wrote.

A meeting between the DGI, the MCC, and the ACC was arranged for November 1985 in Bali. I attended this with 38 other delegates, 23 from Indonesia (including 4 from Irian Jaya and one from Timor), 8 from PNG, 7 from Australia and one from the Pacific Conference of Churches. The theme was MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER INTO THE FUTURE, with three topics: Church and Society, Hopes and Expectations of a modern society, and Relationships with people of other faiths.

Between the first meeting in August 1984 (which I didn't attend) and this meeting, a total of nine separate meetings had been held between representatives of all three councils, either together or separately, due to the large number of refugees (or border crossers, as the Indonesians preferred to call them). The meeting I attended set up a standing committee to deal with urgent matters between regular Tripartite meetings. Its main positive result was an open sharing of the differences of approach and attitude towards church/state relationships, problems associated with development and relationships with people of other faiths. The meeting also agreed to send an Indonesian minister from Irian Jaya to Papua New Guinea to minister there to Indonesian speaking Christians, particularly in the border region.

We were told that 12 refugees had been returned to Irian Jaya by the PNG government against their will. This had created such international protest, that Prime Minister Somare eventually lost his leadership over this issue. The meeting was assured by the Indonesian delegates, that these twelve people were now being looked after by the GKI.

Towards the end of the meeting it appeared to me, that the delegates from Irian Jaya were not given sufficient time to raise some of their concerns. They had asked in one of the plenary sessions for some time to talk to the Australians and Papua New Guineans (I interpreted it as meaning: without the other Indonesians). However, Dr. Nababan from the Indonesian delegation, who chaired that particular session, declared categorically that there was no time on the agenda for that type of meeting. Subsequently, some of the Australians, including myself, and Papua New Guineans were called together by the Rev.Phil Erari from Irian Jaya for an unofficial meeting to hear their concerns, which were: closer relationship with the ACC and MCC on a direct basis, without involvement of the DGI. This showed me that the church in Irian Jaya not only mistrusted the military regime in Indonesia, but also the church leaders represented in the DGI.

When I raised this with the other Australian delegates who had not attended the unofficial meeting, they were completely baffled. They had failed to perceive that the Irian Jayans were unhappy about Dr. Nababan and the way he chaired the meetings. I knew that an Indonesian would not, as a rule, oppose or criticise another person openly, whether it is in the church or in politics. This was simply a matter of etiquette. But as I had witnessed through the unofficial meeting, they have other ways to express their discontent. Eventually, the official meeting agreed to let the GKI deal directly with the Australian and Melanesian churches, 'as long as they would let the Indonesian church know what they were doing'. I realised that it isn't easy to understand people of a different culture, and many mistakes are made because of that.

I was reminded of another event involving Dr. Nababan, then Gen. Secretary of the DGI. I heard about it from someone I could trust, giving a good reason for the Irian Jayans not to trust him. It happened at the Seoul Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia. The Indonesian delegation had walked out of a meeting, ostensibly in protest of the street demonstrations in Soul against Indonesian atrocities in East Timor. However, a member of the Indonesian delegation told me that Nababan was angry that he was not elected to become the Secretary of CCA and he had persuaded all the delegates to walk out of the Assembly and subsequently withdraw totally from all CCA activities for some time.

Inspite of some of these disagreements, the meeting had achieved to create a better relationship between the two council of churches and a standing committee met subsequently in February 1986 at Port Moresby, again in July 1986 in Sydney, in October 1987 in Jaya Pura, and in October 1988 in Bali. Another meeting between the GKI and the MSS and ACC was held in Port Moresby in December 1986.

Tripartite meeting — Port Moresby, August 1989

The situation of the refugees in PNG unfortunately did not improve. My last effort in international affairs was a Tripartite meeting between the DGI, MCC and the ACC in Port Moresby, in August 1989. The theme was SHAPING THE FUTURE. I was one of four delegates from Australia, three only from Indonesia, and 23 from Papua New Guinea. My first reaction was, that the DGI didn't take the meeting very seriously, judging from the delegates it had sent. There were none of the former members participating, no staff of the DGI, no one from the GKI nor from the Timor church, nor from the Roman Catholic Church, which had been particularly requested. It was not surprising, therefore, that very little progress had been achieved since our last meeting in 1985.

The Irian Jayan minister for the refugee camps was in Papua New Guinea, but he was settled in a parish in Port Moresby, not in the border district. When I asked him, why he hadn't gone to the border camps, he said that he had never been to any of them, nor did he indicate to me that he wanted to go there in the future. He was more interested in finding a scholarship for his daughters.

When the subject of Melanesian identity came up at one discussion, the leader of the Indonesian delegation asked me in a whisper: "What is that?" I felt that he genuinely didn't know, but then I asked myself, what was he doing here at this Tripartite meeting, when this subject was so fundamental to our understanding of the conflict!

During breakfast one day I spoke to a church's youth leader from Bougainville. He told me about the desperate conflict between the Bougainvillians and Papua New Guineans. By then the situation had already escalated to a civil war. Australian helicopters, on loan to the PNG army, were being used to shoot villagers and burn their homes. The conflict had started when locals protested about the foreign owned mine, which had dispossessed them without any compensation and which was releasing toxic wastes into the river without filtering, killing all fish and poisoning people.

In my report to the ACC I suggested that future meetings with the DGI should include in the agenda reports on what the churches response was on some specific issues. In Australia the death of Aborigines in custody remained a problem. In Indonesia, delegates should know what happened to the protesters who were jailed because they didn't agree with a dam being built on their land. There was also the restriction on freedom of expression in the case of the poet and writer Pramoedia Ananta Toer, who had been jailed. Some Irian Jayan refugees had been returned against their will and subsequently jailed. Delegates should know what their fate would be and who was looking after them. Such an agenda would provide future meetings with specific subjects for discussion. I also suggested that efforts

be made to internationalise the critical situation in Bougainville. These issues would eventually lead to concrete proposals for the churches to act, rather than remaining hopelessly bogged down in mere words.

Since I have retired, I have lost contact with the ACC and I don't know what has become of our relationship with the other churches in our north. I am grateful to have been given the opportunity of participating in those meetings, and my only hope is that I was able to contribute something towards peace and understanding among our churches, and alleviate some of the suffering of the people. For that is my understanding of being part of the Kingdom of God.

Long service leave, 1987

Many weeks of planning for our long service leave came to fruition in 1987. Alison and I had taken four months leave, one month of annual leave, and three months long service leave. I also wanted to study the church in China, as not much about it was known in church circles. The group of our Theological Table Talk at Canberra gave me the task to present a paper on it at one of the meetings in Spring.

Our visitors left us in April, one by one. Mother made the start, then Mutter. Margaret too left for overseas. We were to catch up with her in Poland. Then came our turn on 15 May 1987. James took us to the airport, and we felt rather sorry for him, for he was the only one of the family left in Canberra. In spite of the predicted fog, the sun was shining that morning, and we took it as a good omen for our long journey ahead. We knew we were in God's hands.

We stayed the first night at Bali, at Dhyana Pura, (The Place of Meditation), which belonged to the church. Alison had never seen it and was most impressed with the set of buildings, in simple Balinese style, all thatch roof. Each unit was comfortably furnished and the bathroom at the back had no exterior wall. For privacy there was a high wall around the courtyard.

We had confirmed our flight to Kupang with GARUDA the next day, but when we arrived at the airport we were told that the flight had been cancelled. Quite upset about it, we went to the office and were told that there were just the two of us and an American booked to go to Kupang, so they had just cancelled it. But just as they had announced the cancellation, a GARUDA employee barged into the office and exploded in our presence: "What are you doing to us! We have a funeral to attend to at Kupang. There are ten of us, you can't just cancel the flight."

With that our cancelled flight was put back on schedule, a pilot was found and with only half an hour's delay we arrived safely at Kupang. The welcome there was overwhelming. Mes Beeh and his wife Thres were there with their two boys. We were going to stay at their place. Then Filus, Sem Nitti with his wife, Zacha and another former student with their families, all came to make us feel we were coming 'home' again after 14-1/2 years. Mes and Thres had vacated their bedroom for us and had moved together with their boys. Their hospitality was absolutely wonderful. We saw how

Kupang had changed, so it was almost unrecognisable. There were so many new buildings, especially the former barren areas between the old town and the airport, where formerly only rocks seemed to be able to grow. This area had changed into a completely new suburb. There were hundreds of bemos (mini vans for passengers) going up and down the streets, competing for passengers. No one seemed to be walking any more. Electricity was available 24 hours a day. They even had a supermarket which sold lots of goods, which were unavailable in our days.

Lasiana beach, our favourite swimming beach, had also been developed. Instead of the quiet and sleepy village, they had built a proper tourist resort there.

But by far the best thing was to meet many of my former students again. Some of them occupied important positions at the Synod office; Sam Nitti was Treasurer, Zacha and Filus heading the evangelism department, and Mes in charge of the Study and Research department, working together with John Barr, the Australian fraternal worker at the time.

Frans Balla had received a scholarship from Princeton University in the USA to complete his doctoral degree. We came just in time to be at his farewell. He reminded us that he entered Tarus theological school with one pair of borrowed trousers. My mind flashed back to one afternoon when we were on our way to Lasiana beach with the family. He had asked for a ride with us to Tarus. From then on he had come often with us and had stayed many times at the LOSMEN BAHAGIA, our little shed in the back yard. His farewell became an evening full of memories for us. Zarus was also there with his guitar. Unfortunately, he is one of our former students who had not succeeded. He had five children and left the ministry to teach religion at high schools. He looked unhappy. They sang our old favourite songs from our days in Oeba. Zarus even re-tuned his guitar, as he had done so often for us, and played it like a Sasandu, a traditional Rotinese string instrument. It was an emotional time for us, and tears came into my eyes when I thought of those happy years gone by.

Some of our students had become Presbytery chairmen. Agabus, who was still in Rote, was one of them. He came with some rice for us and invited us to visit him in Rote. We could catch the ferry, he said, but only when the weather was good.

“Why don’t you come by MERPATI?” he asked.

“It would cost a lot of money,” I said.

Undeterred he answered philosophically: “Friendship is always costly.”

Yes, indeed, Agabus, but thank God it is also something that can never be bought with money. Such friendship and love is eternal. When we arrived at the airport on the island of Rote, there was no one to meet us. The plane seemed to have left us in the middle of nowhere, just a simple shed for shade. We waited there for quite a while, not knowing what to do. Then we heard a motorbike approaching. Seeing us there, the driver

turned around and went straight back from where he came. We sat there wondering what to do next.

After what seemed ages, two motorbikes arrived, one for each of us. Holding on to our bags and the drivers in front, they took us to Agabus' home. As he was out we were met by his wife, who immediately sent her eldest son to fetch him. He soon arrived, and embraced us both warmly. It felt like only yesterday, when he had taken me in his strong arms, consoling me all the way to the plane more than fourteen years ago.

When Agabus showed me some descendants of the chickens he had raised at Tarus, I couldn't believe my eyes. They looked strong and were laying much bigger eggs than ordinary village chickens. He had crossed them with the local breed and had obtained an excellent result.

The following day, Agabus wanted me to do nine baptisms, which he had especially saved up for me.

"But Agabus, I didn't bring any tie, any clothes to officiate. I can't go just in my thongs and open neck shirt?"

"We'll fix that," he said.

Luckily he was tall, almost as tall as I am. He let me have his Geneva gown (good for Geneva, but far too hot for Rote), and shoes, so there was no excuse left. We were invited to two of the baptism families for lunch. It was a bit of a rush, as we were booked on the plane back to Kupang that afternoon, but we still had to eat at both places. You can't offend your hosts!

Of course we had to visit Piaklain on Semau, where Mes' mother still lived. His father had died a year earlier. The change in that village was unbelievable. All homes were lined up in neat rows with fenced gardens along an unpaved road. One could walk on this road without getting lost.

Mes' family had waited for our return with a traditional ceremony, where families give thanks that the year's mourning was over. All the village boys from yesteryear had grown into men and most of them had moved away, as there was no work on Semau. There was still no jetty at Piaklain, and we still had to scramble over rocks and mud as before, and the short people were getting quite wet again. There are some things that don't change!

Mes also took us on a day trip to SoE. It was less than four hours there and back, and I couldn't help remembering the 19 hours it had taken us one way, with seven punctures. Yes, this trip was nostalgic, and it was nice to remember all the good things we had experienced there. The congregation in Soe had built a new church with seating for 1500, but even that was not enough. They had to have three services each Sunday to fit them all in. The pulpit was in the shape of a mountain, symbolising the Sermon on the Mount, no doubt.

In Kupang we met a person whose conscience was burdened by what he had observed about the war in East Timor. He came to visit us especially to tell us about it. When the Indonesian army invaded there in 1975, he had

seen plane loads of corpses being unloaded at Kupang airport. He commented that the Indonesian army had nearly been wiped out. No one would ever know the true casualties of the early fighting. Then the Indonesian commanders changed tactics. They sent in West Timorese troops, who were ethnically the same as the East Timorese and could not easily be identified by them. That seemed to have reduced the casualties drastically, but the conflict continued. In 1987 not even people from West Timor were allowed to visit East Timor. Everyone needed a special permit, 'to prevent further unemployment', they were told. GMIT had four ministers working in East Timor. They looked at that area as their mission field.

Mes showed us the foundations of his own house in AMANUBAN, a new suburb of Kupang. Some walls were already up, and I could see that it would look very nice and spacious.



After staying in Kupang for three weeks we flew to Hong Kong via Bali. Alison hadn't been in Hong Kong before, so we did the usual tourist rounds together. On a clear day we went up to the PEAK by the scenic cable tram, from where we had a wonderful view of Hong Kong. One rainy day we took a double-decker tram around the island and saw as much as we would have seen with a guided tour. We didn't buy too many things, as we had agreed that each one of us would carry their own bag.

From Hong Kong we started our epic train journey, which would end in Frankfurt, Germany.

The train had 14 cars, and all were packed. We just relaxed and enjoyed the luxury of train travelling. First stop Guangzhou. I had booked a room in a guest house, which belonged to a local church, and when we arrived, Alison saw our name on a piece of paper held by a Mr. Ko Lin, who introduced himself as our guide for Guangzhou. He was a student and a member of this church and donated his services as his financial contribution. He wouldn't even take a tip.

Mr. Ko's English was excellent. He took us first to the Dong-Shan Yuan guest house, and then sight seeing. He was a wonderful guide. He told us all we would need to know to manage on our own in other cities. At dinner time we tried to be adventurous and fumbled through the menu of a local restaurant. They didn't have a menu in English, so we just pointed to dishes on other tables and were surprised how well we managed. Apart from visiting the church and the bible college with 34 students, we talked to a 74 year old minister, still active. He told us about the difficult times they had during the Cultural Revolution, when all ministers had been moved to the country to do farm work. But all that was in the past, he said, and they had religious freedom again.

At the church complex we were shown plans for a kindergarten for hepatitis B sufferers. As no one else would take them, the church was willing to fill the gap in a most exemplary way. As the church was very short of ordained ministers, lay people took on all kinds of leadership rolls, but they wouldn't let them preach.

Mr. Ko persuaded us to climb the 6 Bunyan Pagoda, which had been built in 1358. I was terrified because of the incredible height, but the view from the top floor was absolutely magnificent. We also saw lots of pagodas and temples, as well as the Sun Yat-sen Memorial hall, one of the largest columnless halls I have seen, seating 4,700. Mr. Ko also introduced us to ancient Chinese culture. When we walked through one of those beautiful parks he cited a proverb:

“Rather to eat without meat, than to live without bamboo”.

On the last day Mr. Ko escorted us to the train and told us about train travelling in China, and how to buy our tickets. We travelled ‘soft class’ in a 15-car train, real luxury. Our compartment had embroidered linen, a table lamp and a flower pot. Our two Chinese companions unfortunately, couldn't speak a word of English. There was even a thermometer to show that during the night the temperature came down to 32°C. The train journey of 38 hours took us through some of the most beautiful landscapes, along rivers, through mountains and tunnels. Sections of the second track were still being laid, but they hoped to finish it by 1988. On stations we were able to buy as much food as we could eat. There were also meals provided on the train. They came in polystyrene boxes and were not bad, except the rice, which was terrible. After the meal these boxes were just tossed out of the window. What dreadful litter, we thought. By the time we arrived at Hangzhou, we were well known by many fellow travellers on the train, and one came to speak to us in good English. He was a musician and composer, working with the Hangzhou Orchestra.

We hadn't booked a room in Hangzhou, but from the Lonely Planet guide we picked a hotel in the middle range and hired a taxi to take us there. I left Alison in the taxi and went to the reception desk: “We would like a double room please. Is there one available?”

“Yes.”

“How much for one night?”

“One hundred and fifty Yuan. (about \$60)”

“Oh, that is too expensive for us. We are not rich American tourists. Have you got a cheaper room?”

“Yes, for seventy five Yuan? (about \$30)”

“That would be fine.”

We signed in. The room had an en suite and was very comfortable. I think I had discovered a way of bargaining, without them losing face.

Hangzhou was the capital of Zhejiang, the smallest province in China but one of the most prosperous with the largest number of Christians, approximately one million people. We eventually found the church after

first being directed to a Roman Catholic church, which was only a quarter full, when I peeped inside. When we eventually arrived at the Protestant church, the service had just finished. People were streaming out, not only from the church, but also from an overflow hall, seating about 1500 people. We met the Rev. Cai Weng-hao for a chat, and his assistant, David King. This David was to write to us a couple of years later asking for some help. He wanted to come to Australia for some post graduate studies, which we were able to organise for him. It was lovely to welcome him and his wife and son into our home, after we had retired.

I wanted to know what Mr. Cai thought about the rapid growth of the christian church in China: "We are amazed ourselves," he said. "It is God's Spirit working among us. Members are taking their faith very seriously. They are pious in the good sense, and lay workers are taking an important part in evangelism. We run about one hundred courses per annum for lay leaders in this province. We do not have big rallies as in other countries. We believe this is contrary to the gospel. We don't believe in triumphalism. Witnessing is done on a personal level to friends, neighbours and at the work place, and they are not only invited to our church services, but actually taken. In our province there is no discrimination against Christians whatsoever by the state."

As we had missed the morning service, we attended the evening service with a large congregation of about 800. A woman minister was preaching, and some people had brought their own bibles to follow the sermon. The congregation consisted mainly of younger people, with a sprinkling of older ones. They tried to be helpful to us, but since we don't read or speak Chinese, there was not much point. Only one hymn we recognised as one from our own hymn book.

For sightseeing it must have been the wrong season. It was raining and at times quite foggy. But we still got the impression of a most beautiful city, with a lovely lake and parks and the usual pagodas and temples. One temple was nestled into a fairly high mountain, which we started to climb, but soon gave up because of the rain and it became too steep.

We continued our journey in 'soft class' again to Shanghai. It was rather amusing, we thought, how in this classless society one got around the problem of having 'first' and 'second' class train compartments. Shanghai is China's largest industrial and commercial city. Rev. Shen Yi-fen had booked us into the YMCA, and then took us to his Community church. The building could seat approximately 700 on the ground floor, 300 on the first floor, and 250 on the second floor, both with closed TV circuit. Mr. Shen is now the general secretary of the China Christian Council, where he had worked when we visited.

There were six ministers serving at that church. The Rev. Mrs. Pong conducted a bible reading class, a form of outreach. It was pointed out to us that the church considered the most important job to be that of the ushers. As open evangelism was not allowed, the ushers were the first

persons to meet visitors at the services. The ushers would ask them for their names and addresses and would visit them the following week. No collection was taken up during the services, as the church didn't want to take money from people not yet committed or from visitors. Church members gave sacrificially by other means.

Mr. Shen told us that there was a real spiritual thirst among the Chinese people. China had changed over the last years. A better standard of living had removed the need to run after material necessities, and combined with better education, the people felt a great need for spiritual values. Since 1949 the church had become completely indigenised, not only as far as staff was concerned, but also in its theology. The gospel is therefore no longer seen as something coming from abroad or foreign, but truly Chinese. The Prodigal Son, for instance, depicts good Chinese traditional values, like a strong relationship between parents and children, and honouring ones parents is how our relationship with God should be.

We took a river cruise on the Huangpu, about 80 km down stream just before it flows into the Yangtse. We had never seen such a busy harbour before. The parks in Shanghai were also quite famous. One in the centre had a 'floating' pagoda where one of the most famous teas in China was served, or it must have been, judging by the price. To us it tasted like muddy water and not at all special.

One evening we were just resting in a park by the harbour, when a young man joined us on the bench. He was working in a shipping office and said he came here to get away from the overcrowded city, even from the place he lived, which was always crowded. When he heard that I was a minister in the church, he wanted to know 'all about christianity'. He had never met a christian before, but was well-read and obviously interested in christianity. What an opportunity.

I started by asking him: "Have you ever felt guilty about anything?"

"Yes, of course, when I do wrong," he replied.

"Do you usually want to do wrong?"

"No, of course not. That's why I feel guilty about it."

"This is called 'sin'. All religions in the world are trying to overcome it by working or doing something 'for God', as they say. They make an offering, fast, beat themselves or even mutilate themselves, all in an effort to earn God's favour and to get rid of their guilt."

"Yes, I understand that, but ..."

"Wait a moment, I'll come to it. This is where Christianity is different from other religions. Jesus had recognised that in his days the religious people had laid down a law, which was to help people get over this guilt feeling, keep them on the straight and narrow, as it were."

"We have a law here too to keep people honest, but somehow it doesn't work. There will always be some who can't stay within the law."

"You are quite right, no one can ever keep the law in all its details, and that will make some people feel guilty at one time or another, as I have

said at the beginning.”

“So, is there a way out?”

“Yes, there is. As I have said, Jesus saw people struggling with this problem, and so he said to them: ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ He healed them, he made them whole.”

“What, just like that?”

“Without putting any conditions on them, he just forgave them, and took away their guilt. It was his great love for all people that brought this about.”

“But what has this got to do with my guilt today?”

“He was put on a cross to die, tortured and killed like a criminal, although he had done no wrong. He did not resist it, he let it happen to him. Then God made him appear among the living again, to show that Jesus lives on in the forgiveness and love of his followers and of his church.”

“You mean, the church here in Shanghai today can take away my guilt?”

“Yes, you see, the Spirit of Jesus, his love for all, lives on in the church. And that, in simple words, is the gospel, the good news in a nutshell.”

“This sounds too good to be true, but I can’t believe it.”

“This is just it, all you need to do is to believe it, to trust in Jesus. He accepts you as you are. He loves you with no strings attached. Why don’t you see for yourself at the Community Church. That’s where people meet on Sundays.”

Unfortunately, I’ll never know whether he actually became a christian, but he certainly was a serious enquirer.

When pressed for some statistics, Mr. Shen of the Community Church estimated that in China there would be now over four million christians, four times the number before the communists took over. The main reason for this increase was thought to be the indigenisation of the church. He also thought that the materialism of communism had not brought any spiritual satisfaction.

Talking about feeling guilty, I had good reason to feel so the following morning. I had resisted several times the black market money changers on the streets, but this time I fell for the temptation. I thought of our friend in the park the day before, none of us are perfect and we are all in need of forgiveness. The rate was 50 yuan in foreign exchange currency (FEC) for 75 Renminbi (RMB). China had then a dual currency system, the FEC for foreigners and RMB for locals, and the official rate was one to one. We could spend the RMB on local purchases, taxis (some drivers asked for FEC), buses meals and the like.

In another park we happened on an impromptu opera, sung by two ladies, accompanied by two stringed instruments. A crowd just sat around and enjoyed the singing.

Not far from Shanghai lies the ancient city of Suzhou, once the seat of

the Chinese Emperor. It had plenty of pagodas and beautiful gardens, quite unspoilt by tourism, we felt. The hotel was quite basic, rooms without en suite, the only one we stayed in China, and on the morning we left there was no hot water. The food at the hotel was so plain, that we ate there only once.

One day we were tired from walking in the rain and we had to find some shelter to sit down. We came by a make-shift restaurant in the open air under a tarpaulin. The only English speaking person was called and we ordered fried tomatoes and eggs. Next thing a couple of bowls of soup appeared in front of us. We were just about to tuck in, when the waiter realised that she had made a mistake and made attempts to take away the bowls. As we were really hungry after smelling the delicious soup, we held on to the bowls and protested by shaking our heads vigorously. Luckily, we were allowed to eat the soup, and the fried tomatoes and eggs as well.

To walk the streets which had a 2,500 years old history, created a feeling of awe and wonder. What would life have been like in those early days on Tiger Hill under King He Lu, the founder of Suzhou? How many people would have lived then in the city?

Still pondering these questions we were suddenly propelled into the 21st century. At the next cross road were traffic lights which told us how many more seconds before the lights would change. Whoa! Will we ever get that in Australia in the next century?

The Grand Canal, built in the 6th century to connect the fertile grain producing southern region with the imperial capitals in the more arid north, went as far as Beijing. It was an engineering feat surpassing even that of the Great Wall. We caught an ordinary river boat to Wuxi on the canal, which took us six hours. The price for the trip was not even one Yuan, about 80c. There were, of course, no tourists on the boat, and we big noses were an object of curiosity. Here I regretted most that none of us could speak Chinese. I would have loved to talk to the ordinary folk on the boat about their thoughts and daily lives.

The water of the canal was filthy. Some people were tipping out their night potties, and a few meters further away, they were washing their dishes. Traffic was quite heavy, mainly barges pulling long boats of agricultural products, and of course hundreds of smaller sampans. What do you do with a small child when you live on a barge? You just put on a firm brace on the child, attach a rope to it with a loop at the end which fits around another long rope running along the centre of the barge from front to back, and the child can safely roam around the whole barge.

Leaving the boat at Wuxi, we had to use our umbrellas, as it was raining quite heavily. We scrambled on a bus with our bags to take us to the Wuxi Hotel, recommended by the Lonely Planet book on China, but the hotel had closed owing to renovations. According to the China book, there was the Taihu Hotel about 20 minutes walk from the terminus. We thought we would have no trouble getting a taxi or pedicab. They had always been

around when we didn't want them. But there was nothing. It was still raining and muddy, and our spirits were low. We tried to hail some cars to hitch a ride, but no one would stop. Finally we decided to take a bus back to the station and hire a taxi from there to our third choice, the Shuixiu Hotel. The taxi took about half an hour, a long way out, but we were glad to arrive, and gladder still when we were able to get a room for our usual 75 yuan.

After this experience we decided, we would always take a taxi to our hotel in a new town. The Shuixiu was outside the city right on the shore of Lake Taihu. We managed to go for a walk along the gardens in the afternoon in fair weather, but other than that we could see the lake only through thick fog. The food at the hotel was delicious, so the day ended on a good note.

In spite of the fog we took a ferry ride to Sanshan Island the next day, but the fog never lifted and all we could see was fog. We sat next to a young man who spoke no English, but with the help of the Berlitz conversation book we managed to get some information across the language barrier. As we walked past some more pagodas and temples on our way home, we came past a building which looked like a tea house — the appropriate architecture and very pretty. Just what we needed. But what disappointment when this building turned out to be no more than an elaborate toilet.

The express train to Nanjing took about three and a half hours. This time we travelled hard class and by talking to a young couple from Hong Kong we heard that they had paid just half the fare from ours. Was that Chinese economic justice?

The weather in Nanjing was warm and sunny, at last we had escaped the fog and rain!

The Nanjing Seminary is the most famous in China. I had met Bishop Ting in Canberra, and hoped to meet him here again. But he was abroad. The Associate Dean of Students and lecturer, Professor Mo Ruxi, gave us a wonderful tour around the college and answered a lot of questions. She too said that the reason for the rapid growth in membership was due to the fact that the church had become indigenous after Liberation. The leaders promoted the Three Self Movement: self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. This dramatically changed the image of the church. After the Cultural Revolution people had re-discovered the spiritual aspect of life and had found an answer to their searching in christianity. Another reason was that Christians stood out at their workplaces as 'model workers'. When they were asked, what had made them so, they would simply answer: 'We are Christians'. Some cadre leaders acknowledged quite openly, that there is no trouble with Christians and that they don't cause any problems. They are usually honest, reliable and trustworthy.

In the rural areas the record had been even more startling. A certain

percentage of the crops had to be sold to the state at a fixed price. The rest could be sold on the open market, where the price was usually much higher. Christian farmers had chosen to sell to the state the best quality and more than their quota, whereas others had sold to the state the poorest quality and barely the quota. This fact had also been officially recognised by the state.

The Amity Foundation, founded in 1985, is the church's social arm. They are recruiting teachers from overseas for high schools and universities, funding subsidies for medical and welfare institutions, and operating the printing press in co-operation with the United Bible Societies. We visited the building for the new printing press. The machines were still not unpacked. Everything was brand new. It was a huge building and they had already orders for over 200,000 bibles which they wanted to print before Christmas. The annual production of bibles was to be over one million, with a staff of 200.

I was most impressed by the achievements of the christian church in China, and I hoped that this would become a model for churches elsewhere in the world. Western culture and theology was perceived by most Asian people as far too dominating, and the gospel was seen as something foreign. This had to change. I was grateful for this experience.

On our walks we came to a ferry which took us across the mighty Yangtse river. It was a great feeling to be on one of the worlds greatest rivers. We also walked along the two-decker bridge over the Yangtse, where cars used the upper deck and trains the lower. We had a lovely view from up there and we were so pleased to have left the rain behind. Going back to town we wanted to catch a bus, but there was no regular bus service. When eventually a bus pulled up, we took pot luck and got on it, without knowing where it went. I followed the route on my map and we were greatly relieved when it dropped us right in front of the Drum Tower, where we had wanted to go. Once again an invisible hand had guided us.

We couldn't get tickets to Beijing, all trains were full. The man at the ticket counter suggested we take a sleeper to Tianjin, from where it was only a couple of hours to Beijing. We did this. In Tianjin we queued up for tickets to Beijing. The ticket counter was still closed. When it opened, the orderly queue disintegrated, with everybody surging forward. People were coming in from the side, and I saw a man pushing his mate into the direction of the counter as hard as he could. By doing this he got well ahead of the others. Then people began to shout and scream at each other and a fist-fight developed. As I had no desire to get involved in the fight, and seeing that my position in the crowd got further and further behind, I gave up.

In the soft class waiting room there was also a queue in front of the ticket counter, but much more sedate and orderly. But the queue moved only very slowly forward. It took about ten minutes for one person to be served! Was it the system or the incompetence of the attendant? No

wonder tempers flared. When my turn came: “O mei, o mei, ... no ...”

She couldn't sell me the tickets. We had to wait. So we waited, not knowing why or for what. Eventually we were escorted to the train, still without tickets, and allocated a sleeping compartment, where we could sit with four Chinese people, who were soon engrossed in a lively conversation, and we just sitting there being dumb. When the conductor came around we finally paid for our tickets. We could have saved ourselves a lot of hassle!

Our first job in Beijing was to book our train on the Trans Siberian Express. The five-day trip to Moscow via Mongolia was booked out, but we were lucky to get two seats (hard class sleeper) on the six-day trip, a Russian train, via Manchuria.

The next job was to find a hotel room. The Intourist Travel agent in Sydney had told us that it was not possible to get a room in Beijing for under \$200 a night. We met an American couple who stayed at the Qiao Yuan for 34 yuan (about \$15). We were re-assured, but felt we could afford to pay a bit more. The Tiantan Sports Hotel had a room for 68 yuan (\$27), but a vacancy only for one night. We took it anyway, tomorrow was another day. We were overjoyed having a place to stay at this great country's Capital, and the assurance of a train ticket to Warsaw, via Moscow, for only 800 yuan each (\$320). Our next worry would be to get a tourist visa for Moscow. That would have to wait till the next day, as the day we arrived in Beijing was a Sunday, and even in this industrious country, Sunday was a holiday.

We tried in vain to find the protestant church in Beijing. We would have loved to worship there, but it was not to be. The address we had was wrong, and no one else in the hotel knew where it was. We tried to phone the Rev. Kau, but we had the wrong number: “O mei, o mei!”

In the morning luck was again on our side. It took some negotiation, but I eventually persuaded the booking clerk to allow us to stay in the hotel until our departure on 4 July. Now to the Russian Embassy. We went for long bus trips and even longer walks, but it was hard to find. Eventually we got there, only to find again a large crowd of people. When our turn came, we were told that we couldn't have a tourist visa. This would take three weeks. So we settled for a transit visa with the assurance that Intourist would find us a hotel for the night. The connecting train to Warsaw would be leaving the following day later in the evening, giving us practically a whole day and a half in Moscow.

The search for the International Post Office was another wild goose chase. It had changed address since our edition of the Lonely Planet. But we found it eventually, and were rewarded by three letters, two under the letter “T” and one under “D”. We were given three boxes full of ‘post restante’ letters, to find them by ourselves. Then we sent a telegram to Margie, who was waiting for it at Goldstone:

OBTAINED ONLY TRANSIT VISA RUSSIA ARRIVING MOSCOW 10 JULY
 TRYING STAY THERE TWO DAYS IF POSSIBLE SUGGEST YOU ARRIVE
 METROPOLE ORBIS HOTEL TWELVETH AND WAIT MAXIMUM
 TWO DAYS OUR COST. + MUMDAD

From 30 June we had time to do all the touristy things in and around Beijing. The Tiantan (Temple of Heavenly Peace) was just within walking distance from our hotel. I remembered it from my visit in 1964 with its most beautiful deep blue/azure tiled roof and splendid white marble, a most unforgettable place. The Tienanmen Square was absolutely immense, the embalmed Mao Zedong quite life-like. Through the Tienanmen gate we entered the forbidden city, which once served as the imperial palace. The golden/yellow tiled roofs with royal red and green painted wooden structures looked in excellent condition. Most of it was built in 1420. There were many buildings, reception halls, temples, royal quarters, offices and others. We also saw an exhibition of some beautiful crown jewels. The man-made mountain on the northern side with three pagodas gave us a beautiful overview of the Imperial city and of a good part of Beijing.

The Summer Palace about 12 km outside the city was also most impressive with its beautiful lake and park and the Ming-style buildings. And to think that all this was created by the Empress from syphoned off funds which had been budgeted for the navy! Good to know that corruption is a world-wide phenomenon.

For 15 yuan each we caught an airconditioned bus, which took us on a tour of the Great Wall and the Ming Tombs, from early morning till late afternoon. On this bus we met a German couple, Nicholas and Birgit Bocter. They were very friendly. We were to meet them again later. The ancient and gigantic wall is the only man-made structure that can be seen from the moon, we were told. The building of it was begun in 221 BC against the Mongol invaders. The bricks had to carry the name of the brickmaker, to ensure good craftsmanship. The top forms a road which is wide enough to hold five horsemen abreast, now about 15 tourists. Its total length is approximately 6,000 km, much of it now in bad repair, apart from the section we visited. Climbing up the steep side, the much less travelled road, we were reminded of our climb of Ayers Rock, but with the balustrades on either side it didn't affect me in the same way.

Food in Beijing was easy to obtain. There were lots of restaurants. For 'auld langsyne' we went one night to the Xinqiao for dinner, the hotel I had stayed in 1964. But for a few people the restaurant was empty, and the food was very mediocre. One night we dined for 30 yuan each (\$12) in a Beijing Duck Restaurant. Whilst this was the most expensive dinner we had in China, it was also the best. The roast duck was superb. The waiter showed us how to wrap the meat inside the pancake with sauce and spring onions. I had never tasted a duck as tender and juicy as that before.

In preparation for our six-day train journey to Moscow the Lonely Planet had suggested to buy lots of provisions, as the food on the train was said to be only very poor. We did this, lots of tinned meat, tinned fruit, jam, soup, sausages and bread, all extra luggage, but again we were well advised.

Beijing station is said to handle over 90,000 passengers a day. They all seemed to be there when we arrived. It was steaming hot, the locals were fanning themselves even walking in the street. The waiting room was full of Westerners, all waiting for the Moscow train. There goes our cabin for two, we thought, as hard class had berths for four. But the train was enormously long, and we did get our cabin for two, what luxury!

The train was spotlessly clean, white sheets and a nice pillow. There were two attendants per car, ours were a male and a female Russian, whom we called Ivan and Mrs. Ivan. They took shifts to look after us. Although quite severe looking and very rarely smiling, they were kind and friendly to us. No English, of course. With the help of Margies phrase book and searching my brain for some school Russian, we managed. The seats were not at all hard. They were vinyl covered upholstery and quite comfortable. Ivan or Mrs. would come at night to convert them into a bunk with a good mattress, clean white sheets and a pillow. Above this was another bunk which could be let down if there were four persons in the cabin.

Then it was good-bye to Beijing, our last stay in China. As the train pulled out of the station punctually at 8.30 pm, a few heavy drops of rain fell. The sky was black. It had been building up to this thunder storm all afternoon, and then it came pelting down, bringing refreshment to people, animals and plants. The train was rushing through a prosperous looking countryside, and against the black clouds I saw a brilliant rainbow.

Next door to our cabin was a couple from New Zealand, Don and Leslie Campbell. They had pre-booked their trip from Hong Kong to Helsinki, paying about \$6000 each. They had stayed at the most expensive hotels everywhere and complained that the standard had definitely not been five-star. In some places Don had to repair some taps before they could have a shower. They had also been about four weeks in China, and seen much the same places as we, with the addition of Xian. However, they had gone most of the way by plane. They had booked Beijing to Moscow on the trans-Mongolian train, but when they arrived in Beijing, they were told that the train was full and that they would have to go on this train, via Manchuria. Hearing this we felt even happier, that we had not booked our trip in Australia.

After a good night's sleep in our 'hard class', we had a sumptuous breakfast from the provisions we had brought with us. We could get as much tea from our attendants as we wanted. We would try the dining car for dinner that night. Shenyang was our first stop. After that the countryside began to look poorer. The fields were no longer producing

rice but mainly corn and potatoes and the villages consisted of mud-brick homes. The roads were unpaved, showing deep mud from the downpour the previous night. But all homes had a T.V. antenna. We had stopped at Changchun and in the evening light the city of Harbin showed itself in all its glory. It was a large place with heavy and light industry. The streets looked broad and were full of people.

Dinner was to be our last Chinese meal. I love eating in a dining car, enjoying a nice meal and watching the countryside go by the window. It brought back fond memories of my childhood. The meal was quite good, except the rice, which was of poor quality. One dish looked to me like sea cucumber (a mollusc). Alison poked her chop stick into it and her face said it all. She couldn't eat it, even when I suggested it might be egg plant, although I was quite sure that it was sea cucumber.

We went to bed at 9.30 although it was still day-light. It got colder and we needed our blankets. The landscape had changed again, grass covered hills with the odd cattle or horses grazing.

At 4.30 the next morning we were rudely wakened by Ivan. He said something in Russian which we couldn't understand, but it was pretty obvious, he wanted us all to get up and get dressed. An hour later we arrived at the Russian border. A lot of Chinese in army uniforms descended on the train. Our passports were collected, and one man wanted to see our two cameras. That was all. We were stretching our legs in the crisp morning air, when someone came over to us, holding our two passports, ordering us: "You come!"

We were in trouble. We followed him, with no idea what it was all about. "Did you know that your visa had expired," an officer spoke to us through an interpreter.

"No. We had applied for a visa for four weeks, and we stayed exactly four weeks in China."

"This visa was valid for three months, it expired on 17 June."

"But how is that possible, we only arrived in Guangzhou on 9 June? Today is 6 July."

"Here, look at the visa. It says clearly 'expires on 17 June'."

"I'm sorry, I can't read Chinese."

"You must be punished."

"But how were we to know?"

"You must be punished!"

After some discussion among themselves, the Interpreter said: "You must pay fine of 100 Yuan (\$40)"

"We are only poor people, and it surely wasn't our fault!"

"You must be punished."

Nothing would persuade the officer. We had spent all our Yuan, so we went to the exchange and after some considerable waiting got 105 Yuan for \$40. Alison went to pay the fine, while I changed back the five Yuan into 1 US\$.

When I came back, Alison was agitated. Something was wrong again.

"You only paid 100 Yuan. You should have paid 200."

"But you said 100."

"Yes, 100 each."

"I am sorry, that was a misunderstanding, but 200 Yuan is far too much. We haven't got that much money. Please accept this as our fine."

The interpreter seemed quite sympathetic and I had the impression that he eventually persuaded the officer to accept this.

Meanwhile the whole train had been waiting for us. The procedure had taken rather a long time. As soon as we were back in our car, the train pulled off. What a fiasco! The only explanation we could think of was that the Embassy in Canberra had given us a three months visa from the date of issue, without telling us. Well, 100 yuan was still better than 200!

When the train arrived on the Russian side, we had a repeat performance. Swarms of Russian military descended on our train, taking our passports first, then someone wanted to see all our reading material, but they couldn't find anything offensive. Finally our apples and tomatoes were inspected, but we could keep them. 'Better than in Australia between the States,' I thought. Then the bogies had to be changed, because Russia is the only country in Asia and Europe with a wider gauge. The cars were lifted by a heavy crane, while the passengers were allowed to remain, the old bogies removed, new bogies rolled under, then the cars were lowered back on them, and finally everything was bolted together. The whole procedure took about four hours.

By then we were hungry and sleepy. But again we were rudely awakened by some Russian passengers who wanted to come into our cabin. Ivan came to our rescue. He suggested that Don and Leslie, the New Zealand couple from next door, moved into our cabin. They were very gracious to share the compartment with us. Really a wonderful couple, and it was a privilege to get to know them better. Don had just sold his lucrative and successful design and engineering firm, built up by himself, and Leslie was an English highschool teacher. They were now on a year's vacation and we got on very well with them and had a lovely time together until Moscow.

From the border all people on the stations looked European. I was wondering what the Russians had done with the original inhabitants. The landscape had also changed from the steppe to fields and woods, mainly birches, poplars and pines. Forests covered 500 million hectares in Siberia, a territory larger than Europe, supplying enough oxygen for a quarter of the world's population.

What a thrill to hear the first lark singing away with not a care in the world! Childhood memories came flooding back. The villages looked also similar to some of those in the backwaters of Poland, and the women wore head-scarfs just like ours used to do.

The Russian dining car was good. Excellent Borscht, the famous Slavonic beetroot soup, and chicken or beef Stroganoff. It had been a very

long day for us and we were far too tired to wait for the night to come. We went to sleep still in broad daylight.

At day break we arrived at Ulan Ude, where the train line from Vladivastok joined ours. Shortly afterwards we came to Lake Baikal. It is said to be the largest fresh water lake in the world, it was immense! We couldn't see the other side. The deepest place is 1620 m, and it contains 20% of the world's fresh water. Towards the western shore, where the lake narrowed, I saw some foam floating on the lake. It looked like industrial pollution, which was confirmed later on.

The train took three hours along the lake before we came into Irkutsk, the capital of Siberia. This was the first big city in Russia since the border. We were able to buy some cream buns on the platform and a big loaf of heavy Russian black bread. It was good to be able to stretch our legs, walking along the whole length of the train and we had a brief glimpse of the city from the station.

After Irkutsk, the nights never got completely dark. We had come close to the Arctic Circle and we had to learn to go to bed in bright daylight, and wake with the sun again high in the sky. We tried to buy some more food in Krasnoyarsk, but had no luck. Although the landscape didn't change, we saw more villages along the train line. Homes were all built from timber, and each one was surrounded by a garden with potatoes growing. At a smaller station Russian babushkas were selling sour cucumber, potato salad, sauerkraut and even strawberries. But we were too slow, it was all snapped up by the more experienced travellers.

When the four of us walked along the corridors to have our dinner, the dining car was locked. We had miscalculated the time. All time tables on the train were running on Moscow time. We had adjusted our watches according to local times at the stations, and so we missed out on a meal. But luckily we had our provisions from Beijing! We invited Don and Leslie to bread, cottage cheese, roast duck (full of bones) and beetroot, followed by plums. It was certainly better than starving!

In Sverdlovsk I tried again to buy some bread. There were two shops on the platform, both had attendants inside, but they just didn't open. I knocked at the window, but the answer came from inside: "nyet!" and that was it. It could have meant 'don't bother me now, I don't want to, why should I sell you something which means work for me, etc.' Nobody cared, although a whole train full of people wanted to buy some food, which we could see in the kiosk. I didn't like the system.

We tried three times to go to the dining car to get some lunch, but it was "nyet" again. It certainly was not our day! When it finally opened there was such a rush, that we missed out on the first session, so we decided to join the queue. Whilst waiting a Russian pointed out that we had just crossed the border into Europe. We were in the Ural mountains, and we hadn't noticed it. They were low hills, without any rough peaks. Don and Leslie invited us for a dinner which was brought to us in baskets.

At least this way we could be sure to get our dinner. For sweets we shared a tin of pears, the last of our supply from Beijing. Thanks to THE LONELY PLANET, we never had to starve on board the train.

The atmosphere on this Trans-Siberian train was quite wonderful. We knew most passengers in our car, if not by name, certainly by face. There was a Japanese male student who had taken a year off from studies heading for Europe, India, and Israel. He was fond of practising karate chops on his friend. After a well-placed kick in his sternum his friend fell off his bunk, but luckily, there were no injuries. A Chinese mother and son with nephew returned to Russia from a family re-union in Hong Kong. They had been on an extended shopping spree. When they left the train in Novosibirsk for Alma Ata, near the Chinese border, parcels after parcels appeared on the platform. I never knew one could travel with so much luggage!

Then there was an Englishman from Newcastle returning after eight months globe-trotting, and two German-Swiss boys who kept much to themselves as their English was not too good. I had a few chats with them in German, which they seemed to appreciate. Sophia came from Moscow, a very vivacious and friendly lady. I think she was an actor. She was about 40, and had usually quite an international gathering around her. When I heard lots of laughter from her cabin, I would join them sometimes. Through my almost forgotten Polish and rather limited Russian, I was able to interpret when the conversation got bogged down. Once I just missed out on a tea and vodka party! The German couple we had met in the bus to the Great Wall, were also on the train, but they were travelling soft class, which meant that we only saw each other at stations.

I had bought a pack of very small patience cards especially for this train trip, but I don't think I used it very much. There was always something to do, and we didn't get bored at all. Occasionally I would read, often I would just stand in the corridor and look out of the window or chat with the other passengers.

We arrived in Moscow on Friday, 10 July in the afternoon, perhaps an hour and a half later than scheduled. Not bad for a trip through a whole continent. Don and Leslie were met by an Intourist officer. He told us that only Intourist had the authority to allocate hotel beds for foreigners. What a difference to China! He gave us the address in the city and told us to catch the Metro, only a few stations to Marx Prospect.

We took our suitcases over our shoulders and walked in peak hour to the overcrowded station. I was lucky to be able to read Russian and to get on the right train. At the Intourist office they wanted to give us a room for 185 Rubles, which was about \$US180. With a bit of gentle persuasion they made a couple of phone calls and offered us eventually a room in the Berlin Hotel for 36 Rubles. We were jubilant. Persistency paid, even in Russia. The only condition was that we had to pay it in US dollars, i.e. \$54, which we had in cash. The Berlin was quite close to the Intourist office, so

we walked there.

The hotel had seen better days, but our room was quite adequate. It had a basin with running water, but the bathroom was down the corridor. The first thing we both did was jump into the bath, to wash off soot and grime, which had accumulated over six days, without having a shower. After that, all our tiredness vanished. When talking to the receptionist, she insisted that I had to go to the railway booking office to book our train to Warsaw the next day.

The place was full of people and the person at the counter was most unhelpful. He wanted to send us to the station to buy the tickets, and in any case, they were really closed as it was already 7pm (closing time 6pm). He was obviously over-worked and under paid, but that didn't help us. By then I had enough. Why should we be running around, wasting our precious time to buy tickets, when the Russian authorities wanted us to leave the next day, which was not our choice? We returned to our hotel and said to the receptionist, that we were unable to get the tickets, would she be so kind to do this for us. First she grumbled, but then she agreed.

By then quite hungry, we went to the dining room, expecting to have our meal. Had we booked? Of course not, we had just arrived, but we were staying at this hotel. Things were again difficult, but after seeing the head waiter and insisting that we had to eat, we were allocated a table. The dinner at the Berlin was most delicious, particularly after six days travelling. To our surprise, we saw the Bocter's just a few tables further down from us, having their evening meal. They were also staying at the Berlin. They invited us to their place at Düsseldorf on our way to England, as they wanted to hear more about our experiences in China.

After dinner we walked to the Red Square. By then it was already after 10pm, and we thought we would be the only ones on Red Square. When we arrived there, thousands of others were milling around. The soft evening light transformed St.Basil's church and the Kremlin almost into a fairyland.

After a wonderful sleep we had a most delicious breakfast with cultured buttermilk, two frankfurts, bread rolls, butter jam and cheese, so different to our Asian breakfasts! The receptionist greeted us with a smile, she had been able to get our tickets. This left us plenty of time to join a guided bus tour through Moscow.

Red Square in full daylight didn't look as enchanting as the night before. It was again full of people and a long queue was waiting to see Lenin in his tomb. We thought, to have seen Mao was quite enough for us. Anyway, there was no time for that.

Our guide pointed out the place in the square where a young German pilot from Hamburg had landed a couple of weeks earlier. We thought this was a great joke, but our guide had a straight face and didn't let us know what he thought of it, but I could see a faint twinkle in his eye.

The bus took us around the Kremlin and from one of the many bridges

we had a good view of the many basilicas and onion-shaped domes within the Kremlin.

An Orthodox monastery, away from the city, would be celebrating 1000 years of Christianity in Russia the following year. It seemed a busy place where worshippers mingled with workers and the monks. We were also shown the stadium of the 1980 Olympic games. The Moscow University was an absolutely enormous building, many stories high. I had seen a replica of it, though on a much smaller scale, in Warsaw. We stopped at a popular spot where two bridal parties in their traditional western style dresses had their photos taken. But the purpose of our stop was not to see the bridal couples, but to enjoy the most beautiful view of the city.

We passed another church which was open for regular worship, not like many others which had been converted to museums. Some more famous buildings followed, giving us a really good overview of Moscow. We couldn't have picked a better tour for the short time we had available.

As we had some more time after the tour we set out to visit Ruth Adler, a friend of a friend of ours from Canberra. It took some searching, but eventually we found her flat. She had to share it with other tenants, which can't have been easy. She was very pleased to see us, though, and we had quite a long chat with her, sitting around a dining table in the kitchen. Living space seemed scarce in Moscow.

After a good lunch at our hotel we tried in vain to get a taxi to the Byeloruski station. Neither the Hotel could help us, nor were we able to hail one in the street. We just literally had to pick up our bags and walk to the Metro, which took us there very quickly.

We had no trouble finding the train for Warsaw. The notices were all written in Polish, and our cabin companion said that we were on a Polish train. He was a Polish business man from Warsaw, who couldn't speak any English, only a smattering of German. To my surprise, we were able to have quite a good conversation. He spoke slowly in Polish, and I answered in German. My Polish, which had been deeply buried in my subconsciousness, came slowly to the surface. This was a most extraordinary experience.

He had nothing positive to say about Russia. He sold electronic equipment to many countries in the East, but Russia seemed to be at the bottom of his likes. He was very polite and friendly, and when we were preparing to go to bed, he just disappeared, leaving us by ourselves. Dinner was excellent on the train, and we slept till about 5 the next morning. We had arrived at the Polish border. The Russian border control was again very thorough, but they left us and our luggage in peace.

I had some four rubles left, and I asked the officer where I could change it back to hard currency. The exchange rate was then 0.43 rubles per Australian dollar. He suggested that I keep them as souvenirs. I didn't like the idea. I should get more than \$9 for it, so I asked him, was it not illegal for foreigners to own rubles? He shrugged his shoulders and sent me to an

exchange place. After I had received my dollars, there were still 50 kopeks left, which they didn't want to exchange. Again they suggested I should keep it as a souvenir. 'Nyet, my dear', I said again, this was illegal, and since I insisted, they eventually gave me another dollar, as they didn't have any smaller change (or couldn't they work out the amount?).

Meanwhile, the bogies had been changed again, and the train was approaching the actual border. Our Polish companion pointed out the barbed wire on the Russian side, whereas the Polish side had no wires at all. His comments were: "This is just one example of the difference between us and Russia. They don't want anybody to leave Russia, whereas we can travel wherever we like."

The Poles seemed a free and easy people. Even the border police did their inspection while the train kept moving. How sensible, I thought, why can't the others do the same? Two hours later we arrived at Warsaw.

The station was most impressive. Announcements were made in Polish, English and German, no Russian. I changed some money into Zlotys, bought a ticket to Poznan, and was told that our train would be leaving after 1pm. So we had ample time on our hand. Our clocks had been put back by two hours and since breakfast seemed a long way ago, we were rather hungry. There was a buffet style restaurant in the station with an excellent choice of food.

Well satisfied we ambled along the station, not really knowing how to pass the time, when I heard the announcer mentioning the arrival of a train to Berlin via Poznan. We rushed to get our luggage from the hold and made it to the platform just as the train was pulling in. It was the Moscow Berlin sleeper, which we could have caught, but which must have been fully booked from Moscow. As we saw some people getting off, we went to the conductor, showing him our tickets, including Beijing Moscow to prove that we were international travellers. He got a bit confused, but let us board the train anyway. This would save us two and a half hours.

We thought of Margie, who could be in Poznan by then, as it was the 12th, the earliest we said in our cable we would arrive there. Would she be already waiting for us, or would we arrive before her? When one is eagerly expecting a meeting, time is usually crawling. So it was with our journey from Warsaw to Poznan. We just longed to meet up with Margie. At the station in Poznan there was no Margie. It was really silly to think that she would be there waiting for us. We hired a taxi and arrived at the Metropole around 3pm. Standing at the receptionist desk, having just booked a room for us, I asked whether a Margaret Tieman had booked in earlier. Suddenly somebody grabbed me from behind. I turned around and found myself in Margie's arms. She had arrived just four hours earlier. What a wonderful re-union after such a long distance travelled!

As soon as we had checked in and showered, we went for a sentimental walk through the city. It had been more than 42 years since that fateful

morning, when as a sixteen year old I had walked with my comrades from the anti aircraft gun battery through the streets of Poznan to the same railway station we had arrived a little earlier. I thought of how our train only just had made it, the second last to get through to Germany without being shot at by the Russian army.

But there was peace in 1987. Poznan had suffered terribly under the fighting in 1945. The Palace had lost its tower, but had otherwise been restored. The university seemed unchanged from my days. I felt like walking in my sleep, recognising long forgotten land marks, which brought back sweet memories. We walked into several hotels to enquire about their tariff and room availabilities. As they were all cheaper than the Metropole, we decided to move into the Poznanski the next day, for sentimental reasons. It was here that my Opa had stayed in 1918 on the day the armistice had been declared, and when there was shooting in the square, but being deaf he had slept through it all.

However, we didn't need the room at the Poznanski after all. Mrs. Janiec, a cousin of Maria, a former nanny of Gerdas, had phoned and invited us to stay at her flat. Her son was going to pick us up the next morning. We slept well that night, although Alison missed the rocking movement of the train. We enjoyed a lovely Polish breakfast next morning, which was included in the price of \$US115.

Mrs. Janiec came for us with her son in their Fiat. They shared their three-room flat with us most generously. Andre, their son, dropped us off at the old Market, which had been beautifully restored to its former glory. The war had virtually flattened the old patrician homes, and the town hall had been half destroyed. We took a guided tour and were very impressed with the restoration work of the Poles.

We also saw an old Baroque church, quite dark inside. When our eyes got used to it and we admired the beautifully decorated church, which had not been destroyed during the war. Then we searched for my old Schiller School. Again the feeling of sleep-walking along a well trodden path 43 years ago. The school had lost its upper three floors, I nearly didn't recognise it.

We had lunch at a good restaurant. It was full when we arrived, but we didn't mind waiting, the food we got there was certainly well worth waiting for.

Returning by tram I was surprised to see that it was still the No.4 as in my days. We stopped at what used to be called the Bürger Park and walked towards the street where our Siebenbürger Boarding house was. I had no trouble finding the Helmonskego Street. The building stood there quite unchanged and I told Alison and Margie some of the stories from my boyhood.

Mr. & Mrs. Janiec took us on a sightseeing tour around Poznan in the evening. They showed us the almost completed church to seat about five to six thousand people, the largest in Poland, with other halls and offices

and quarters for the priests, a school and a library. It was a modern design and most impressive. They also showed us an old castle, and on the way to the lake Gorka, we passed the old property of Count Racinski at Rogalin. The beautifully kept park had two onethousand year-old oaks which we had to admire. Lake Gorka was the place where we had been many times as children to celebrate my Opa's birthdays. In the soft evening light it looked like in the old days. A cuckoo was calling and water birds were squabbling over some food. It was all so beautiful and peaceful.

On the following day we went to Strykowo, first to Maria and then over to Sapowice. Andre took us by car. Maria was so pleased to see us. She would have recognised me, as I looked like Vater, she said. Then the most emotional part of our journey started. We began at Strykowo station, which had not changed at all. In my mind we had just arrived from school and were racing our cousins to the street corner in our carriages. Then we turned into the road towards Sapowice. The lake on our left, we arrived at our border, then at the forest which my Opa had planted at the end of the last century, and which had been enlarged by Vater. This had been the destination of many Sunday afternoon walks with the family. Mighty trees greeted us, as we drove into the forest to look for the vault and private burial ground of our family, where my Opa was buried. It was heavily overgrown and we nearly walked past without seeing it. The fence was missing and I couldn't see any head stones. We had heard that our people had buried Opa's and his son Walter's coffin in the ground, to prevent them from being desecrated. The heavy granite stone with a cross had fallen and lay hidden by brambles.

After leaving the forest, we stopped the car at Święty Jan, a chestnut grove in the fork of the road, where the statue of St. John still watched over Sapowice. We walked into the park through the side gate towards the vegetable garden, but what disappointment, it wasn't there any more. Just fields, no fence, no hedge, just a heap of rubble where the glass houses had stood. Then we searched in vain for our boat house. There was nothing, not even the jetty. The lawn towards the manor house had all but disappeared, grown over by trees from both sides. We had such a lovely view of the lake from the house, was there no one interested in keeping it that way? Also the path to our bathing shed was grown over, leaving only a narrow track. Opa had always seen to it that the walk ways were maintained in immaculate order. But the lake was beautiful as before, tranquil and framed with trees on either side. I was tempted to go for a swim, but Margie didn't want to, so we left it, walking instead across what used to be lawn, now a sports ground. Nothing left of the tennis court, but the three linden trees which had formed a shelter for Oma's favourite sitting spot, were still there.

Around the manor house was a builder's fence. The outside walls had been newly rendered and new windows put in. The back terrace still looked a mess. I looked for another of those tiles George had brought back

from his visit in 1977, but there was no trace of them. Then Andre asked one of the workers if we could go through the house. He just nodded, what a bonus for us!

We walked up the front steps where we had always stood for the harvest festival presentations. The hall still had its old tiles, but the walls had all been newly rendered, parquetry replaced by concrete, and some doors had been bricked up, while others had been created. We heard that the Raczyński Library of Poznań had taken over the house for storage and as a branch office. Walking through the room where we always celebrated Christmas with the whole family, brought tears into my eyes. Was some of the childhood magic still there?

Then we looked through all the rooms upstairs, and I thought that the renovators had really done an excellent job. I was so pleased that Alison and Margie could see the house from the inside, it gave them so much more of an impression about what must have been there in the past. They just had to imagine the views of the lake from each room.

As we left the manor house, we came past our beloved climbing tree with its three branches, where once little feet had climbed nimbly to the very top. And the linden tree of my childhood dreaming stood still there in all its majesty, just larger around the trunk. I had the distinct feeling it responded to my touch.

The 'villa' was occupied by the administrator of the farm. It looked in good condition. I had to smile, though, what had become of the once beautiful hedge of beech trees along the drive way. They had never been trimmed and had grown into a row of tall, thin beech trees.

The old village pump was still there, but it didn't seem to be in use any more. We saw the farm yard from the outside only, we didn't want to cause a stir. Slowly we walked back to the car. It had been good to see it all again, even though it became very emotional for me.

Before we drove back to Maria for lunch, we went via Antonin, our old out station, to show Alison and Margie the extent of our property. In the afternoon the son of our former mason called with his wife. Kubala and I used to play together so often in the park. He had followed his father's foot steps and showed us with great pride his own house he had built. Then he took us again to Sapowice and we called at Stefan Kempa's house in the village. He was another play-mate of mine. When we arrived, he was just tinkering with his car.

"I have just brought some visitors," Kubala said. "You should know the man."

Stefan looked at me and shook his head, "I don't know him."

"Look again and think back many years when you were boys."

Suddenly his face lit up: "Dieter Tieman, I know you. You look just like your father when you were here." And he opened his arms and gave me a big hug.

Soon József (whom we used to call Józiu) dropped in, his younger

brother. He too eventually recognised me. What a wonderful re-union! I thought, Stefan also looked like his father Franz, who had been our coach driver, car driver and Opa's personal valet. The reminiscing continued for a long time:

"Do you remember when the donkey run away?"

"Or when we stole the pears, and Opa was chasing us with his dog Nellie?"

It went on and on. I was so pleased that I could still understand them, only my comments were rather short and slow coming, but I got more fluent in Polish as the afternoon progressed. Time ran out only too quickly.

Before Kubala took us back to Strykowo, he wanted to show us the church he had helped build in Sapowice. In the belfry hung a bell.

"See this bell? It once hung on the cow shed, calling people to work for our master, your father. Now it is calling much the same people to worship our Lord and Master in heaven."

I was deeply moved. I had told him that I was a minister, and he knew that I would be pleased about it.



Back in the train again from Poznan to Berlin, we had to cross the East German border near Frankfurt-Oder. Our engine had to be changed from electric to diesel and I thought to myself, why? We had come from Siberia to the East German border by electric trains. Was East Germany so much poorer? or was it just bad administration? I also noticed that the East Berlin homes looked all drab and unfriendly. So were the border police, they never smiled. We left the train in West Berlin, found some relatively cheap accommodation, went for a stroll along the famous Kurfürsten Damm with its outside cafes, and had a look at the Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtnis Kirche (Emperor Wilhelm Memorial Church), which had been destroyed by the bombs. Only its ruined shell had been preserved, a reminder of the destruction of wars. A new part had been added, which is now a museum. It contained a cross of nails sent by the people of Coventry Cathedral in England from the burnt beams of their Cathedral, also destroyed during the war. It was a beautiful symbol of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Food prices were very expensive in Berlin, especially compared with Eastern Europe. But we found a typical German restaurant where we each had a huge plate full of fried potatoes with eggs, bacon and some vegetables, all fried like an omelette.

My friend Walter Grube was very generous with his time. He took us three on a sightseeing tour through West Berlin, along the Wannsee, and showed us the place where his boat was moored. We had a lavish

afternoon tea and supper at Walter and Marthas. The following day we took a train to Düsseldorf, where we were going to stay at the Bocter's, our friends from the bus to the Great Wall in China. Crossing the border into West Germany, we saw the infamous tall fence with intermittent watch towers as far as the eye could see. A strip of about fifty meters had been ploughed, a sad reminder, that Germany was still divided and the iron curtain was very much in evidence.

At Hanover we had to say good-bye to Margaret. She would catch a train to München, where she wanted to meet up with her Oma, who was staying at the Goebels, my cousins who had stayed with us during the last years of the war.

For a whole day we sampled life in Düsseldorf, a very elegant and beautiful city. The Bocter's were most hospitable, and we had long talks about their and our China trip.

From Düsseldorf we went by train to Köln, where we caught a Rhine steamer, the most expensive leg of our trip. We had to pay DM.139 (\$127) each for just 200 km to Mainz. But we didn't go on a Rhine steamer to save money. In fact that was impossible, as the price for a pot of tea was DM.5. If we had to spend a penny, the charge was 40 pfennig! I was quite annoyed about the latter charge, as if our tickets were not expensive enough! But we tried to cheer ourselves up with a bottle of Rhine wine, however, the atmosphere remained dull. What had become of the beautiful 'stimmung' (aura), where people were singing and drinking, as I remembered it from years ago? Perhaps they had priced themselves out of the market, since only a few people were on board.

At Mainz we stayed at the Koblenzer Hof. It was just two minutes from the wharf, with moderate prices but quite adequate. Some shopping the next morning, before we went on our last train journey to Hanau, near Frankfurt, where we were staying at my cousin's Bernd and Ingrid. This completed the overland journey Hong Kong to Frankfurt.



It was good to catch up with news. We hadn't seen each other since 1972. Bernd had taken a week off work to be with us. We did lots of things together, went on lovely walks, visited the Town Hall, and Alison went to a typical German market. She particularly liked the most beautiful flowers there.

From Frankfurt we caught a flight to Manchester, where Sheila Nichols, Alison's school friend, met us and took us to her place at Grange-over-Sands, a seaside town in the picturesque Lakes District of England. We very much enjoyed some long walks. We also climbed one mountain with Elspeth, Sheila's daughter, from where we had a breathtaking view of the area. The landscape is truly beautiful. Hills and mountains, green pastures

and woods framing the lakes, and fluffy sheep grazing, provided a peaceful atmosphere in the glow of the evening sun.

After five most relaxing days, Sheila took us to Oxford by car, where we stayed at Alison's niece Judith with husband Mark and their three children. Judith had been staying with us in Australia, while we were in Albion Park, and it was good to see them all. Lovely children. Oxford is indeed a University town and everything centres around it. It breathes history, and the beautifully preserved Tudor homes left an unforgettable impression on me. Alison and I went for long walks around the colleges, chapels and halls, climbed up Carfax Tower overlooking all of Oxford, and attended an evensong in Christ Church Cathedral, which was quite memorable. I even had a browse through Blackwell's book shop, through which I had ordered many theological books during my student days. I had never seen such an extensive bookshop in my life, I could have spent weeks there browsing! One day we went for a picnic with the children along the Thames, but the rain chased us home.

From Oxford by bus to London, then by train to Canterbury, where Mother met us with Robert. We spent four lovely weeks in Goldstone, doing the occasional bicycle trip to Sandwich and Sandwich bay, where we swam in the sea. It was good to be able to relax completely, not having to get up and go sightseeing or catching another train, bus or plane. Margie was also staying at Granny's during that time. Mother was just wonderful to us. We both thoroughly enjoyed ourselves and recuperated from our fairly strenuous trip.



On 25 August 1987, Mother, David and Sybil took us to Heathrow in pouring rain. Since our last visit in 1972 the 'orbital' motor way around London had been opened and the trip to Heathrow took only two hours. At Cairo we were met by Gerda and Fawzy, who took us to their flat in Dokki, a suburb of Cairo. They had recently bought a second flat just opposite theirs on the sevenths floor. They made it their apartment for guests. We had a lovely and airy bedroom with our own bathroom. Fawzy used the lounge room as his study. From one window we could see the Pyramids, early in the mornings, before the pollution enveloped the city in a thick haze.

During our two weeks stay we lapped up the wonderful hospitality of Gerda and Fawzy. We couldn't have wished for better hosts and tourist guides. The Cairo Museum has an unbelievable treasure of ancient exhibits. One can virtually immerse oneself into the most ancient history and culture of this world. A stone tablet mentioning the Israelites (Habiru) in the days of Jacob and Joseph, more than three thousand years ago, and the treasures of the tomb of Tut-Ankh-Amun. I particularly liked his

golden face mask. Standing on my toes I could look straight into his eyes, and I had the feeling that he looked back at me. Most uncanny.

This is where the belief in life after death finds its best artistic expression. It was not yet spiritualised, as real gold and wealth for the life beyond was added to the tomb. The mask alone weighed 9 kg. of solid gold. It had been placed over the head and shoulders of the king's mummy. He had died aged 18 years. The falcon head upon the brow was the symbol of sovereignty over upper Egypt, and the cobra next to it was the symbol of sovereignty over lower Egypt. The eyes, eye-brows and lids were all made of precious stone.

We also saw the sculpture of king Aknaton who had introduced monotheism into Egypt, roughly during the time of Moses, and I wondered what influence this must have had on the development of monotheism among the Hebrews. These were only some of my thoughts that came to me as I studied those ancient artefacts. I could have spent days in that museum without getting tired, speaking in a metaphorical sense, of course, as after a few hours we were physically quite exhausted.

The Citadel, actually a mosque built early last century, had a commanding view over Cairo and was built, no doubt, with a strategic purpose in mind. Near the Sultan Hasan mosque we came across a notice in English which made us laugh:

FOR INFANTRY ONLY

(In Australia it would have read: FOR PEDESTRIANS ONLY)

It is not surprising that in the land of the pyramids, the ordinary dead would be honoured too. This culture has led a whole suburb to be declared a 'City of the Dead'. This contained town house sized tombs and monuments, where the living could have easily lived.

The mosques were most impressive. Part of the Al Azhar Mosque was the oldest university in the world, established in 972 A.D. The professor would sit in 'the chair' and his students would sit on the carpeted floor around him.

We had been given an address of a Coptic christian in Cairo. He took us for the Sunday service to the 'hanging church' or El Mu'alla'a, which was built on top of tower gate columns, a Roman fortress called Babylon. The church was built in the fourth century. It had three pillars in the centre, symbolising the Trinity, and six pillars on either side, representing the twelve apostles. The service took well over two hours. It included a baptism, long readings, a sung liturgy accompanied by cymbals, and a cloud of incense smoke rising to the top (symbolising the Holy Spirit?) and tickling our noses. A guide took us around and showed us some of the 90 icons, and an escape stairwell down to the river, for the priest and congregation to escape, if attacked by persecutors. It is good to be prepared! The Coptic museum was also in that area. We learnt there that

‘Copt’ actually meant Egyptian. They are the true descendants of the ancient Egyptian race, if not diluted by Arabic blood over many centuries since then.

We were also shown St. Sergius church from the fourth century where a crypt commemorated the place where Joseph and Mary with baby Jesus had taken shelter for a few days. Nice thought, we said, but far removed from reality. Good for tourists. It was here also that we came across a modern philosopher, a noticeboard with the following inscription:

The Angels from their thrones on high
Look down on us with wondering eye
That where we are but passing guests
We build such strong and solid nests
And where we hope to dwell for aye
We scarce take heed a stone to lay.

How appropriate!

The roads in this very old part of Cairo were very narrow, and the street level was far below present-day Cairo. To enter the older churches, we had to go again a few steps lower.

The Bazaar was another of Cairo’s attractions. Fawzy and Gerda insisted that we walked through it and absorb the atmosphere of life in the market place, as it has been going on for almost millennia. It was fascinating to watch the haggling and trading. If we wanted to buy anything we had to tell Fawzy and he would buy it for us. They were not to see us westerners, as otherwise the price would have doubled or tripled.

We heard a lovely story of a taxi driver, who was able to beat an American tourist at his own game.

American tourist being driven around Cairo: “How long did it take to build this bridge?”

Taxi driver: “Ten years”.

“We would do it in two! And this mosque, how long did it take to build that one?”

“Forty years.”

“We would do it in one year.”

After a couple of similar remarks the driver got really annoyed at such arrogance. They came past the pyramids.

“How long did it take you to build those?”

“Which, what, where? Oh, I hadn’t seen those when I came past here last week.”

The pyramids were really awe inspiring. What surprised me most was that when they were built they didn’t go down in steps, but were all smooth, polished stone, as the Cheops pyramid is today at the top. I

walked inside the Cheops to the burial chamber. I didn't get claustrophobia but nearly passed out in the chamber itself, as someone was applying some preservative to the wall which gave off acetone fumes. For a glue sniffer it probably would have been heaven, but not for me. I couldn't even look for the hole which is said to let the North Star shine on the king's head on one particular day of the year. The ancient Egyptians must have been fabulous astronomers and mathematicians! The second pyramid in Giza was that of king Chephren, and the third was built for king Mycerinus, all built around 2700 B.C.

Whilst we were in Cairo we heard that laser examinations had shown that 20 per cent of the pyramids is hollow.

The Sphinx was best seen at night. We went to a "Son et Lumiere" (sound and light) show one evening, which was most impressive. We heard there that Napoleon's troops had shot the nose off the Sphinx.

The most ancient pyramid is the Step Pyramid in Sakkara. From there we went to the tomb of Thi, a high court official. The frescoes were beautifully preserved, telling the viewer about life four and a half thousand years earlier. Artisans, musicians, dancers, scribes, soldiers, and animals. The artist was not without humour. He had painted a hippopotamus giving birth to a baby with a crocodile waiting with its jaw wide open.

On our way back to Cairo we passed through a village, where once the ancient capital of Memphis was. A resting figure of Rameses, a sphinx and some statues were all that was left of its former glory. The Nile was not far away, we saw plenty of bullrushes, and we could almost picture Moses in a basket!

One day Fawzy and Gerda took us along the main road half way to Alexandria. We turned into the desert to the oasis of Wadi el Natroun, where two monasteries were, Amba Bishoi and Abu Makarios. At the first we met a monk who knew Fawzy. He showed us the tomb of a saint who, the story goes, met Jesus Christ in disguise as an old man. He asked him to carry him, because he could no longer walk. So the monk carried him and the weight got heavier and heavier. He nearly broke down under the weight, but he didn't put his burden down. Then it became lighter and lighter, and the saint knew he carried Jesus. Jesus then promised him that after his death his body would not rot but stay fresh for ever. The coffin was built in such a way that people could touch the saint's hand and so receive healing from him. Recently the hole was closed, but people still touched the coffin to receive healing, and kissed the curtains of the altar.

The monastery was surrounded by a high wall against Bedouin attacks. We asked the monk how the teaching of the Coptic church helped people to live a better life in the world, but his answer was not convincing. We felt that superstition and mystery overruled rational thinking. People were held on the level of feeling, and there was no evidence of social involvement.

Our farewell meal was stuffed pigeons in a restaurant by the Nile. We watched all kinds of craft going by, tourist ferries to old falukas. It was our farewell from the Nile. Fawzy said, that whoever drinks water of the Nile will come back again. We sincerely hoped so, one day.

Via Singapore, with a rest of a few hours in a hotel with the compliments of the airline, our plane took us to Sydney. Australia greeted us with a spectacular sunrise. It was 8 September. Our long journey had ended. Four eventful months had passed. We arrived back in Canberra on 8 September with a grateful heart that all had gone smoothly and neither Alison nor I had become sick. It was difficult, though, to settle back at work, but I trusted the congregations would benefited from our experiences via my sermons for some time to come.



There is a post script to our tour. The airline bookings had been done by a Canberra travel agent, however, as they were unable to give us any information about train travelling from Beijing via Moscow to Berlin, we wrote in January 1987 to the Russian travel agency INTOURIST in Sydney to book the section Beijing Warsaw through them. We indicated that we would be prepared to pay about \$2,000 for both tickets. INTOURIST asked us to pay a deposit of \$500, which we did. Much later we discovered that they wanted to charge us \$3,500, which we found too expensive. I then asked for our deposit back, but they refused. On our return I wrote to the Department of Consumer Affairs, complaining about the unacceptable business ethics of INTOURIST. This matter was then forwarded to the Consumer Claims Tribunal which set a date for a hearing in November. Five days before the set date, INTOURIST paid us back the full deposit.

By doing the whole trip through China and Russia without prior booking, we saved about \$3500. The ticket from Beijing to Warsaw was \$310 p.person hard class, and train travelling through China amounted to \$160 p.person, with hotel accommodation for the two of us about \$700 and food \$375. To pay for all this we took \$5000 with us, half in traveller cheques, the rest in cash, some US dollars but most in Australian dollars. It took some preparation, but I think we have seen almost as much as we would have seen with a fully booked and guided tour. Our advantage was to have seen much more of the way people live in China by buying our own tickets, travelling in buses and trains, and rubbing shoulders with ordinary Chinese in eating places and in the beautiful parks. I'll be for ever grateful for the wonderful experience of this trip.

Building a church at Melba

By 1985 our congregation at Melba had grown considerably. Several members began to express their wish for a church building. Our sister congregation in Central Belconnen were in the process of building at Kippax. There were pros and cons on the matter of having a church building. I personally favoured no church building, as the arrangements with the Melba Primary School were quite adequate, using the large hall for the services on Sundays, and several class rooms for Sunday school. Our Parish Centre at Chinner Crescent was used for weekday activities, which until then was sufficient. However, I must admit that for some activities we were running out of space fairly rapidly.

By not having a church building, the congregation was spared an enormous financial burden, not only of servicing an initial capital loan, but also maintenance. Overall I thought it was good stewardship to share the school building, which was not being used on Sundays. But the pro-building voices became louder and more numerous. Over the years the rent for the school had been increased quite considerably, and after our congregation had been locked out a couple of times, as the caretaker hadn't come to open the building, and we had to have our services in the car park, I became more inclined towards a building. I said, however, in our quarterly magazine LINK, in Winter 1986:

“... that we could not simply assess the situation according to commercial values, viabilities and funding. We needed to measure what we intended doing according to the task that God had given to the Melba congregation and its need to serve the community. What will ultimately determine the size, shape and location of the building is not the budget, but how much faith we have in God to provide the needs of His work in our area ... Do we look upon this as our task given to us by God, or is it simply a matter of ‘it would be nice to own our own building’? What is God actually asking us to do here at Melba? ... If God wants us to go ahead with it, then let us walk in faith, together with God.”

When the decision was taken to build at the beginning of 1987, I heard from my Indonesian friends in Sydney, that their congregation was asked

to pay rent for the church building in which they held their afternoon services. The Indonesians were outraged. They wouldn't mind to help with the cleaning, with working bees, paying for part of the electricity bill, but paying rent went against their theological and cultural grain. The building had been dedicated to God, they said, and didn't belong to the congregation. I felt this was a timely reminder for our building programme, and I shared this insight with the congregation.

A stewardship programme was conducted towards the end of 1987. Meanwhile, all groups in the church were consulted about their anticipated use of a church complex and an architect's brief was compiled. A building site of 1.1 ha. was chosen opposite the Melba High School, next to the Melba Health Centre. It was large enough for future development. As a small but strong group opposed the building programme, on theological and on financial grounds, we arrived at a compromise. Ten percent of funds collected over and above our normal budget requirements would go into an Outreach fund, to be distributed annually. In this way everybody was able to pull together, even for fundraising activities, as 90% would go to the building fund and 10% to the Outreach fund. It was also decided to build a multi-purpose building, to be used for all church activities during the week.

The actual work on the building began in 1989, and it was opened on 17 June 1990, two weeks before my retirement.



In February 1989 I raised with the Parish Council the timing for a change of ministers in the Parish. It was then anticipated that the new building would be finished early in 1990. I anticipated that this would bring a growth in members at Melba, and I thought it best if the Parish could look for a new minister to start in January 1990. I gave notice to this effect to the Parish Council.

As I was concerned that during this last year before my retirement I might become stale or 'retire' prematurely, I started a new programme to help the parish prepare for growth. In the Winter edition of LINK 1989, I wrote:

"As a church we need to be in the forefront of change, where people hurt, where they work, where they need to make decisions that will affect their family, or the nation. To bring a message from God into such a situation, is also our task, the task of every one in the church. God has something to say about how we bring up our children, how we earn our money, how we invest it, and he is intimately interested in every aspect of our working place, our decisions there, and how we treat others."

The Elders agreed to a segment in our morning worship where members would tell the congregation, how their christian faith influenced them in their work place. We had some very meaningful presentations in that segment, and I am sure that everyone benefited from it, presenters as well as listeners.

An Elders' retreat also dealt with a similar subject. I had felt that too often our christian faith remained in the realm of the 'private', and not spilling over into our daily life, where it really ought to find its expression.

Later that year, the Parish called Rev. Niall Reid to be their new minister. However, as Nial could not start before October 1990, they asked me to stay on until 1 July 1990. I had asked Presbytery for an early retirement owing to health reasons. I felt quite drained and unable to start a ministry in another Parish. This became fortuitous, as I was able to accept an extension of six months. As it happened, the new building also took longer to finish, and everything worked out in the end.

The first service in the new church was held on Sunday, 17 June, the dedication took place in the afternoon of that day, and our farewell service was a combined service in the new church on Sunday 1 July 1990, followed by a luncheon and farewell speeches.

The Parish gave us a wonderful farewell present. Greg Ewers, the chairperson of Parish Council said in his speech that they had wondered what to give us. They wanted to make our retired life at the beach easier for us, especially when we came home late in the evening, wondering what we would eat. I still had no idea what they were going to give us. A big and heavy parcel was handed over to us, and we still couldn't guess it then. When we opened it, it was a brand new Microwave oven with sensor cooking and automatic this and that. We had never even looked at one, as we thought we didn't need one. But this was a wonderful gift. They had put a lot of thought into it. I don't think we would have ever bought one ourselves, but in retrospect, it was really ideal for us.

Chris Dalton, the secretary of the Council of Elders, gave the farewell speech, mentioning some of the achievements of the parish during my ministry there. I was very pleased by his words of appreciation.

The whole farewell was a most moving occasion, and I will never forget all the fine people of the Melba and Wattle Park Congregations. We had made so many friends during those nine and a half years, it was hard to leave them.

Reflections

Christmas 1990, the first after our retirement, I announced to the family, that I wanted to write my memoirs for them. During 1991 I served the Gosford church as their part time supply minister. I was kept so busy there, that I never had the time to even think about my writing. It was demanding work and drained me more than I had anticipated. I decided afterwards, not to accept any other appointment. When all the family came to Copacabana for Christmas in 1991, I had to tell them that I had not even started on my memoirs yet. A year later, and with the writing still only in my head, George gave me for Christmas a book on how to write your memoirs, plus a folder and writing paper. Well, that did it.

Early in 1993 I started hammering away on my ancient type writer. Then, later on that year, Gunter gave me his old computer. First I had to master it. After a couple of failures, and s.o.s.'s to Leeton, the computer was absolutely marvellous. It made writing and editing so much easier and saved a lot of time. Alison went to England to visit Mother for eight weeks. During that time the book really took off. It has taken me a long time, and had it not been for the urging and prompting from all the family, and the constant support from Alison, this book would have never been finished.

In this last chapter I want to reflect on some of the highlights in my life, and mention some of the issues I feel strongly about. I am who I am because of my personal history. No one episode or experience could explain my character or motivation. All have influenced and shaped me, from my childhood paradise to my retirement. This does not mean, of course, that all events made the same impression on me.

In my early life, one of the most profound scars left on my soul, was the loss of my Heimat, my homeland, which left me with a feeling of being uprooted and lost, not belonging, vulnerable and rejected. When it gradually dawned on me, that I had also lost my brother in the war, I felt that one half of me was also buried back in Poland with him. I grew up with him almost like a twin. Everything was shared. Being my elder brother, I looked up to him for guidance and support, and he was of such caring nature that I could share my innermost thoughts and feelings with him. With him gone I felt abandoned and very lonely. A door inside me closed for ever.

Having lived through the war under the Nazi regime made me very suspicious of authority of any kind. To become aware so early in life, that public figures tell you big lies, that they are selfish and will not stop at exploiting the innocent and vulnerable for their own gain, robbed me much of youths usual idealism about any political system. Then, living under communism, I felt that not much had changed from the Nazi period. People were still being exploited, there was no justice, and the worst was the lack of freedom. I came to the conclusion, that the war had not solved anything in Europe. Millions had died for nothing. War was not the answer. The answer, it would dawn on me slowly, was peace, a peaceful resolution of conflict. I believed in the power of the word, not of the sword.

When I found a new Heimat in Australia, it was like being planted in a new soil, where my soul could heal, grow and mature. Thanks to that maturing, Alison and I found each other. With our love and respect for one another, we both set forth on a journey together which is still going on. We were blessed with a wonderful family. The family tree, replanted in Australian soil as it were, formed branches, and is still forming ever new branches.

In the security of our family bliss I was searching for a deeper meaning in life. Spiritual clouds were forming around me, and I was groping for some light. Since childhood I was aware of how to look for the light, I sensed a presence in the universe which was above and beyond me, but also within me. Sometimes I didn't see it, sometimes I wasn't aware of it, at other times it was there, strong and visible, like a clear rainbow against a dark cloud. Many times I had seen it fade away, but it always came back. Then I was helped to see the link between the rainbow and that presence. This gave me the assurance that no matter what, that presence will never leave me. The rainbow has been the sign of this, the symbol of reconciliation, of peace and harmony. I am thankful that I have been allowed to experience, that for me the rainbow never sets!

When I realised that, I became very dissatisfied with my life in the wool trade. It offered no lasting values. I needed to find the true life, one in which I could be myself, one in which I could be in tune with the higher presence. Nothing in all creation would satisfy that strong longing. It was like a call to a new life, a new direction with a new dimension. It was the call to the full time ministry in God's church.

Studying theology opened a completely new horizon for me. Bits and pieces in my life came together like a jigsaw puzzle. It all made sense, for every aspect of ones life is connected with God, whether we see it or not — like the rainbow. This became a major focus in my ministry, to present the spiritual life as part and parcel of life itself. There is no aspect of life which does not have a spiritual dimension. I began to see that life without the concept of God is unthinkable. Human nature is far too vulnerable and too fallible to be independent of that higher presence. Some call it

'original sin' or 'sin', the characteristic which on the one hand helps the human being to survive infancy, when the self must be satisfied. But if this self-centredness remains unchecked, it acts like a time bomb which will eventually self-destruct.

Therefore, since time immemorial, human beings have needed to acknowledge the existence of a higher being, whom we call God. This God acts in human relationships, not as it was thought, with power and might and magic, but with love, compassion and forgiveness. Whilst biologically we may have evolved through the principle of survival of the fittest, spiritually we can only prosper through the principle of survival of the weakest. As we help the weakest in our community and in the world, we advance the well-being of the whole world.

This principle is not explicit in the Bible. In fact, there are passages in the Bible which speak of God as the almighty warrior, who can zap people miraculously into submission and obedience and who is portrayed as supporting violence. But there are also those which speak of him as protecting the weak and being on the side of the poor. These contradictions can only be resolved by a theology which is not fundamentalist. The church should admit that it deliberately selects those passages and viewpoints which support the views of the majority at that time, but make public also those of the minority. Churches who follow a fundamentalist theology should acknowledge that they are also selective and argue their viewpoint on the issue at hand. Most disputes in the church should be seen as a different way of interpretation, rather than on dubious facts. The Bible we read is a translation from an ancient text, but not the very words of the original author. Because everyone's language changes constantly, we need to translate the text to current meaning and usage, to make it available as a guide for our attitudes.

The racism of the Nazis had taught me to be acutely aware of racism in any shape or form. When I came to Australia, I found, generally speaking, the tolerance of the people towards new immigrants very liberating. Personally, I have never experienced any racism or anti-German behaviour. However, from early on I found it appalling how the Aborigines were treated here. The official policy at that time was "white Australia", and Aborigines were treated as non-people. They were not citizens, they had no vote, they were not even counted in the census. After watching the film 'Jedda' in the 1950s, I realised that here was an ancient culture which had not only not been appreciated in the past, but also been actively suppressed, falsified and eradicated.

Having lost our land during the war, I could readily identify with Aborigines' feeling of up-rootedness, with their need for land to give them back their dignity and identity. When in 1967 the referendum on Aborigines was carried with an overwhelming majority, giving them full citizen status, I was overjoyed. But I knew also that latent racism was more difficult to eradicate. In June 1969 I wrote to Mr. Wentworth, then

Minister for Social Service and Aboriginal Affairs, supporting him in his stand for Aborigines, in particular his efforts in securing land rights for Aborigines.

The Australian, 26/7/69, had carried a report on a speech by Mr. Snedden, then the minister for Immigration, who said that "we must have a single culture and do not want a multi-cultural Australia. Those of different ethnic origin must integrate and unite into our community." I was alarmed. Is that what the referendum had achieved? I wrote to Mr. Snedden:

"With this statement you seem to be ignoring our Aborigines completely, as with them, together with our Chinese, Italian, Greek etc. communities, we already have a multi-racial society in Australia. Therefore, your whole reasoning in support of your type of immigration policy does not hold ... trying to preserve old European traditions and expecting from Aborigines to be 'integrated' into the Australian community is, of course, blatant racism."

And I reminded him that I didn't want Hitler's racist policy in Australia.

"Such a policy cannot lead to peace, as we know. But an immigration policy based on tolerance and justice may lead to an enrichment of Australia's culture and must eventually be to the benefit of our whole region here in South East Asia. Let us hope for the sake of our future, that such a policy will become Australia's immigration policy."

I sent a copy of that letter to the then leader of the Opposition, Gough Whitlam.

During my student years I attended seminars on Aboriginal spirituality, where I came to appreciate the depth of their traditional religion. Whatever they do has spiritual significance, and there is no dimension in life which is not touched by the spiritual. This was driven home to me by Charles Harris, the president of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress of the Uniting Church.

The Congress was formed after Aboriginal christian leaders from the Uniting Church had met at Crystal Creek in August 1982. Charles was, like I, a member of the Commission for World Mission, and he stayed at our home several times. On 9 May 1988 the new Parliament House was opened in Canberra. I took part with Charles in the protest march of Aboriginal people, which ended in the forecourt of Parliament House. He had a large Aboriginal flag to unfurl, so we went together to the top of the western wing, facing the main entrance. There, laid in mosaic, was the Aboriginal emblem of the rainbow serpent watching over the entrance to the meeting place. He explained that the hill, on which the Parliament House was built, was actually a traditional Aboriginal site for a meeting

place. The protest was to highlight the non-recognition by whites of the original occupants of this land.

As the world media was focusing on the arrival of the Queen to open the new Parliament House, Charles and I unrolled the huge Aboriginal flag over the western wing, just above the place where the Aboriginal marchers had been assembled. Their loud cheering echoed throughout the forecourt, as they saw their flag unfold.

Aborigines have always seen the spiritual aspect of life in their daily living. This helped them to live in harmony with their own environment. Their spirituality has enabled them to survive over 200 years of all kinds of attempts to eradicate them as a people. Their spiritual bond to each other, to the land and to the higher being is stronger than the powers of the new-comers. Through the Congress Aboriginal church leaders were taking the affairs of the indigenous church into their own hands. This was the only way they could regain their dignity and put their spirituality into practical living. I fully supported them in these endeavours, and whenever there was an opportunity, I offered my help for the Aboriginal cause, whether it was at Aurukun in the late 70s or at Noonkanbah in 1980.

Aborigines have also corrected my attitude towards the blatant materialism and capitalism of our society. In their culture people share what they have. When I read the bible again I saw that the early church also shared their possessions. I cannot see how our church can turn a blind eye on the present-day capitalism with its economic rationalism. I would like to hear a clear prophetic voice which says that our capitalism is wrong, that we need to put people before profit and to protect the environment from the rapacious mining companies. Greed in any shape or form is wrong, and our capitalism is based on greed. I have alienated several members of my congregation with such views, because there hardly seems to be a debate in the church press about such issues, let alone statements by the church to condemn our capitalism outright. The church has a mandate to look after the poor and oppressed, not just to give palliative care. It needs to expose the roots of this poverty and oppression and offer alternative solutions, such as an economy based on love and care and justice. Many Liberation Theologians have pointed to other roads, but they are not being heard.

It is not surprising that with my background I have always abhorred authoritarian rule, wherever it cropped up. I have found the Presbyterian system of corporate leadership very congenial, and have always supported it. When the subject of bishops in the Uniting Church came up for discussion, I was alarmed. I couldn't understand the motivation of people who were for bishops. Did they want bishops because other churches had bishops? When I read in the bible, that the people of Israel wanted a king (1 Samuel chapter 8), I had to smile. Maybe our people wanted bishops for the same reason. We need to accept the fact that power corrupts, no matter how good the intention. Then why implement a system that lends

itself to corruption, when we have one that guards against it? I prefer a Uniting Church, where the spokesperson, or the head, is elected for a limited time, but has no authority to act on his or her own behalf.

How do I see co-operation with churches which have different forms of government, and indeed, different theologies? I have always felt that the Christian church should be one, but since my own unpleasant experience with my colleagues who went against the decision of the Presbyterian church to unite with the Methodist and Congregational churches, I believe that there should be unity in diversity. To me the ecumenical movement is a genuine attempt by member churches, to come closer together as churches, and co-operate wherever possible. There should be such co-operation between the different denominations that wherever local churches decided to form one church, this should be encouraged. But I would certainly not favour one monolithic universal church, governed by one or a small elite.

That I have been involved in the peace movement, was already mentioned. I was motivated by the conviction that wars and violent conflicts do not solve any problems. After each war the leaders of the warring nations have to sit down and negotiate. Why can't they do it before they go to war? I know, that many people in power simply don't want to do this, like Hitler, but it is important that the people know that war is not the answer. I was sensitive enough to see through all the propaganda of the cold war years, when the West did its best to provoke and arm itself to the teeth, hoping the East would start a war. One need not be a scientist to foresee the utter disaster and destruction that a nuclear war would have brought. At times I doubted the sanity of our leaders, who were unashamedly suggesting that such a war was winnable. But where were the churches in those days? Their silence was stunning.

I believe that consistent opposition and popular demonstrations, such as were held on Palm Sundays the world over, deterred the powers that be from starting a war. It was people power that did it. People power also eventually broke down the wall in Berlin, and lifted the 'iron curtain', that separated the East from the West. I see all this connected with our spirituality, the spirituality that knows what is right and wrong, and sees the connection between our faith in God, and how we live our daily lives. To be involved in the arms race, even to work in the nuclear arms industry or in a factory where weapons for export are manufactured, is against the spirit of God and is incompatible with my faith. It is for these reasons that our peace group in Canberra staged protests against the Australian Industries Defence Exhibition (AIDEX) in November 1989.

My commitment for peace is not only based on the biblical concept of peace/shalom, but also on the way Jesus lived and died in utter powerlessness. Jesus has turned our concept of power completely upside down. Weakness has become strength. Power has become powerlessness. Turning the other cheek has more force than a retaliatory punch. I had

noticed how the church in China had accepted this principle of powerlessness, and how it had drawn people to Christ. It has become clear to me that this is the right way to overcome most violent confrontations. It will hurt, I may die in the process, but ultimately there is no other way. I think of all the martyrs who have gone that way before us. Tyrants and dictators have passed away, but the value of powerlessness has remained. Such powerlessness can bring profound change, where force and all the powers in the world cannot achieve that.

Related to the way to overcome domination by powerlessness is the way we may overcome the domination of evil and addiction over us. Prohibition, the death penalty or heavy fines have not prevented our young people from experimenting and misusing drugs. We need to take more time to persuade them, to show that we care for them, to give them back their self-esteem. We should jail people only for two reasons: one, to protect the community, and two, to reform the prisoner. Unfortunately, to this day there is far too little emphasis put on reforming prisoners, and far too much on punishment.

One of the heaviest load to carry is guilt. Until I became a minister I didn't know how widespread guilt is among people. Guilt will drive people to do the most obscure and weird things, sometimes totally irrational. Guilt will drive people into the arms of fanatic sects which exploit their members ruthlessly. I have also seen some quite respectable religions, where the guilt of their adherents is being exploited and increased, in order to have power over them, rather than proclaim the gospel of forgiveness. For me, Jesus has died for us, which means that our guilt has been taken away, no matter what the crime. Only after we have realised that, and accepted it for ourselves, can we live a full life, freed from guilt.

Is my view totally coloured by our permissive society? I don't think so. I believe it to be the gospel, the good news for all. There is a time for parental control, guidance and discipline. Without it, children grow up insecure. It is a wise parent, though, who knows when discipline is required, and when the time has come to let the adolescents make their own decisions.

Unfortunately, though, there is also evil in the world, which will not respond to kindness and forgiveness. I had in my congregations people who would spread disunity, envy, malice, lies, and cause untold damage to their families and congregations, and there was nothing I could do to help. No amount of prayer and time spent with them and their families would persuade them to leave their evil way. They were simply either not aware of the evil within them, or not admitting to it. I felt quite a failure, and so did the elders and other members of the congregations. I guess in cases like this, and also in the larger community, the law needs to take care of such people, and the community needs to be protected, but we must never give up hope on anyone. I could never subscribe to the notion

that there are people so bad that they are described, like recently by the minister for police, as 'animals' and that they should be locked up and the key thrown away! Every person is made in the image of God, even if that image is hidden or invisible.

Division into opposing groups within a congregation is also a common hazard for ministers. I am grateful, though, to have learnt from passages in the New Testament, mainly from Paul, about the spiritual gifts we have been given as Christians. In the church at Corinth the members were divided into 'parties', one disagreeing with the other, and causing the church almost to split up. Paul didn't take sides in the dispute, but rather affirmed each group in its diversity. He said, that each one has been given different gifts or talents, and that all these have been given for the benefit of the church as a whole. Whenever similar divisions occurred, I was able to point to the passage in Corinthians, and the bickering stopped. It was more difficult when it was obvious that I was leaning more towards one side of the dispute, but the Pauline principle of diverse gifts would still persuade them to accept this.



I have often been asked what the highlight of my life has been. There were a number, of course, but one period stands out for me. It was our time in Indonesia. It was a unique opportunity for me to use all three fields of training I had in my life: agriculture, commerce, and theology. The challenge of a new culture and a new language was at times daunting, but the rewards were immeasurable. The relationship I was allowed to establish with the students was closer than with any other group before or after Indonesia. I loved the people and the work there like nowhere else, although at times it has also been most frustrating. My only regret is that we were unable to serve the church there for a second term.

A post script for our children

You may find that you are not mentioned enough in my memoirs. Maybe this is a valid criticism, but I would like to point out, that throughout your childhood it was Mum who was always around you, she looked after you like no other, and your Mum was and still is the centre of our family. In her selfless way she never complained, even when the burden laid heavily upon her. Often I was away when a crisis erupted, or I was too busy. She made quick decisions and acted upon them. Without her I could have done nothing. If I have achieved anything in my life, it is mostly thanks to her, for standing by me, for supporting me, for looking after me in such a wonderful way. I will never be able to thank her enough for what she has done. This is why, out of a deeply felt gratitude, I would like to dedicate this book to your Mum, my beloved Alison.

