

Growing Up in Turbulent Times



Waldemar Janzen

Rich descriptions throughout the book convey picturesque images of beauty, love, hope, and humour even in dark and difficult circumstances. The honest and reflective style draws the reader into a fascinating journey toward maturity, faith, and wisdom in which even the mundane gives occasion for wonder—Mark von Kampen, Associate Minister, First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg.

What makes this memoir unusual is that revolution and displacement are seen through the eyes of a curious and observant child, one who revels in the excitement of that time without being overpowered by loss. This child remembers everything, bringing alive a dramatic era in astonishing detail—Margaret Loewen Reimer, editor and writer. Former Managing Editor of *Canadian Mennonite*.

While written primarily for his extended family, Professor Janzen's memoirs will also be of great interest to his many students, friends, and colleagues. Written in an even narrative style, this book tells the story of a young man in turbulent times: loss of father, flight from war and possible capture, life in a new country, and education for a life of service. Breathing understanding, tolerance, and gratitude, the book was difficult to put down — Harry Loewen, Professor Emeritus of History and Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg.



CMU Press, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Growing Up in Turbulent Times

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Memoirs of Soviet Oppression, Refugee Life
in Germany, and Immigrant Adjustment to
Canada

Waldemar Janzen

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Winnipeg, Manitoba
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In Memory of

My Mother, Helene (Dueck) Janzen
September 24, 1905–February 12, 2001

and

My Father, Wladimir Janzen
July 26, 1900–May 15, 1957

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Notes and Credits

The spelling of geographical names in the former Soviet Union has generally followed William Schroeder and Helmut T. Huebert, *Mennonite Historical Atlas*, 2nd edition (Winnipeg: Springfield Publishers, 1996) with a few slight alterations.

German and Polish (often formerly German) geographical names have been rendered in keeping with official usage at the time when my story took place, with earlier Polish names often added in parentheses, for example, Konitz (Choinice).

German city names have been retained in their German form, and not rendered in English usage, for example, München and Nürnberg, rather than Munich and Nuremberg; while regional names have often been translated, for example, Franconia and Bavaria, rather than Franken and Bayern.

For the Soviet Union and the Ukraine I have generally followed the usage of Mennonites (and others) at that time; for example, Russia for the state (but sometimes Soviet Union), and the Ukraine, (with article) understood as a part of Russia, rather than Ukraine, as the sovereign state is called after the fall of the Soviet Union. This is not intended to express any political or ethnic judgement or position, but simply to reflect the common usage around me during my childhood and my teenage years.

Most of the photos and maps are from my personal collection. We wish to gratefully acknowledge the following permissions:

1. For the woodcut of the town gate, from Frau Martha Jüngling.
2. For the photo of Stadtkirche Scheinfeld with Pfarrhaus and photo of Scheinfeld with woods and Schloss Schwarzenberg in background, from Druck+Papier Meyer, GmbH, Scheinfeld.
3. For the map of Mennonite Colonies in Southern Ukraine (slightly modified) from Springfield Publishers.

Introduction

When I retired from full-time teaching in the summer of 1997 and began to write down the story of my early life, I chose to do so in the form of memoirs, based on recall rather than research. Of course, I have tried to be accurate with respect to dates and events, but my aim has been to write an experienced story rather than a researched history. The experiences told are my own, set in the context of the people around me, the latter, of course, seen from my perspective. If someone should say, “But that is not how it was,” I can only respond, “But that is how I remember it!” Perhaps this approach is a form of self-indulgence, the indulgence of allowing myself to rethink and recount—and thereby to reclaim, in a sense—a past that is very much my own.

And yet, I did not write for myself. One does not tell a story to oneself but to listeners. I addressed, first of all, my wife, Mary, and our children, Martin, Hildi, and Edwin. Sitting in the second row of the circle, so to speak, I saw our closest friends, many of them former students who, in some form or other, have replaced for me the extended family I lost in the turbulent times of my childhood and youth. If any others should be interested to listen in, they are also welcome.

Must one justify writing one’s own story? Perhaps not. All of us have a right to remember and to tell what our life has been in our own eyes. If there be anything that gives me some added justification for this venture, it may be the fact that my early life was lived in times and places of great historical upheaval. It could therefore evoke an interest that more placid lives may lack. To say this is not to claim that a turbulent life is richer than a life that followed an externally smoother course. In fact, I often longingly imagined what a “normal” childhood and youth might have been like.

Now, from the vantage point of retirement, I look back gratefully on a rich if not easy path along which “The Lord (so I believe) has been my shepherd,” even in times when I walked “in the valley of the shadow of death” (Psalm 23).

The positive response to early drafts of these memoirs, shared at first informally with my family and, upon request, with a small circle of friends, has led to the publication in book form for a wider readership. This called for certain changes in my storytelling. While the first readers were interested to hear about the early life of a person they knew well and in whose life they had an inherent interest, a wider readership will approach the published book with somewhat different presuppositions and expectations.

These presuppositions and expectations will largely be shaped by the extant published works and oral reports on World War II refugee experiences which the readers have encountered, and there are many. Even the accounts by or about those Mennonite refugees who fled the Soviet Union during World War II and eventually came to Canada are increasing in number. A body of literature is developing that seems to have a master plot with certain expected features that many readers will undoubtedly also look for in my memoirs. This is natural, but I must point out that the escape from the Soviet Union, via Poland and Germany, to Canada was not a nearly identical experience for those who participated in it. It took countless individual forms differing greatly from one person or family to another.

To be faithful to my own story, I chose certain modes for its presentation that depart from what some may have come to expect on the basis of the master plot. I want to draw attention to them here in order to help my readers to enter into my memoirs.

First, I have consciously resisted the temptation to slip from the role of storyteller into that of historian. Of course, I did not want to tell a contextless story. Sufficient historical material had to be introduced to create a context for my reminiscing, but I have tried to avoid historical or other analyses for their own sake.

Second, I have tried to recapture as best I could the experiences, feelings, and perspectives of the boy and young man I once was. The voice of the storyteller is, of course, that of an older retired man, the author. As that older author, however, I have tried as much as possible—and there are limits of what is possible in this respect—to hold the microphone, as it were, to the boy and young man of years ago and to let him speak about his life back then. When it seemed necessary to explain something from my present perspective, such passages are clearly identifiable.

Third, I have deliberately avoided dramatizing my story, a feature found in so many refugee accounts that it has come to be expected as part of the master plot. I have tried, for example, not to highlight such dramatic events as front line fighting, bombardments, narrow escapes, or highly emotional partings and family separations. They are there and receive due attention in my story, but for the most part, my refugee life was not unremitting high adventure. It was more characteristically a life of waiting, hoping, uncertainty, improvising, and short-term living arrangements. Between the dramatic and adventurous episodes lay stretches of everyday life with which a novelist might make short shrift and a reader may sometimes become impatient. In order to present a full picture of my experiences, however, I had to pay appropriate attention to the non-dramatic and essentially ordinary stretches—attending school, playing with other children, or queuing up for food—at the risk of boring some readers. Nor was refugee life an unmitigated state of hardship and suffering. I have good childhood memories as well as disturbing ones. And it was in the most difficult times and situations where I had many of my most treasured experiences of hospitality and goodness.

Fourth, although I have tried to tell my story as interestingly as I could, I avoid as much as possible all artificial fictionalizing, such as keeping the reader in suspense or inventing dialogue. I quote direct speech, for example, only when I remember the wording with reasonable certainty, or when I have a written record of it, mostly from my frequently mentioned *Braunes Büchlein* (Little Brown Booklet).

Finally, I must respond to a question repeatedly asked by readers of the unpublished drafts: “How did your mother feel about this or that?” My story will show that she was the most important adult in my life during those years, and that I had a close and positive relationship to her. As an older adult now, I realize, of course, that many of the events told in my story—such as the loss of my father—must have brought her emotions of loss, helplessness, and pain far beyond what I could understand at the time. A child or teenager does not analyse the inner experiences of a parent, and in recounting *my remembered story* I have told only what I *then* concluded from my mother’s words and behaviour. In a time when women’s experiences are of special interest to many readers, I can only plead with those that may be disappointed in this respect that I am telling the memories of a young boy growing up, rather than the inner experiences of a brave, remarkable, and sometimes almost despairing woman.

In telling my story, and without my conscious effort, I gradually realized that recurring reminiscences began to align themselves into themes. I did not plan this, but was guided in my writing mainly by the sequence of time and by our movements from place to place. While the future is always unknown, a refugee's life, and particularly that of a refugee child and youngster, is especially exposed to the unknown, without the possibility of shaping life plans and aspiring to long-range goals, other than pursuing escape to security. Emigration to Canada, though by no means removing the many uncertainties, eventually allowed for more goal-oriented choices and efforts.

Some themes eventually came to stand out, among them the loneliness due to loss of family, the experience of hospitality, the longing for "the holy" and its attendant faith struggles and decisions, a love of nature, an inclination to academic learning, and possibly others that I will leave for my readers to discover as they accompany me through the years of my childhood and youth.

It remains to express my gratitude to a number of persons who have furthered the writing and publication of these memoirs in significant ways. Many years ago, in a conversation at a social gathering, Edith Wiebe of Winnipeg encouraged me to write down my story in a way that gave impetus to begin that task. The greatest encouragement towards publication came from the positive reception of the first drafts by our three children, Martin, Hildi, and Edwin. Instead of being bored by stories they had heard in fragmented form throughout their early years, they welcomed the continuous narrative warmly and appreciatively. A small circle of friends and acquaintances offered stimulating suggestions and questions, together with support for publication. Wolfgang Formatschek, of Offenburg, Germany, acting upon the nudging of several former fellow students of mine during my Scheinfeld years, worked energetically to have my chapter 22, "Our School," published, in German translation, in the special Annual Report edition of the Gymnasium Scheinfeld's 60th anniversary year 2006, and to have an article on my Scheinfeld years appear in the *Fränkische Landeszeitung*. Dr. Karl Koop helpfully steered the manuscript through the processes leading to its acceptance by CMU Press. Dr. Harry Huebner was my judicious and wise editor who combined creative direction with sympathetic tolerance for my wishes in guiding the book to its final shape. To all these persons I express my deepest gratitude.

More than anyone, however, my wife, Mary, has entered into my story; first, by embracing my history throughout our 48 years of happy married life together, and second, during the ten years of labour on the manuscript. By patiently devoting countless hours to read and reread and to discuss every chapter as I finished it, catching typos and Germanisms, suggesting improved formulations but, above all, by becoming familiar with every aspect of the world of my childhood and youth, and weighing what should or should not be included, her collaboration and companionship in the task made it a joy to continue. Thank you!

Waldemar Janzen
Winnipeg, Manitoba
2007

Part I

Childhood in the Ukraine
(Birth–October 1943)

1

Earliest Memories

I was holding on to my father's hand as we walked home after getting milk from a neighbour. The moon was shining, and I made a striking observation. "Papa, the moon is following us. It is always in the same place beside us as we walk!" This is my first clear childhood memory, and one of the few I have of my father. He must have made a reply, but I cannot recall it.

We were refugees, but at my age of not quite three years I could not know this. At the time of that evening walk we lived in Chortitza, now a suburb of the large city of Zaporozh'ye on the Dniepr River in the Ukraine, but then a distinct settlement. My parents and I had moved there recently from the Mennonite village of Ohrloff, near the much smaller Molochnaya River further to the east. It was the Stalin era in the Soviet Union, a difficult and dark time.

In Ohrloff, the place of my birth, my father, Wladimir Janzen, had been the last minister to officiate at a time already hampered by increasing restrictions and temporary arrests. Eventually the church was closed and all ministerial activity made impossible by the atheist Soviet regime. One night, certain former members of the church council who continued some underground leadership functions, came to ask my father whether he and his family would consent to leave, since new threats against him had been made in the soviet (village council), and since the presence of a minister also endangered the church members on whose secret support we were dependent. My parents consented and, in the darkness of the same night, a horse-drawn wagon drove up and took them and their two-year-old toddler (me) to the nearest railroad station, Lichtenau.

We found accommodation at Tante Greta's, the first of four places of residence in Chortitza during my nine years there (1934-1943). Tante

(Aunt) Greta was no aunt of mine, but a kind older lady who had rented us a larger room in her house, no doubt on favourable terms. I think her last name was Wallmann. Tante Greta's house was also home to Tante Huebert with her young teenage daughter Lieschen, who often played with Walterlein (diminutive for Walter), my cousin, and me.

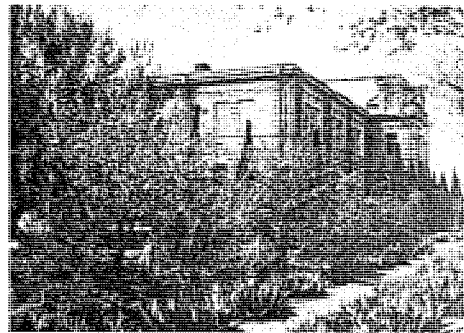
But who were "we?" Our composite family consisted, first of all, of Grosspapa and Grossmama (Grandfather and Grandmother) Heinrich and Susanne Janzen, my paternal grandparents, who earlier already had



Father (back row) with
parents and siblings (1925)

moved from Ohrloff-Tiege to Chortitza, where the in-laws of their daughter, my Tante Ira (Wiebe), were at home. Tante Ira had been sent to concentration camp near Warkuta in the far North in 1933, because she had been secretary to a Professor Lindemann, a German scientist. Her infant son, my cousin Walterlein, stayed with my grandparents, my parents, and me. He and I were only a few months apart in age. That made six of us, all in one room. Walterlein's father, Onkel Abram (Wiebe), lived nearby at the Regehers, his sister's home. He came for regular visits until he too was taken away during the mass arrests in 1937-1938.

The end of our long room farthest from the door was partially partitioned off by a high cupboard to create a minimally private sleeping area for our grandparents. My parents, Walterlein, and I slept in the main part of the room. To increase the living space for the day, Grosspapa built two very simple but practical cots for Walterlein and me. These could be folded and pushed under my parents' beds for the day. Grosspapa could make such things because, during his 30 years or so as a teacher for the deaf in the *Taubstummenschule* (school for the deaf) in Tiege (the twin



School for the deaf in Tiege

village of Ohrloff), he had not only instructed his pupils to lip-read, speak, read, and write, but also to acquire manual skills.

A second personal memory of Papa had a painful cause. I had done one of the things we children were frequently warned not to do: I had stuck my finger between the door and the frame on the hinge side. Papa or someone else on the other side of the door, not realizing this, had begun to close the door, pinching my finger. In spite of my howling it cannot have been very serious because there was no lasting injury. To comfort me, Papa took me on his lap and read me a story.

Our time at Tante Greta's was interrupted by a few months in Melitopol, a city south of the Mennonite colony of Molotschna. As a minister, even though without any possibility of doing church work now, my father was *stimmlös* (literally, voiceless), that is, politically disenfranchised. Among other restrictions, he was not allowed to hold regular employment. During the last few years in his former church district of Ohrloff we had depended on the charitable gifts secretly brought to our door by former church members. In Chortitza he held a temporary office job.

When my father had to renew his passport after one year, he was asked to renounce his ministerial status or leave Chortitza within 24 hours. He did not renounce, and we left for Melitopol. Grossmama's sister, Tante Olga (Friesen, daughter of Mennonite historian P. M. Friesen) and her brother, Onkel Paul (the artist Paul Friesen) with wife Wera and daughter Ira, as well as other relatives lived there and took us in. Our stay was not long, however.

After a few months in Melitopol my father was arrested, together with 13 other Mennonite leaders and Russian teachers and professors. I clearly recall the evening, December 5, 1935, when he failed to come home from work at the regular time. We waited and waited, until late at night someone came to tell us that Papa and Onkel Paul had both been arrested at their common workplace.

How did we feel? What was our reaction? I have heard and read many accounts of the mass arrests of 1937-1938. Each night the black car of the NKVD (secret police), the infamous "Black Raven," would enter a village. The people heard it coming and trembled in fright. Who would it be this night? Then came the loud knocks on the door, the order for the man of the house to get ready and come along, the wailing or pleading of the wife, the crying children in the background, and finally the parting—possibly forever—as the husband and father was whisked away.

There was no such drama in our case. This was before the time of mass arrests, even though arrests were frequent. My father had been taken into custody temporarily on a few earlier occasions to prevent him from conducting Easter services or the like. Now he was not dragged away from us at night, but simply did not return home from work one evening. Mother must anxiously have expected this to happen sooner or later. She must have cried that night, and no doubt during many other nights. To the best of my knowledge, however, she did not cry or lament in my presence on that evening, and she seldom did so later. Neither did I. Life had to go on, and it did, both for us and the many others suffering similar losses.

It is necessary to dwell on this point because my account of these events has sometimes been met with incredulity. Surely we could not have accepted this violently life-changing loss so calmly or apparently unfeelingly? My memory must have tricked me, I have been told, or I must have repressed a trauma, or my rational disposition must be making me afraid now to recall and express emotions or appear sentimental.

I think the explanation is different. My mother must have anticipated this parting for a long time. In a sense she may even have been relieved that the worst had now happened and needed to be faced, just like a soldier may gather new courage when the long-feared battle has begun. For Mother, facing this battle meant above all to protect and care for me. That required showing courage rather than despair. Courage was generally considered a desirable virtue then, as compared to the modern concern for expressing one's inner feelings.

I for my part also did not lament the absence of my father. He was away *now*, as he had been away for various reasons before: at work, on trips, or even arrested for a while. At three years of age, I had no sense of "forever," or "for endless and long years." And I still had Mother. To live without Father did present me with challenges. On one occasion, for example, when Mother wanted to carry me as she had done so often, I told her that now, with Father away, she must not carry me any more; I could walk alone. And, according to Mother's account, I stuck by my resolution. That we missed Father, remembered him in various ways and contexts, and that Mother showed various signs of the impact of losing her husband will continue to surface throughout much of my story.

A first decision was to leave Melitopol where Mother was never allowed to see Father. After a while, he and the others in the group were

sent to Dnepropetrovsk, closer to Chortitza than to Melitopol. There they were to be tried. At that point Mother and I moved back to Chortitza and rejoined my grandparents and Walterlein at Tante Greta's.

In 1935, arrests like my father's, though numerous, were still somewhat selective in contrast to the mass arrests of 1937-1938. As a former high school teacher and minister, my father belonged to those especially suspect politically. After some nine months in prison, he was charged in a mock trial with counter-revolutionary propaganda (an easy accusation against a Christian minister), correspondence with a foreign country (he had written short and carefully worded thank you notes for food parcels to his uncle in Ontario), and a third "crime," the nature of which I do not recall. He was sentenced to eight years in a concentration camp.

During this time in Dnepropetrovsk Mother was able to visit him briefly once a month and deliver small food packages, always in the presence of a guard. After the trial Mother was allowed to visit Father alone for a few minutes. He told her that the whole time had been "hell," but that he personally had not been tortured. He was especially glad that he had been able to keep from drawing anyone else into his case. He had made a brief speech in response to his sentencing, denying all the charges and saying bluntly, and at considerable personal risk, that the only basis for his sentence was his Christian faith. The judge became very angry at this.

On her final visit Mother took me along to the prison. The prisoners, a group of about 20, were on one side of two parallel fence-like barriers about a metre apart, and the visitors, a similar number, were on the other side. In the metre-wide space between the two groups, a guard paced back and forth while visitors and prisoners tried to shout messages to each other across the barriers, always in the hearing of the guard. The poles of the barriers were far enough apart, however, for a little three-year-old like me to slip through and reach my father. The guard did not intercept me, and I had a few minutes in Papa's arms. He talked calmly to me, admonished me to be good to Mother, and assured me of his love. Then the time was up, and we had to leave. It was the last time we saw my father, and thus my last personal memory of him.

~~

2

Life at Tante Greta's

We lived at Tante Greta's for two or three years, interrupted by the stay in Melitopol and by a visit of several weeks or months in Pyatigorsk. It was a time of poverty. Grosspapa received a small pension. Onkel Abram, Walterlein's father, made a contribution to our upkeep. After Father's arrest and our return from Melitopol, Mother eventually began work in the office of the former Koop Machine Factory, a job she obtained through the good services of the Froese family that lived a few houses away.

The adults must have felt acutely their deprivation of so many things considered essential or taken for granted in the "good days." They tried to make the best of it, however, and to offer us children what they could under the circumstances. The first "Christmas tree" I remember, for example, was a decorated tumbleweed. Nevertheless, Walterlein and I did get a little toy car each. Grossmama baked some peppermint cookies and some *Lebkuchen* (spice cakes), wonderful delicatessen baking compared to the more ordinary *Korzhee*, small and thick pancake-sized cakes baked almost without fat that we sometimes had on ordinary days.

For the adults, the following years were a time of struggle; not a struggle with challenging adventure, but the tedious and tiring struggle of the poor for the daily necessities. The social chaos of the earlier revolutionary era had given way by now to firm Soviet state control. This had resulted, among other things, in the end of previously rampant banditry, but it had left a society pervaded by thievery. General poverty was one cause, but perhaps Communist ideology provided another: if everything belonged to everyone, anyone might help himself to anything. If goods belonged to the state, stealing them was punished most harshly.

A mother taking some handfuls of grain from the *Kolchos* (collective farm) to feed her children might be sent to Siberia, but the stealing of private property was either uncontrollable or not considered to be very serious by state authorities. In any case, ordinary people would not readily have contacted the police to report it because nobody wanted the attention of the latter.

One night, for example, our carefully saved Easter eggs were stolen from the basement. On another occasion, some of our meagre and much mended laundry, which was soaking in a tub in the basement, was also stolen. The thieves had reached through a barred window with wire hooks to pull out the wet pieces. Such clothes were generally shabby, made over from old garments, but for us their loss was still serious.

Our daily fare for the remainder of our time in the Ukraine under Soviet rule consisted mainly of bread, potatoes, various types of gruel or *Grütze* (*Mannagrütze*, *Hirsegrütze*, *Buchweizengrütze*), beans, Borscht and other soups, and occasionally pancakes or *Wareniki* (dough pockets filled with cottage cheese or fruit). In summer there were watermelons as well as fruit—apricots, pears, apples, gooseberries, and more—and vegetables, which were available in abundance in that fertile area. However, since our family did not own a garden we had to depend on purchasing fruit and vegetables in the *basar* (market), unless friendly neighbours with gardens gave us some of their produce. I often wished for my own gooseberry bush from which I could eat without having to ask anyone for permission. I had to wait for several decades before I could plant my own gooseberry bush in our garden in Winnipeg, but the berries remained small and my taste buds were no longer tickled by that childhood delicacy.

Our main source of fat was sunflower oil, also bought in the *basar*. We poured a little into a saucer and dunked our salted bread into it, a tasty treat for us then. Our common drink, called “coffee” at times, was *Prips*, the Mennonite name for a coffee substitute made of roasted grains. Virtually absent from our diet were meat, butter, eggs, and sugar, not to mention luxuries like chocolate, candies, citrus fruits, and most other things we take for granted when we go to the supermarket in Canada. Only on very special occasions did we get a few candies. A little less rare was a rather crude form of halvah. I received my first real chocolate bar from German soldiers during the occupation years, and my first banana after coming to Canada.

While in retrospect our diet seems meagre and monotonous, such thoughts did not occur to me then since I knew nothing else. Grossmama and Mama tried their best to make things tasty even with simple ingredients. During my first year of life a major, artificially created famine ravaged the country, but during the times I remember we did not really experience hunger.

When I was a little older, however, I spent many weary hours standing in queues to buy margarine, sugar, soap, and other things in short supply, and sometimes even bread. Since the stores would sell only a limited quantity to each person, for example one-half pound of margarine, children often had to accompany an adult and stand in line because their presence as persons increased the quota correspondingly. Often people lined up outside a store long before opening time, based on the mere rumour that something would be sold on that day. No one knew what it might be, but it was sure to be something we lacked. This endless queuing up for things as a child has left me with such a distaste for queues that I stand in line now only if it is absolutely unavoidable.

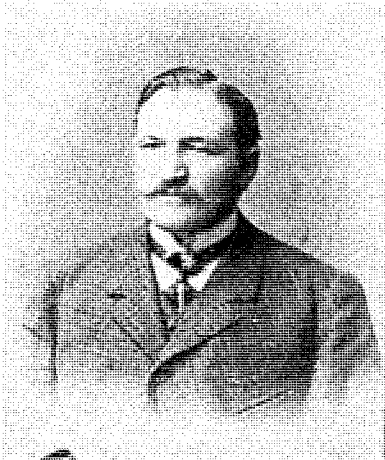
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3

Visit in Pyatigorsk

Soon after Father's sentencing, Mother and I made a trip to the Caucasian city of Pyatigorsk. Mother's own mother and her brothers and sister with their families had eventually moved there, after they had been expropriated and expelled from their home village of Altonau as *kulaks* (rich exploiters of the people). For Mother, seeking out the comfort of her own family was probably the natural response to the loss she had suffered. For me, it was my first major travel adventure. Pyatigorsk! For the first time I would see my other grandmother (Dueck), my uncles and aunts and cousins.

After short periods of residence in several places, my maternal grandparents, Heinrich and Anna Dueck, had settled down in Altonau, the Mennonite village farthest toward the southwest edge of the



Grandfather Heinrich Dueck



Grandmother Anna Dueck

Molotschna colony. This move had taken place some time during my mother's early childhood years. There Grandfather operated a general store until he was murdered on October 30, 1919 by the roving Machno bandit horde after the Communist Revolution.

Altonau was home to Mother, and in her mind it remained that until her virtually complete loss of memory in her 90s. There she had experienced a happy childhood as the second among four surviving siblings: Mitja (Dietrich), Lenchen (Helene, my mother), Karin, and Heinz. Peter and Hänschen (Johannes) had died in early childhood. In the years following Father's arrest, Mother told me many stories about her childhood in Altonau, a time she idealized in retrospect, although I have no doubt that her childhood there was indeed a happy and carefree one. I loved to hear these stories, both for their inherent interest and because I felt that Mother was happy when telling them.

After the time of the Revolution and the terrorizing roving bands came years that allowed for a semblance of normal life. While conditions were hard, Mother later recalled fondly her high school years in the improvised small *Fortbildungsschule* (continuation school) on her home premises, the large and congenial youth group to which she and her siblings belonged, the active church life including her baptism, and the weddings and other festive occasions. It was also in that period when my father, a teacher of Russian Literature and Mathematics, took an interest

in his bright, conscientious, and idealistic teenage student, even though another decade passed before they were married.

During that time, and through her friendship with Father, Mother was introduced to the social circles of Ohrloff-Tiege, a cultural centre of the area some 10 kilometres from Altonau. There she learned to know the cultured homes and families of three Janzen brothers, all of them prominent teachers: Johannes Janzen, teacher in the *Zentral-schule* (literally, central school; a high school for boys) as well as



Father as a young teacher (1926)

minister, painter, and writer; Jakob H. Janzen, teacher in the *Mädchenschule* (high school for girls) and also minister and writer; and finally, her future father-in-law, Heinrich Janzen, teacher in the Taubstummenschule. In these families, together with their relatives and friends, much emphasis was placed on classical music, literature, the arts, and languages. Her future mother-in-law, Susanna (nee Friesen, the daughter of Mennonite church historian P. M. Friesen), for example, had studied in Neuchatel, Lausanne, and Paris, taught piano, and spoke French fluently, as did my father. Mother, the daughter of a village merchant, recalled later that she had often felt inadequate in this social milieu, even though she was apparently welcomed warmly.

All of this changed in a few years. Grandmother Dueck never fully recovered from the violent death of her husband at the hands of the bandits. She sank into deep depression, so that the family—in an attempt to cope with her mental state that seems very inappropriate now—allowed her to sit for days in a dark room doing nothing. Mother's maternal grandfather, Dietrich Dueck, who had been evicted from his estate Hochfeld, moved in and exerted a rather strict though benevolent rule over the household. Eventually the family was declared to be *kulaks* and expropriated. Their deportation to Siberia was imminent, but was averted in the last moment, apparently through the intercession of some member of the new Communist



My parents' engagement photo

Soviet who was well disposed to them.

My parents married shortly thereafter on June 25, 1931, and Mother moved to Ohrloff with my father. Father had renounced his teaching profession in 1928 already, due to increasing pressure on teachers to engage in anti-religious prop-aganda. In the same year he was elected minister in Davlekanovo in the Ural area, where he had last taught. A year later, he was ordained as minister in the Ohrloff congregation in the Molotschna, where he served the church to the very end of its existence,

and eked out a meagre living for his small family on the side, supplemented by charitable gifts.

Although Mother's family had been saved from exile to Siberia, they had to find a new place to stay. Onkel Mitja (with his wife Tante Gredel, nee Nickel), Tante Karin (with her husband, Onkel Petja; Peter Nickel, a



Ohrloff Church

brother to Tante Gredel), and Grandmother Dueck moved to Pyatigorsk in the northern promontory of the Caucasus mountain range. The move was motivated by the search for greater anonymity and therefore security. It was also said

that the non-Russian Caucasian peoples were less hostile to various ethnic groups, including ethnically German Mennonites, than were the Russian-Ukrainian authorities. The move proved at least partially successful in that Onkel Mitja and Onkel Petja were not sent to concentration camp at a time when most Mennonite men in the Old (Chortitza) colony and the Molotschna colony—the main Mennonite settlements—fell prey to mass arrests.

Later, in the course of World War II, all these relatives were exiled further east, however, and the men were sent to concentration camps or into the *Trud Army* (workers' army). But in contrast to the victims of the mass arrests, they were not executed, but returned to their families some years later. Onkel Heinz was not married at that time. I am not sure of all his moves, but they included time



Father as last minister of Ohrloff Church

spent doing alternative service (to military service) in coal mines in very harsh circumstances. Later he married, had a son, Vitja (Victor), but died young while serving in the *Trud Army* in Siberia in 1942.

When Mother and I set out on our trip to visit her family in Pyatigorsk, the future must have looked bleak and uncertain to her. She not only needed to seek consolation in the midst of her family, but also to ask for advice as to what to do and where to live. As for me, a four-year-old, this visit belongs to the most vivid and exotic memories of my childhood. It was my first remembered trip by train, and it may well have sparked in me a fascination for railroads that extended into my adult years. The short railroad trip from Chortitza to Zaporozh'ye, often repeated in later years and always interesting, was only a prelude to many other trips. The real fascination began in the big Zaporozh'ye station. The waiting rooms late at night were crowded, but there was a special room reserved for mothers with children. I received a glass of tea from a samovar (charcoal tea cooker), dropped it because it was hot, but received another one from a friendly attendant. I was most impressed when I stood outside on the platform at night and heard the loudspeaker announce the incoming train and list all the main cities it had passed through, beginning with Moscow, and then all the stations yet to be reached: Melitopol, Simferopol, and finally Sevastopol at the southern tip of the Crimea. I sensed distance and yearning, feeling that through these ribbons of rail I was linked to what seemed the farthest ends of the earth. It is a feeling that has followed me into later years and other lands throughout my life.

As I write this, I realize that this picture of rail travel is a composite one. The train to Pyatigorsk cannot have come from Moscow and gone to Sevastopol. Nevertheless, that first major trip represents for me all the romance of railroad travel in my early years, and the mood described was there even on that first remembered train journey to Pyatigorsk. I recall distinctly sitting by the train window, watching many birch trees fly by and the sea (the Sea of Azov) glittering through these trees.

In Pyatigorsk I saw mountains for the first time. The name of the city means something like "Five Mountain City." Closest to the place where we stayed with Grandmother and other family members was the Bashtau. It was an ominously dark mountain due to the deep forests that covered it; there were wolves in them, I was told. Far in the distance, but clearly visible with its gleaming snow cover, was the Elbrus, the highest peak of the Caucasus range. Lower mountains ringed the city.

The house or apartment was simple, perhaps primitive, but its location offered a special attraction for us children. Right through the middle of the wide, unpaved street flowed a brook that had gouged out a rather deep ravine. If cousin Edi (Edgar, Tante Karin's and Onkel Petja's son) and I, and sometimes cousin Heinz (Heinz, the son of Onkel Mitja and Tante Gredel, who lived near us) carefully slithered down its sides to the creek bottom, we could dig out a supply of finest grey clay. It was almost as good as plasticine for making birds and other figurines.

Mother's family members tried to make our stay as pleasant as possible. They took us on an outing to a park where a band played music in a shell-like pavilion. Many people of different races wore colourful clothing. More memorable was a trip to the neighbouring city of Zhelesnovodsk (Iron Water City) which was known for its mineral wells. Even the water cascading down stair-like channels beside a street smelled strange and different. One of our adventures there was a visit to the dead volcano Mashuk. A tunnel had been excavated into the mountainside and made it possible to walk to the crater filled with blue-green water. Everything seemed exotic and interesting.

My memories of our relatives are, by comparison, rather pale. They were there and they were kind. Mother must have spent much time in conversation with them, considering our future and hearing their counsel. They wanted us to stay there with them. One of her brothers—Onkel Mitja or Onkel Heinz—had found her a job and was trying hard to get police permission for us to stay. This was denied, however, and when he kept insisting, he was told that we had to leave within a certain number of hours or else he would be arrested. Thus our visit came to an abrupt end, and we rejoined our composite family in Chortitza. How glad I am now that my uncle's good intentions failed! If we had stayed, I undoubtedly would have shared the harsh fate of so many who were exiled to Siberia or Kazakhstan. Eventually those who survived came to Germany as *Aussiedler* in recent decades.

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4

Timeless Years of Preschool Childhood at the First Tante Epp's

Mother and I were back in Chortitza. For her, our trip may have ended in dashed hopes. Again she had to face the dreary struggle of providing for elderly parents-in-law and two young boys, but without the support of her husband and her extended family. The worries about Father must have been intense.

I do not know how long we continued to live at Tante Greta's, or why we moved to the first Tante Epp's. (Of course, we did not call her the "first" Tante Epp then because we did not know there would be a second one.) Tante Epp lived alone in her own house until we came. She and her husband were childless, and he had been sent to concentration camp.

Her house was built in typical Mennonite-village style, but in a newer section of Chortitza not very far from the railroad station. The street, called Vetrenaya, was wide and unpaved, as were all streets in Chortitza except the Chaussee, the highway from Zaporozh'ye to Dniepropetrovsk. House, stable, and barn were set back some distance from the street and surrounded on three sides by vegetable and fruit gardens with a fence and gate toward the street. The driveway from the gate passed the front of the house and broadened into a yard. The hard-earth sidewalk on one side, our side, of the street was lined with acacia trees. Several other Mennonite families lived in the immediate neighbourhood.

In the centre of the yard was the *Brunnen* (well) which was also constructed in typical Mennonite-village fashion. It was protected by a square wooden enclosure high enough to keep children from falling in. A windlass was held in place above it by two beams that also supported a

roof. The windlass was operated by a crank, which made it possible to lower a bucket on a rope and pull it up again filled with water. Close to the barn was the dog house for a chained dog, a big German shepherd or the like. We children always kept a respectful distance from him.

Our living quarters consisted of one larger room and a tiny, poorly lit eating nook. We shared the kitchen with Tante Epp. This was not much living space for three adults and two young boys. Our folding cots were much needed again. In summer, the outdoors offered welcome relief from the crowded quarters. Grandfather or Grandmother had made a small and neatly designed *Rucksack* (backpack) for each of us cousins, and Grandfather took us on many an outing. I am sure he also entertained and instructed us in many other ways; being with him was always good.

Grandmother was in charge of food preparation while Mother continued work in the office of the former Koop Machine Factory. She had to walk several kilometres. Many late afternoons I stood by our gate, looking down the acacia-lined sidewalk and waiting for Mother. Since she was sensitive to sunlight, she would usually shield her eyes with the folded daily newspaper, which made it easy for me to recognize her while she was still a long distance away. Then I ran to meet her.

I must have been four years of age or a little older when we moved to Tante Epp's, and approximately seven when we moved again. In the title of this chapter I refer to these years as the "timeless years of preschool childhood." The adults may well have experienced them as the hopeless and apparently futureless years of Stalinist oppression. The Communist system was firmly entrenched by then, and no change for the better seemed possible. The mass arrests of 1937-1938 fell into this time period. Walterlein's father, Onkel Abram, who lived with his sister's family for space reasons, came to visit his son and us regularly until one day he stayed away. The next day we got word that he, like so many others, had been *genommen* (taken), the word for those arrested by the NKVD, usually at night. My grandparents and my mother accepted this fact with quiet resignation. Onkel Pauli (Paul), my father's 18-year-old brother, had also been "taken." He died within about a year. Thus my grandparents had now lost all their three children (my father, Walterlein's mother, and Onkel Pauli) to the Communist rule of terror, and now also their son-in-law. Onkel Abram, like so many others, was shot shortly after his arrest, but Walter obtained this information only after the fall of the Soviet Union.

For the adults, the painful thoughts of their loved ones in concentration camps, the meagre subsistence with barely a minimum of food and clothing, the long line-ups to buy necessities, the loss of all their social and spiritual support structures, and the apparent futility of any hope for change must have made this time the low point in their experiences thus far. Grandfather bore these burdens with quiet dignity. Grandmother busied herself with the daily chores, and sometimes she, whose earlier life had been filled with music and language teaching and refined cultural interests, went so far as to go begging for food to send small parcels to her children.

Mother was physically overburdened, holding a full-time job and needing to do at home what the aging grandparents could no longer manage. With Onkel Abram gone, the extra financial support he always provided had also ceased. Psychologically Mother often suffered from what I recognize in retrospect as depression. She also had frequent headaches and occasional moments of despair when she beat her fists against her head. That was very upsetting for me, so I grabbed her hands to pull them away and pleaded with her to stop.

However, for me as a child these years were not altogether unhappy. There were the apricot orchards, and Grossmama's efforts to dry apricots by spreading them on large gauze-like nets in the sun. Tante Epp, a somewhat taciturn though not unfriendly woman, could show generosity, as when she brought Mother a plate piled high with peaches from her one little peach tree as a birthday gift. Then there were those outings with Grosspapa, and much more for a young child to do.

Also, and in contrast to the next phase of my life, this one was not lonely. Walterlein and I were good playmates. There were other children in the neighbourhood, too. Among them was Gredel Braun, a girl a few years older than we, who lived next door with her mother and often played with us. Further away, in the vicinity of Tante Greta's, lived two families whom Walterlein and I visited frequently, with or without adult accompaniment. One was the family of Onkel Abram's sister, Tante Netl (Neta, short for Aganeta). With them lived their Grandmother Wiebe. Tante Netl's husband, Peter Regehr, had been taken away together with Onkel Abram. The Regehers had four children, and where there are children, more children will gather. The Regehers had a very modest house but a large lot, which included an orchard and garden and also some grassy areas and a creek bank. There was plenty of room for children to romp around, play hide-and-seek, and swing on a long swing suspended from an old tree.

The adults had no time to supervise us, and they probably assumed that the older children would look after the younger ones. On the whole, this trust was justified; I do not remember any incident where one of us suffered major harm. The many scraped knees, stubbed toes, slivers in our bare feet, and the like, were accepted as part of life.

To be sure, the adults would not have approved of all our doings. Older girls, for example, loved to tell stories to frighten the little ones. Two of these stories had as their subject the *Yaletain* (Low German for Yellowtooth) and *Isaaken Aun* (Low German for Anna Isaak). The former may not have referred to any particular person, but the latter was the name of a poor woman who suffered from some neurological disorder (probably Huntington's Chorea) and would appear on the street from time to time, move about in a strange kind of dance, and utter a stream of inarticulate sounds. While sensitivity to mental illnesses left much to be desired in those times, our elders would surely have stopped us from gawking at this sufferer or running away shrieking in fear.

On one occasion we took turns swinging on a long swing hung from a tree. When my turn came, some older children did not stop pushing me when I wanted to get off. I felt increasingly nauseous and pleaded to be let off, but they continued to push. When they finally stopped the swing, I sank to the ground and vomited. For years after that incident I could not even sit on a swing without experiencing nausea.

One time someone suggested playing a "doctor-game." One little girl went into the outhouse, and the others, including the boys, took turns entering after her. There she reclined between the toilet seats, skirt pulled up and lower parts exposed. So I saw how girls were made. I was one of the youngest children, and the sight neither interested nor excited me. Eventually the grandmother came and shooed us away, but without much scolding and reprimanding. This was probably my first "sex education." Growing up without sisters, the experience fulfilled a certain informative function for me, thus anticipating and preventing any undue curiosity about the opposite sex until the age of puberty raised further questions.

Besides the Regehr's, the second family of special importance to us were the Froeses. They lived two or three houses from the Regehrs, also in their own home with attached stable, surrounded by yard and garden. The family consisted of seven members. There was the matriarch, *die alte Tante Froese* (the old Tante Froese) and her son Hans, who had a severe heart condition and was therefore not taken away. Grandfather and he

had long conversations, but he died soon at a relatively young age. An older unmarried sister of Hans was Tante Lena. Another unmarried sister, Tante Mariechen, became Mother's closest friend for many years to come. She and Tante Lena had been teachers, as their father had been before them, but during this period both sisters worked in the same



The Froese house in Chortitza

factory as my mother. Then there was Tante Lyda (Lydia) who was married to Abram Froese, another brother, who had already been taken away when we got to know the family. Tante Lyda had two sons, Gerdi (Gerd) and Edgar, the latter my age, and the former six years older. Our association with the Froeses

was probably brought about by the friendship between Onkel Abram, Walterlein's father, and Hans Froese. Thus we were not at all related, but I continued to say "Tante Mariechen" and "Tante Lyda" throughout my later life.

From this time, or possibly even earlier, come my earliest memories of Bible stories. With mother at work, it was usually Grossmama who told them to Walterlein and me, or she read them from an old Bible story book with engraved illustrations. The Bible stories were interesting and, while I was not particularly stirred by them, I believed them and learned to love some of their characters, such as Abraham and David and, above all, Jesus, *den lieben Heiland* (the dear Saviour). Of course, there were no public exercises of anything religious at this time: no church services, Sunday schools, Bible studies, or choirs. Any evidence of "practicing religion" was sufficient ground for arrest and exile. We did say grace at mealtimes, usually consisting of well-known and memorized prayers such as "Komm, Herr Jesus, sei unser Gast und segne, was du uns bescheret hast." (Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest, and bless what Thou hast provided.) After my father's arrest my regular bedtime prayers, also memorized, always closed with the formula, "Bring Papa nach Hause! Amen." (Bring Father home! Amen.) I prayed this for many years, sometimes with feeling, but often routinely. It was a prayer that was not to be fulfilled.

I was too young at this time to sense the full weight of the oppression and injustice under which we lived, although a certain heaviness seemed to rest on us all. It became most palpable for me when Mother was down



Walterlein and I (1936)

or had her moments of despair. However, a vivid memory of my first experience of a very different kind of personal injustice stands out in my mind. One day Walterlein said to me, "I am bigger than you!" We had always been treated equally and fairly by our grandparents and my mother. I immediately protested: "No, you are not!" "Yes, I am. Go and ask your mother, if you don't believe it." I did, and my mother could not deny the fact. I was deeply hurt; it was so unfair. That was the beginning of living consciously with the

fact that I was then, and always remained, short in stature.

My official birth certificate, which I still possess, is divided down the middle into a Ukrainian half and a German half. On the German side I am registered as "Waldemar." Thus the name I have carried most of my life was not a later translation from the Ukrainian or Russian, as was the case for many other Mennonites who moved from Russia to Germany. My father, who had only the Russian name "Wladimir" (emphasis on the second syllable; abbreviated to "Dima," pronounced "Dyeema" with a soft "D") in a German-Mennonite family and context, must have consciously provided me with a genuinely German name. On the Ukrainian side of my birth certificate, however, I am registered as "Wladimir." The popular version was "Wolodya," and the diminutive of that, "Wolodyenka."

It was in this phase of life that I began to show interest in matters mechanical. Both Walterlein and I had relatively few toys, but mine were supplemented by a cardboard box in which I kept scraps of metal: a cog wheel, a bolt, a piece of angle iron, and whatever else I might pick up on the road. Together with my fascination for the railroad, this attraction to metal pieces and machines made everyone predict that I would some day become an engineer. How far removed from my later life's work, but I have always retained a certain practical sense, albeit undeveloped, that helped me later to fix things in homey ways or construct various

“contraptions” that became the objects of ridicule by our children. Nevertheless, they usually worked.

I remember only one Christmas from this period. This time we had a real Christmas tree in our cramped quarters, and we must have read the *Märchen vom Weihnachtsmann* (a Christmas fairy tale written by Grosspapa’s brother Johannes), as we did every year, until we virtually knew it by heart. And there were gifts. One of these was a small wooden sled that Grosspapa had made for Walterlein and me together. It was neatly built and painted grey. Walterlein and I were overjoyed and could hardly wait for the next morning to use it. Alas, it had one defect. Since hardly any materials were available, Grosspapa had sawed the curved runners from simple boards of about 1.5 centimetres thick. They cut into the snow and, each time we tried to pull each other or go down a slight incline, we got stuck. Dear Grosspapa had meant so well; if only he had had the means to carry out his idea.

The other gift, my gift, was more successful. Mother had managed to save the money for a very simple meccano set. This was a gift in keeping with my mechanical interests, and I would while away many hours with it later, at the second Tante Epp’s, when Mother was at work and I was alone.

Some time during 1939 our life took a major turn. After five years, Tante Ira, Walterlein’s mother, was released from concentration camp in Warkuta, north of the Arctic Circle. It took some time before she could make the trip across the tundra, but one evening we stayed up late into the night to wait for her to arrive. I do not remember what must have been emotional scenes of reunion when she met her elderly parents and her seven-year-old son from whom she had been torn away when he was an infant. I do remember, however, that I felt somewhat left out. Here was a major family event in which Walterlein figured prominently while I was at the margin, even though Tante Ira had brought me a little gift, too: a celluloid mouse that moved if you pulled on a string coming out of its back.

Tante Ira, as a released “political prisoner,” was not allowed to live in certain regions designated as militarily sensitive. To these belonged the region around the Dnieprostroy, the huge hydro-electric dam across the Dniepr River, five kilometres from Chortitza. Tante Ira moved to Melitopol, taking along her parents and her son, my cousin Walterlein.

That left Mother and me alone. It made sense for us to move closer to Mother's place of employment, and that eventually brought us to the house of the "second" Tante Epp.

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The Lonely Years at the Second Tante Epp's

Now Mother and I were alone. All our relatives lived on the east side of the Dniepr. Mother had her office job in the factory about a block away from where we lived while I had to stay at home. The age for starting school was eight, but I was seven years old so would have to wait for another year. What would I do? Tante Epp was wonderful. She was an adult presence if I should be in some need, which brought much assurance to my mother. She also read me many stories, but she had her own household duties and was not my babysitter. I spent much of my time on the street propelling a tire rim with a heavy wire hook along the sidewalk, roaming around the large garden with a creek bank, and watching Tante Epp's two goats "Gisa" and "Belka." I also played with some neighbourhood children occasionally. One was a Jewish boy who came over from time to time. Another was a Russian girl next door. I did not like her much, but I cultivated a sort of friendship with her because she owned a two-wheeled bike for children and, if she was in a favourable mood, she would let me use it. That is how I learned to ride a bike.

Often, however, time passed very slowly. On many days I walked up to the factory gate—the factory area was surrounded by a high brick wall—and waited for my mother, sometimes for an hour or more. In front of this gate, cars or trucks might be parked, objects of great admiration for me. Once a kindly chauffeur invited me join him in the cab of his truck. Even though we did not drive anywhere, this was a highlight experience in my rather monotonous life.

Finally the siren blew, and after a while the first workers emerged from the gate. There were many of them, a whole stream of drably clad, tired figures, although that did not strike me then. In fact, Communist propaganda held up just such figures as the heroes of the Revolution, the upholders of the wonderful Socialist new society. Placards and other cheap state-sponsored “art” were replete with them. Finally Mother came along, sometimes alone, sometimes with Tante Mariechen, and I could happily return with her to our one-room home.

When Tante Epp had to be away for a longer time, that is, half a day or a day, I was asked to stay inside, lock the doors, and not let anyone in until I had assured myself by looking through the keyhole that it was someone I knew. My only company on those days was a big tomcat, Kater Hops. He was not exactly friendly, as obvious from the many scratches I carried away from our association. However, he was intelligent. In lieu of a doorbell, visitors would often tap on the metal doorlatch. It happened a few times that there was that familiar tapping, but peeping through the keyhole did not reveal anyone. On one such occasion I finally ventured to open the door a tiny slit, and there was Kater Hops, hanging from the door handle with one paw and tapping the latch with the other!

After work Mother must have been as tired as the other workers, but for her the household chores began when she came home. I recall very little regarding our food except that many things were scarce. Sometimes Tante Epp would take me along to line up early at the store when rumour had it that something would be for sale on that day. The portions sold were limited to certain amounts per person, and if I went along with Tante Epp, I could bring home a portion for Mother and me.

Financially we were very poor. Sweets, butter, meat, or other luxuries were not for us. Mother fried our potatoes with sunflower oil bought at the *basar*. We dipped our bread in sunflower oil and cooked our gruel with water. Tante Epp, out of the goodness of her heart, gave me one glass of goat’s milk a day, a very valuable food supplement for a growing child. Clothes were equally scarce. Remodelling old pieces was the order of the day. Socks were darned and clothes patched, which added to Mother’s after-work chores. New items were rare. Mother once bought me a new winter coat, something made possible by a special savings plan sponsored by her factory. But that was an exception.

The climate was continental and winters were cold. I had to stay indoors and days seemed even longer than in summer. Again, Tante Epp

often read me a story, but that still left much time to be filled. Sometimes I played a kind of bureaucracy imitation. Mother brought home pay slips each month. I would sort these, number them, and make certain "official" entries on each. That could while away much time. Another entertainment was counting locks. I do not know what attracted me to that, but I counted every lock on a door, on a cupboard, on a suitcase, on a briefcase, or a purse. Eventually I announced the total number of locks to the members of the household: over one hundred! The Epp family and Mother looked at me incredulously. I insisted, however, and took them on an expedition through the house, pointing out the existence of locks in all kinds of unexpected locations. There was great wonderment, perhaps not only at the number of locks, but also at a little boy who would preoccupy himself with counting them.

Tante Epp was the head and heart of the household. With her lived her stepdaughter, Tante Tina (Epp), who also worked in Mother's factory. Then there were Tante Epp's two children, Agnes and Erni (Ernst), both in high school. Agnes, in her upper teens, eventually went to university in Dniepropetrovsk and came home only occasionally. She was a very pretty and pleasant girl, liked by all. Erni was a serious teenage boy, sometimes impatient with me and my questions and wishes. At other times he could be companionable and generous, for example, when he built a chinning bar for himself, and beside it a lower one for me so that I could also practice chin-ups and gymnastics. Later he was drafted into the German army at a young age. He went missing in the final stages of the war and was presumed to have died. It goes without saying that Onkel Epp had been "taken" already when we lived there.

Tante Tina's sister, Tante Lise had married a Mr. Sudermann. He had also been "taken," but his wife with their three children (Leni, Heinz, and Gredel) and an orphaned niece (Lieschen) lived in Rosenthal, the twin village of Chortitza. With them lived Mrs. Sudermann's energetic, well-educated sister-in-law, Anna Sudermann (always Anna Davidovna), together with her deaf older sister, Tante Titchen. Through the Epp-Sudermann connection we became associated with this Sudermann family. Through Agnes and Erni Epp we also got to know some of their fellow high school students and other young people, among them Elfi Hiersack and later her husband, Arthur Kroeger.

On a few occasions after Father's arrest, Mother and I visited her home village of Altonau in the former Mennonite Molotschna colony, east of the Dniepr River and north of the city of Melitopol. The major

part of the journey was made by train, always a great adventure for me. We had to change trains at least twice before arriving at the village station of Lichtenau. That was the good part of the journey. Then we had to get to Altonau by walking along a dirt road parallel to the Molotschnaya River, passing through the villages of Blumstein and Münsterberg before we reached Altonau. Not only was I a young child who soon got tired, but the road we had to use became a morass of mud after the slightest rainfall. However, Mother knew people in the villages we passed, and we could stop here and there to rest. Once we even got a ride on a horse-drawn wagon.

The visits in Altonau remain vague in my memory. We stayed at Tante Lena's, my maternal grandmother's youngest sister. She was married to Onkel Cornelius (Penner); they had two daughters, Liesel and Lenchen, somewhat older than I. Mother had a number of girlfriends from her younger years in Altonau, and many of these invited us or came to visit. Most of them were young married women by then. Even though all agriculture was collectivized, these country people had more ample and better food than we. For example, they frequently served us chicken dinners, something we could never afford at home.

On one visit, Mother walked with me past her family's former home, the place of her happy childhood and the scene of many stories of childhood experiences that she had told me. Now, she said, it was dilapidated and no longer looked as it once had.

These trips to Altonau, although embedded in my memory, evoke little emotion. The real Altonau for me was the village of Mother's childhood stories. I never grew tired of them, first, because they took me back to a long-ago world that was whole and ideal, but also because Mother would always seem happy when transported back to that world herself. In her later years in Canada, she wrote a number of articles about village life in Altonau. These articles, published in *Der Bote*, brought many enthusiastic responses from readers who recognized in them the customs and traditions of their own home villages in the Ukraine.

What was happening to Father, and in what way was he "present" to me? Unlike those taken away in the later mass arrests, he was allowed to write and receive mail twice a month at first, and later only once. From the beginning, Father included little leaflets for me with his letters to Mother, some of them with sketches and drawings. I in turn sent my own little letters and pictures along with Mother's letters. During the

years at the second Tante Epp's, I gradually gained greater awareness of the context and the circumstances of this correspondence. When I



Postcard from Father (1940)

I started school, Papa even addressed some postcards specifically to me and used sufficiently large (Russian) print to make them readable for a first-grader. While Mother lost all her correspondence of those years on our later flights, I managed to preserve 13 small letters and two hand-printed postcards from the years

1936-1940 (including one undated letter possibly from 1941). They are still in my possession.

Eight of these pieces are dated, but the rest can easily be assigned to an approximate time on the basis of tone and content. The first letter was sent from Dnepropetrovsk, where Father was in prison until his trial and where I had seen him last. The others all come from Karaganda. These letters are written on low-quality bits of paper, sometimes in ink, sometimes in pencil. Most are written in German, but four (including the two postcards) are in Russian. Even in the German ones, however, Father addresses me with the Russian version of my name and prints it in capitals: “ВОЛОДЕНЬКА” (“Wolodyenka,” diminutive of Wladimir) and later, as I grew older, “ВОЛОДУЯ” (“Wolodya,” informal for Wladimir). His own signature is printed in Russian: ПАПА (Papa), even in the German letters. I believe he used these Russian forms, printed in capital letters, to indicate to the censors at a glance that this was father-child correspondence, and thereby perhaps making them more lenient.

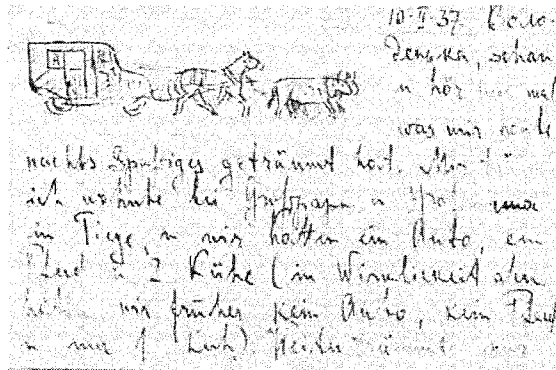
What did Father write? First, he always addresses me in endearing ways (for example, “Mein liebes, liebes Söhnchen” [my dear, dear little son]) and concludes with some version of the (customary Russian) expression “I kiss and hug you dearly.” He repeats over and over how much he loves me and asks me time and again not to forget him.

In addition to these overt assurances and pleas, he is remarkably skilled in engaging my attention and interest. He asks whether I remember this or that event—for example, how we lined up my toy

animals in the form of a caravan on our last evening together, or how we made a trip to Zaporozh'ye and encountered an angry ram on the street. He recounts some former experiences of his own, or tells me to have Grossmama or Grosspapa describe for me some former event.

Frequently he describes some aspect of life in camp. Twice they saw a movie; another time they were visited by a dance group that performed funny Negro dances. He comments repeatedly on the weather. A few times it was so cold that no one could go out to work, but "in the barracks it was nice and warm, and I *still* [my emphasis] have warm clothing." Understandably, whatever he writes sounds positive, or else it would unlikely have passed the censor.

One takes note, of course, of little signals like the "still," above. And yet, one must not be too cynical; even in those camps there were certain little amenities, like the movies or dances and song groups. On my sixth birthday (August 7, 1938) Father includes a self-composed Russian poem, in which he congratulates me on my birthday and tells me that he has celebrated it with cookies and milk. He thanks me for having sent him the money for this. The reference is to something I remember well. One time I found a 5 ruble note on the sidewalk, a fairly substantial sum of money for us. We decided to send 3 ruble to Papa, and that allowed him to buy the treat of cookies and milk for my birthday. Even a little humour gets into his reports, as when he tells about a strange dream he had. He wanted to go from Tiede (where he used to live) to Altonau (where my mother lived before they were married). To do so, he hitched a horse to a car, and then two cows in front of the horse! Then they moved step by step. In reality, he writes, we had no car, no horse, and



Father's dream

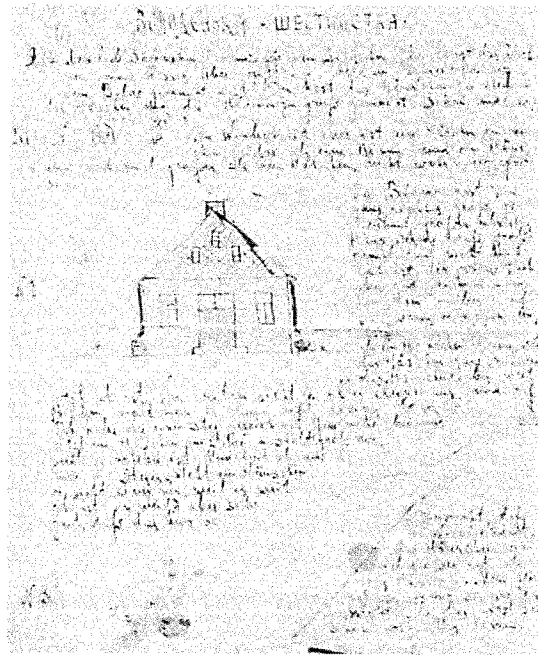
only one cow. In spite of the humour, intended for me, it is hard to miss the nostalgia of the difficulty now associated with a trip (to see Mother) so familiar from courtship times.

Father was a teacher with all his heart, and this shows in many of his letters. In one, he

notes that I will go to school in a year or two and enumerates in encyclopedic comprehensiveness what all the areas of learning will be, drawing appropriate sketches: German and Russian, arithmetic, plants and animals, human anatomy (a skeleton drawing follows), geography, machines, electricity, astronomy. But it is important also to do physical exercises and to learn handicrafts like carpentry. I should learn Russian well, but also French, which Grossmama could teach me. (Like his mother, Father was fluent in French). And Tante Ira could teach me music, he writes, but “Du wirst wohl wie dein Papa kein grosser Musiker werden, aber die Noten musst du später doch lernen.” (Probably you, like your father, will not become a great musician, but at a later time you should at least learn to read notes.) My lack of musicality had apparently been recognized earlier in my life than I had thought, and—alas, I never even got as far as learning to read notes.

Father not only encourages me to learn, he even tries a bit of long-distance teaching. A letter I find most impressive contains his very simple and clear attempt to teach me, with illustrations, how to draw applying perspective: if both a rabbit and a house are equally near, the house is much bigger than the rabbit. But if the rabbit is close by and the house quite distant, the rabbit must be drawn larger than the house. You must draw as you see it, not as it is in reality.

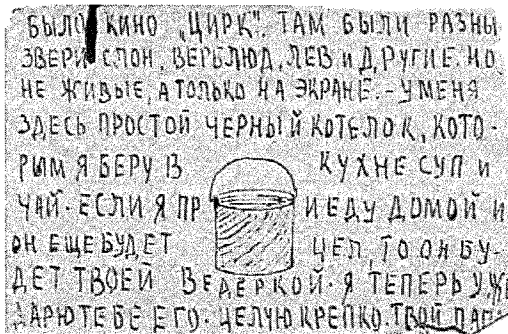
Sometimes Father's admonitions relate to moral character. Once he admonishes me not to “scold” my mother, as I was apparently doing at times. That is making him sad. (He uses the German *schelten*—scold, reprimand—and I am quite unsure what he means.) Other admonitions are positive, among them—to



A lesson in drawing perspective

my surprise—a few relatively overt religious ones: I should be *fromm* (pious, in the best sense), always love *den lieben Heiland* (our dear Saviour). Further, he thanks me for always praying for him, and assures me of his prayers, trusting that the I.G. (*der liebe Gott*, that is, the dear God; another time, *I. Gott*) always gives us what is *truly* useful for us. (“Er gibt uns immer, was uns *wirklich* nützlich ist.”) In retrospect, I am surprised that he dared to be so open, and that the censor let it go (or didn’t see it).

I have left a most pervasive and nostalgic theme to the end: Father’s ever repeated deep sorrow that he could not give me any gifts, even on my birthday and for Christmas. He mentions repeatedly his wish to give me a real rocking horse but, that being impossible, he draws one for me. On the back of one letter he sketches out a whole playground, partly reminiscing about what he once had, and partly designing what he would



The soup pail Father promised me

love to give me. Then he concludes sadly: “But I cannot come to you yet, and when I will come home after a long, long time, I will have no money to buy such things. Do you love your Papa, even if he cannot give you a rocking horse, a little goat, anything?” Both ingenious and pathetic are

his two attempts to give me something anyway. In one letter he describes his little pail for soup and tea (with a sketch of it) and tells me that it will be mine once he gets home. but he is giving it to me now already. In another he asks whether Mother has sewn me a winter coat yet. That will be a gift from her because she sewed it, and also from him because it is made from his old jacket.

Thinking back as an adult and the father of my own children, now I could weep when I read these letters, but then I did not feel the pain and sadness in them. Mother must have caught all the nuances of longing and sadness underneath the positive and sometimes cheery surface, but I read the letters with interest, enjoyed the drawings, and imagined my Father living in an intriguing world far away where there were camels and where interesting things were happening. That is, no doubt, how Father wished me to read his letters, and Mother did her part to shield

me from the harsher realities. Further, 15 little items of mail in a span of five years means three a year. Even if some should have been lost, these signs of life from Father, though welcomed happily when they came, were not enough to make him realistically a part of my everyday life. Yes, I added to my bedtime prayer every night “Bring Papa nach Hause! Amen.” (Bring Father home! Amen.) but while I certainly meant it, my prayer took on the character of an easily and habitually repeated formula. Father was a distant saint—as Mother portrayed him for me—in a distant land, and not a part of my everyday world.

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6

First Year in School

On August 7, 1940, I reached the age of eight, the age for starting school in the Soviet Union at that time. To expand the small amount of Russian I had earlier learned at home and on the street, Mother began to practice that language with me more regularly, though informally, during my last pre-school year. School would bring change to my solitary life, and I looked forward to it with enthusiasm and expectation. First, however, an unexpected obstacle appeared to block the way.

A medical examination was required for all beginners. Since Mother had to be at work, Mrs. Sudermann took me along when she went with her daughter Gredel, also a beginner, for this medical examination. Gredel and I both had to strip to the waist, and a young woman doctor examined Gredel first with her stethoscope. The doctor told her to breathe deeply and found no problem. Then it was my turn. Anticipating the order to breathe deeply, I did so right away. Whether that created a wrong impression, or for some other reason, the doctor looked alarmed, declared that I had a heart condition requiring rest, and refused to allow me to enter school. I was crushed.

Mother, though not by nature assertive, did not accept this verdict. She took me to the principal and explained our situation: how I had to fend for myself while she went to work, how I was looking forward to school, and I don't know what else. The principal agreed to admit me, but I was to be exempt from physical education. Since I had never been particularly interested in sports, that meant no sacrifice to me. I entered Grade 1, and I never heard of that supposed heart condition again, despite many physical examinations in later life.

On the morning of school opening day, Mother and I joined a crowd of other parents with their children on the yard of the school called

Dyessatiletka (literally, “Ten-Grade School,” the former Mennonite Zentralschule of Chortitza). It was now a school offering the whole school curriculum from Grade 1 to Grade 10, the latter being the basis for university entrance. The principal or an assistant read one name after the other, and the respective student left the crowd and entered the building. The group got smaller and smaller, and my apprehension grew and grew. When would my name be called?

Eventually, only a few prospective first-graders were left. Had my name been struck from the list due to the medical report after all? Finally I did hear my name and walked in, greatly relieved. What I did not know at that time was the controlling power of the alphabet. In Russian, “Janzen” does not begin with a “J,” a letter in the middle of the Latin alphabet, but with the letter “Я” (equivalent to “Ja” and pronounced “Ya”), a single letter and the last one in the Cyrillic alphabet. That was the simple explanation for my position at the end of the list. Later, when I had moved half-way up the alphabet in my German- and English-speaking contexts, I often felt sorry for people with names beginning with “Z,” like Zacharias. Nothing else of that first day has impressed itself on my memory.

Our Grade 1 class was housed in a building separate from the main complex, though on the same large yard. Our teacher was a Mennonite woman, Maria Janzen. (I met her again in Canada many years later. In her nineties she lived in the same nursing home as my mother-in-law.



My first school in Chortitza

She was always very happy to see me.) There must have been 25 to 30 pupils in my class.

The curriculum consisted of “the three ‘R’s,” plus political instruction on certain days. Being eight years old already, we were expected to learn. There was no playing other than in intermissions, no napping, pasting and drawing, or other activities designed to make learning fun, features so characteristic of present grade school curricula. Only during recess could we play on the school yard. This does

not mean that school was no fun, at least for the better students. I for one enjoyed it thoroughly and learned well, which made me an *Otlitshnik* (*otlitshno* means “excellent;” in other words, an “A” student).

That brought with it competitive events, such as one or two visits to another school to meet (and compete with?) the “A” students there. Without being consciously competitive, I did strive for high marks, and I got them. I would never have said, however, that school was easy. The instruction was very thorough; even now, in my seventies, I can read Russian, and also write some but with difficulty, although I had only that one year of Russian-language schooling.

Several times a week a very pleasant young woman with a white blouse and red scarf (the uniform of the “Pioneers,” the Communist youth organization) came to teach us Communist doctrine. These classes were designed to be especially enjoyable and interesting, no doubt to win

us for the cause, but they left no special impression on my thought.

Other aspects of the Communist system were more serious. Even our kind Mrs. Janzen had to ask in class who among children celebrated Easter at home. Easter was the highest religious holy day of the Eastern Orthodox Church, and celebrating it would betray a family



Grade 1 “A” students: I (smallest) and Edgar Froese (tallest) in back row

as engaging in Christian religious activity, a very dangerous charge. I am sure our teacher did not enjoy asking, and I want to give her the benefit of the doubt and assume that she never revealed a child and its family to the authorities. At home, we Mennonites were taught not to betray our Christian practices, like prayer, hearing Bible stories, or celebrating Christmas and other feasts secretly. Gifts received at Christmas could not be shown in school until after New Year’s Day, which had been turned into an alternative winter festival with *D’yed Moroz* (Father Frost) as a substitute Santa Claus, with a decorated tree, and with gift giving.

I lived in two worlds, in a state of unconscious compartmentalizing.

On the one hand, I heard the Bible stories and believed them; prayed my bedtime prayer, always with the addition “Bring Papa nach Hause! Amen;” and looked forward to Christmas and Easter. At the same time—and at that age, without a conscious sense of contradiction—I respected my teachers, listened to political instruction, and kept the home world to myself. In retrospect, it is obvious to me that this unconscious compartmentalizing could not have gone on for many years.

I can only imagine what it must have meant for Mother and other parents to train their children to maintain this duplicity; Mother never talked about it later. Of course, there was support in numbers. All Christian parents knew that their fellow believers did the same. There was no other way unless they wanted to risk being sent to concentration camp, in which case the children would be handed over to a Communist orphanage and brought up in its atmosphere, unless relatives managed to get them out and take care of them.

Going to school was physically demanding. I had approximately two kilometres to walk one way. A long stretch of this distance led up a gradually ascending dike-road, across a bridge, and down again. This stretch left me exposed to wind and snow. My clothes were not the best, and footwear was always a problem. On many winter days the wind blew fiercely, driving the snow into my face like icy needles. One day school was closed early, and only those children who lived in the vicinity or had relatives close to the school were permitted to leave. I was taken in by the Sudermanns until Mother could come later and take me home.

On the whole, however, my first year of school was a good experience. I did not have to while away my time alone, I learned well, and I put my teacher on a pedestal. It was a great shock to me when one day Mother and I stood in line to take a bus and I saw my teacher standing in the same queue. Why did she not go to the front? Did people not know she was a teacher? Eventually it dawned on me that teachers were special only in school; in the rest of the world they were ordinary citizens. That was an experience not unlike the realization that there was no Santa Claus!

I have been told that I was quite self-assured, and sometimes in command of games played by first-graders on the school yard. I was not conscious of this, and it surprised me to hear it from others later. Perhaps this assurance was due to the fact that sports and music—the two areas where my small size and my lack of musicality often worked to

my disadvantage in my later school life—played no prominent role in this context. Music was absent from the curriculum, as far as I remember, and from sports I was exempted due to my supposed heart condition.

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7

The Approach of War and Experience of the Front Line

The war between Germany and Russia began on June 22, 1941, and it had immediate consequences for my life. Only a few days earlier, Mother's friend Alice Martens came from the former Molotschna colony east of the Dniepr River, to visit us. It was decided that I, by then almost nine years old, should accompany her back to Melitopol where my grandmother (Grandfather had died in 1940), my Tante Ira, and my cousin Walter lived. Mother, due to get furlough from her office job a few weeks later, would then follow and bring me back. To let a young child travel by railroad and negotiate several train changes alone was out of the question then.

With the outbreak of war, however, Mother was "frozen to the job," like all workers, and I was stranded in Melitopol. While the official news reports about the war were vague and propagandistic, passing transports of wounded soldiers, long columns of mostly Jewish refugees fleeing east, and the underground rumours circulating among the people soon made it clear that the front was rapidly advancing toward us. How would I get back to Mother before the front line separated us?

I will be forever grateful to my Tante Ira that she had the courage to send me home in a totally unconventional manner. She entrusted me to a family of distant acquaintances who, for whatever reason, were to travel in the open back of a Russian army truck to Zaporozh'ye, the large city on the Dniepr nearest to Chortitza. To make me fit in suitably, Tante Ira even bought me a toy rifle! The family in question promised to deliver me in Zaporozh'ye to an older couple, also distant acquaintances, with the request for them to see me home the rest of the way. That is exactly what happened. I remember only a hot day in the back of the army truck

and one or two stops at wayside soft drink stands. We arrived in Zaporozh'ye around supper time and, upon my pleading, the elderly woman set out on the same evening yet to bring me home to Mother. I arrived on August 6, one day before my birthday and 12 days before the Germans occupied Chortitza.

Only when my cousin Walter and I met in Berlin 51 years later, that is, in 1992, and when I heard the story of his bleak life of banishment in Kazakhstan, which began soon after our separation in Melitopol when we were nine years old, did I realize fully how different my own life could have been if Tante Ira had not been so resourceful and courageous. At that later reunion, Walter gave me a postcard in which my mother informed Grossmama, Tante Ira, and Walter that I had arrived safely. That was our last contact with them for many decades.

When I returned, Chortitza had begun to change. Not only did we see daily the streams of refugees on the highway that ran past Tante Epp's house; there were also unending lines of trucks transporting factory equipment and goods towards the east. Soon Mother's factory was also evacuated, but accompanied only by select personnel. Mother, like most workers, was discharged, having received her last pay. Since my birthday was at hand, and since we knew that the money she had received would soon be valueless, she took me to an almost empty store and asked me to select a birthday gift. I chose a bicycle pump! I had no bicycle, of course, but the pump alone symbolized in a pathetic way one of my great unfulfilled wishes. Mother tolerantly agreed to this totally useless purchase.

Soon after the outbreak of war the government issued a seemingly strange order that was later recognized as eminently wise and beneficial. Every household was to do two things: First, paste newspaper strips three centimetres in width diagonally in an X-form across every window pane in the house. Second, every household was to dig a ditch about one-and-a-half metres wide with an entrance at right angles to one end, a certain distance from the house. This was to be covered with beams and boards and then with approximately one metre of earth to form a bomb- or shell-shelter.

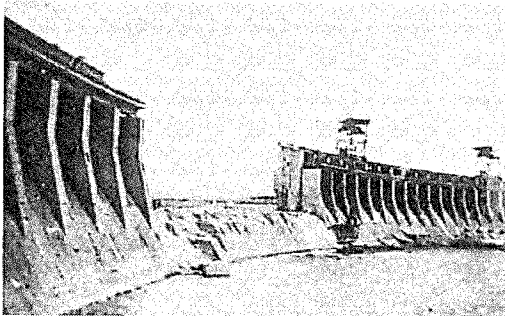
Although we knew the front was coming closer, the state radio announcements, the only news available, proclaimed the glorified official version of the war's progress. The front was supposedly still far away, and these measures could readily be interpreted as two more wilfully enforced but senseless orders from the top. This time, however, they

proved to be appropriate and effective. The paper strips prevented splintered glass from windows shattered by explosions to fill the house, while the crude shelters offered the simplest and most sensible form of shell protection. They could not withstand a direct hit, of course, but many shells would soon explode close to us without doing us any harm.

The mood of the town (in the layout of a large village, but with a population of about 13,000) was eerie. Apart from the stream of eastbound vehicles on the thoroughfare, people did not move around unnecessarily. A sense of impending momentous events filled the atmosphere. We were at Tante Epp's, together with Agnes, Ernie, and Tante Tina Epp.

Then came the afternoon of August 17. We were all inside when a detachment of several Russian army trucks drove onto the yard. The soldiers began to prepare for supper. A few soldiers knocked on the door and conducted a quick and cursory search of the house, probably for any hiding men. Agnes, Mrs. Epp's pretty daughter, had meanwhile been hidden in the large attic, for reasons not quite clear to a nine-year-old boy. The soldiers seemed neither menacing nor particularly interested in us. Suddenly a motorcycle messenger dashed onto the yard, delivered a message, and sped away. The soldiers immediately went into frantic action, poured out their soup, jumped into their vehicles, and left the yard in haste. Eerie quietness descended again.

It was clear to everyone that something was about to happen, but what? Later reconstruction of events revealed that the soldiers must have



Gap in dynamited Dnieprostroy dam

been informed of the impending blow-up of the Dnieprostroy, the long hydroelectric dam across the Dniepr. If they wanted to make their escape to the east, they had no time to waste. Later that evening we heard the detonations, and then the roaring of the released waters some five kilometres away. The dam was much too huge to be demolished quickly, but two major breaches gaped in its vast expanse until the Germans temporarily repaired them.

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The adults in our household decided to take turns waking and watching. Mother's shift fell into the early morning hours, and I, being awake anyway, kept her company. Suddenly we heard two subdued bangs, and then two howling sounds overhead, followed by explosions not far away. This was shellfire! We quickly awakened whoever might still be asleep, and all of us rushed to the shell shelter. We also heard machine-gun firing in the distance. There we sat for what may have been an hour or two, until some Russian civilians looked in and asked why we were still in hiding; the Germans were here!

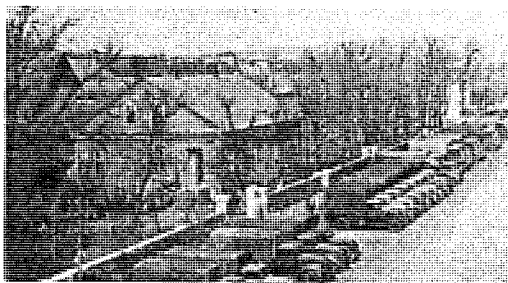
We left the shelter, and soon we met three German soldiers who were moving from house to house quite leisurely, it seemed, in search of hiding Russian soldiers. When they heard that we were German-speaking, they seemed glad but had to move on. For the rest of the day, we saw very little military activity. A few machine-gun bursts could be heard far away, and the occasional motorcycle and side-car, with a machine gun mounted on the latter, drove along the street. Once I saw a plane caught in the crossbeams of searchlights and shot down, spiralling to the ground with a trail of smoke.

What stands out in my memory of that first day is a feeling of tremendous exhilaration. We had been delivered from Communism! It was as if a breakthrough within me had erased the compartmentalization mentioned earlier. I realized that the forces that had taken my father away and had hung like a dark cloud over our lives were the same forces that had now been expelled; that we lived in a different world, a world in which one could breathe freely and deeply. I must hasten to add that these were a nine-year-old's feelings, recorded as accurately as I remember them. They were surely also conveyed to me in part by the relief I sensed in the adults surrounding me. They are in no way a political assessment of powers or issues in the grand conflagration called World War II.

We lived in the front zone for seven weeks. Apparently a small German army detachment had heard that there were German villages ahead whose people might be in danger of being deported to the east. To save them, this small force forged ahead at great speed to reach the Dniepr River. Its action may well have ensured our deliverance from the fate suffered by so many Mennonites and other Germans on the east side of the Dniepr, including all our relatives.

The Russians, surprised by the rapid German advance, hurried across the power dam and the bridges to escape across the river before

these would be blown up. It even appears that they continued their flight some distance further before realizing that their pursuers, few in number, were no longer following them. Thus we experienced three relatively peaceful weeks under German occupation.



German army vehicles in Chortitza

Then, however, the Russian forces had regrouped along the east bank of the Dniepr, including the city of Zaporozh'ye, and dug in. For the next four weeks, Chortitza and surroundings were systematic-

ally shelled by heavy cannon fire morning, noon, and night. The Germans had also set up heavy artillery by now, and the firing of their big guns shook our houses. During these weeks we spent many hours in our shell shelter. It is amazing that the number of casualties, both military and civilian, during this phase seems to have been relatively small. In part this was due to the fact that Chortitza was laid out as a large village rather than a compact town. Wide streets and large gardens received much of the impact of the bombardments. It was frightening, nevertheless, and Mother and I walked out to the village of Neuendorf, some 15 kilometres further inland, and stayed with acquaintances there for two weeks, that is, until the Germans had crossed the Dniepr elsewhere and captured Zaporozh'ye from the east.

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8

Life under German Occupation

We received and perceived the German army troops not as enemies, but as our liberators. We lived under German occupation for a little over two years: from August 18, 1941 until October 1, 1943. The German takeover meant, first of all, a relief from Stalinist oppression and its accompanying fear and suffering. For the older Mennonite people it also meant a large measure of restoration of “life in the good old days.” People were free to meet, to sing, to organize as a village community, to establish German-language schools, and—probably most important—to re-open the churches. The restoration of Mennonite life according to older patterns was not only tolerated, but actively aided by the German armed forces.

The Mennonite church in Chortitza had been converted into a movie theatre. While Mother was not opposed to seeing the occasional movie—we did that when we had occasion to go to the city of Zaporozh’ye—she would never have gone to a movie in the desecrated Chortitza church. Now the church could be transformed into a house of worship again, and the people did so without delay and with great joy. German soldiers helped along. I looked on as one of them tackled a stack of framed portraits of Stalin brought out from the church, stomping through each canvas with his heavy boot. While worship had been carried on secretly within many families, Mother frequently expressed her joy to be able to worship “in the great congregation,” as the psalmists had encouraged the faithful to do. Her sentiments were shared by many.

Early in this period Mother came home from a town meeting one evening and told me that she had been elected to be a teacher in the four-grade Chortitza elementary school that was to be re-opened in fall, only a few weeks away. The Mennonite community refused to employ teachers

who had served under the Communist system where they had been required to engage in anti-religious activities, whether willingly or under duress. Consequently, there was a shortage of teachers. To meet the need, some retired teachers were drawn back into service, and other persons deemed suitable were simply elected. Mother was one of those.

We moved into a house on the school yard shortly thereafter, occupying one half of it while the janitor family lived in the other. This was to be our home for the next two years. It was my first experience of living in a home with several rooms, and one to which we had a rightful claim. Until then, we had always lived in one room, sometimes with a small kitchenette, in facilities that people had opened to us out of the kindness of their heart. Mother took well to her work as teacher; she enjoyed her work and was liked by pupils and parents.



Chortitza village school

Many German soldiers and officers were billeted in Mennonite homes. We had *Einquartierung* (soldiers or officers assigned to live with us) for almost the whole period of occupation. While this caused some inconvenience, it was accepted gladly, and the relationship between Mennonites (and other Germans) and their military guests was generally harmonious or even

cordial. These men, mostly drafted away from their families, enjoyed the family contacts and especially the children.

I have many memories of soldiers, including officers, who told me stories, allowed me to get into their trucks, gave me my first chocolate bars, and showed interest and kindness in many other ways. One soldier, a skilled carpenter, built a nice toy car for me, big enough to sit in. Unfortunately his unit moved on before he could find and attach wheels to it. We children “hung around” our visitors and were probably a bother to them at times, but I recall no instance of gruffness or unkindness on their part.

One lieutenant must have become very tired of my constant presence and questions. Once, when I sat down in a chair with a high back to which a cushion was attached by straps, and put the cushion in front of my face, he sighed: “If you sit there for an hour and don’t say a word, I’ll give you five Mark (German currency) and a slice of bread with butter.” I

promptly complied and sat still for an hour, upon which he, of course, had to give me my reward. What five Mark might buy, I did not know then, but I certainly knew the value of a slice of buttered bread!

Many adults around me, including my mother, had great trust in these German soldiers. Once a petty officer, knowing my fascination with cars, offered to take me along on a trip to Dniepropetrovsk, a large city further north along the Dniepr, for three days; one day out, one day there, and one day back. I am still surprised that Mother let me go along with several soldiers who were, after all, relative strangers. It was in mid-winter, too, and the roads were icy. It was a good trip for me, although Dniepropetrovsk was a city in ruins, and our return trip was beset by repeated slips into the ditch beside the road.

Eventually a civil administration system, with brown-uniformed German National Socialist Party officials at the head, replaced the military administration. Some of the few remaining Mennonite men with leadership ability were appointed to civic offices under the Party officials, among them *Rayonschef* (District Administrator) Hans Epp, the husband of Tante Epp I, who had returned from exile just before the arrival of the German army; and *Bürgermeister* (Mayor) Karl Hiersack, the husband of Frau Hiersack and father of Elfi.

It did not take long for us to realize that there were great differences between Army and Party, with little love lost between them. One of the measures of the new administration was to move religious instruction from the public schools, where it had traditionally been given during the whole history of the Mennonite colonies before the Communist era, to Sunday school classes which were taught by volunteer teachers in private homes. The adults tried to present this to us children in a positive light, but I did sense that something was being covered up.

There was increasing indignation among Mennonites also about the Party administration's policies towards the Ukrainian population. We knew that many Ukrainians were equally unhappy with Soviet rule and anticipated their own liberation through the Germans. When it became evident that the occupation authorities treated them as inferior and began to exploit them, their sympathies with the German occupiers changed. The forcible conscription of younger people as factory workers in Germany was one of the most disturbing measures.

There were also reports and rumours of various incidents of injustice and maltreatment perpetrated by the Party administration. A Ukrainian man, for example, who had been a respected and liked supervisor in the

factory office where Mother and Tante Mariechen had worked, came to them one day and asked what he should do. A German functionary had slapped his face. Should he commit suicide or join the guerrillas?

The adults around me would often discuss these things with consternation and disbelief. How could the Germans antagonize their potential allies in such counter-productive ways? Time and again I heard it said that the Army would not do this. It was also believed widely that Hitler could not possibly know all that his underlings were doing, or else he would set things right! When Mother once expressed some such thoughts to an army officer billeted with us, he warned her: "Mrs. Janzen, you can say this and get away with it, but for me it would be very dangerous to do so. And you should be careful, too."

Did we know about the treatment of the Jews in Germany and in the German-occupied Ukraine? In a way, we did. The adults will have known more than I, but even I picked up some rumours. As the front line drew nearer, a steady stream of motor vehicles carrying refugees farther east moved along the major road that ran past the house of Tante Epp II. It was no secret that many of these refugees were Jews trying to escape. I am sure that most, if not all, Mennonites were for some time unaware of the existence and nature of the now infamous concentration camps. Even if they had known, some vague rumours of concentration camps in far-away Germany or Poland would still have failed to capture their mental preoccupation in view of their vivid awareness of the huge network of Stalinist concentration camps, to which almost every family had lost one or more members. Further, the "holocaust" had not yet reached its peak at this time. Nevertheless, there were inescapable rumours to the effect that the SS (*Schutzstaffel*, a special force trained to uphold the National Socialist regime) hunted down and executed Jews in the German-occupied territories.

Mother, for reasons still unclear to me, told me one day that even Jewish children were being put to death. As if to shield me from the full impact of this news, she added that a little bit of poison was put on their lips and that they died quite painlessly. I do not know how widely this mode of execution was practiced, but I have heard of it from one other source since then. That Mother told me—at age ten or eleven—about this at all, still puzzles me. Either she was so shocked that she had to express it to someone, and I was the only other family member; or she thought that I might hear about it anyway and might be traumatized by it, so that it was better if she herself told me in as gentle a way as possible.

While this news must have impressed me, since it has remained clear in my memory, I do not remember being very upset or thinking about it further. After all, I had heard about and had learned to live with countless stories of revolution, concentration camps, and so on. A world where such things happened was the only world I knew; why should I be shocked by one more story of death?!

The Party (*die Partei*) was not a monolithic body of committed ideologues, either. It included fanatics and extremists, but also many lukewarm members (*Mitläufer*) who had joined the Party only because their vocation virtually forced them to do so. Besides the “political bosses” there were, for example, teachers from Germany who were sent to provide ongoing education for the Mennonite (and other German) teachers in the Ukraine. I am not sure whether all of them had to be party members, but they all wore the brown party uniform. My mother and her fellow teachers found their courses very enjoyable and helpful. Among these educators was the later well-known Christian author Rudolf Otto Wiemer, who remained a friend of Mother and some of her fellow teachers for decades.

All in all, however, the adults around me moved from a first sense of exhilaration and liberation, which was largely confirmed by their encounters with the German Army, through two years of growing realism regarding the Germany that they had once venerated so much. Nevertheless, there was always the backdrop of Stalinist Communism, the thought of which was enough to tip the balance of sympathy unquestionably into the direction of Germany. We learned to distinguish then, and also later as refugees in Germany, between Army and Party, culture and politics, hard-core ideologues and the majority of people caught in circumstances they had neither wished for nor could escape. Even though I learned later to see Hitler-ideology in all its sinister aspects, it has often pained me to be exposed throughout over half a century in Canada to the simplistic black-and-white characterization of “the Nazis” and “the Allies,” as Evil and Good, respectively, the Allies including the Stalinist Soviet Union!

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9

Boyhood Joys and Adventures

In spite of the war context, the two years under German occupation stand out in my memory as a generally happy time. Subconsciously I must have sensed that the Mennonite community breathed more freely again after many years of Stalinist oppression. In fact, this was my first real experience of a larger community, since our earlier interactions with friends and acquaintances had always taken place in small groups or by way of individual contacts. While not all of these had had to be hidden from public view like our religious celebrations, an aura of underground existence hovered over them. There were always things that must not be said or done in public or must not be heard by the wrong persons.

Now this was gone. Friends, neighbours, school, church, and the Mennonite community generally could engage in being community. When I refer to the “Mennonite” community here, it is a term I conveniently use in retrospect. I am not sure whether I would even have understood it back then. We, or at least I, thought of ourselves more consciously as Germans, but of course our German community bore the stamp of 150 years of Mennonite faith and customs. For the German occupation forces we were part of the many *Volksdeutsche*, that is, Germans living outside of the *Vaterland* (Fatherland).

A first effect of the changed mood on me was the feeling that the lonely years were over. Tante Epp’s house, with her young adult children Agnes and Erni, immediately became a gathering place for other young people. German soldiers often joined these gatherings. While I, at only nine years of age, was too young to take part, I could hover on the edges, listen to the conversations and songs, hear about Germany, or even climb into an army truck or armoured personnel carrier.

Soon, however, we moved to the teacherage. Mother was no longer one of the large tired crowd that poured from the factory gate around supper time; she was a respected teacher, together with *Lehrer* (Teacher) Harder, Frau (Helene) Winter, and Tante Mariechen Froese. *Lehrer* Harder, a retired teacher called back to duty, was the strict and somewhat aloof and old-fashioned principal. Frau Winter and Tante Mariechen, both former teachers, together with Mother, formed the congenial female staff of the Chortitza *Dorfschule* (village school; that is, grade school).

However, a strong sense of collegiality also existed among a wider circle of Mennonite-German teachers of the area. This included the teachers of the *Zentralschule* (high school, Grades 5-10), the teachers of the Rosenthal *Dorfschule*, Rosenthal being the twin village of Chortitza, as well as the teachers of the surrounding villages. I am not sure how often and on what occasions this wider circle met, but at least the courses conducted by teachers from Germany were a major bonding event. Their conclusion was marked by a most enjoyable presentation of drama, charade, and song.

Among the teachers of the *Zentralschule* were several who will re-appear in my later story: Anna Davidovna Sudermann was the austere, learned, and competent principal. Then there were Tante Lyda (Lydia Froese), the mother of Gerd and Edgar; Tante Lena (Froese, sister of Tante Mariechen); Frau Hiersack (wife of *Bürgermeister* Hiersack); and *Lehrer* Schellenberg.

The Russian school I had attended in Grade 1 had been located some distance away from us, and my classmates had come mostly from families we did not know. That situation had not contributed much to my social life outside of school hours. By contrast, the Chortitza *Dorfschule*, attended by Mennonite children, offered the opportunity to make friendships that extended into off-hours. Such school friends usually came from families known to us, which firmed up the connections.

The group of boys with whom I associated most frequently included Edgar Froese, son of Tante Lyda and nephew of Tante Mariechen; Ernst Regehr, cousin of Walter(lein); Jascha (Jakob) Woelk, who lived a few houses down our street; and Hans Heese, son of our school caretaker, Frau Heese. We were not always together as a group, but associated with each other in this or that combination. Not all of us were in the same grade, so that another set of associations, though more limited to school hours, was offered by classmates.

Of course, there were also girls, but we boys age nine to eleven did not consider them worthy company. To play with girls would have called forth ridicule, yet they were important nevertheless. Typically, our boyish interests expressed themselves in teasing them, playing pranks on them, and laughing at their embarrassments. Interestingly, there were also those who were somehow considered “all right” by us boys, who were taken seriously and were less subject to pranks and teasing.



At age 10

For us boys the war context offered much that was fascinating—and sometimes dangerous. There was a destroyed Russian tank to explore. There were explosives of all kinds to discover. Once I found a hand grenade and brought it to a German soldier. He removed the fuse and threw it away which, of course, did not render it harmless by any means. A favourite pastime was to pry rifle bullets from their cartridges, melt the lead out of the bullet, and use the hollow bullet as an arrowhead. The powder flared up nicely when lit, and the empty cartridge could be used as a whistle or set to other purposes. Accidents did occur, but in retrospect I am surprised that there were so few. Did our mothers—none of us had fathers at home—allow all this, and more? Well, we did not ask, and they often did not know where we roamed. In the case of my mother, I am also sure that she was almost naively unaware of what adventurous boys get into when left to their own devices.

Interaction with the German occupation troops also held great interest; I have already described some of it. The uniforms impressed us and the insignia of rank became familiar. Soon I could list the ranks in order, from private to field marshal. I knew the different sizes of army units, different types of planes, and even the various war ships, although we lived in the flat steppe. The first complete “book” (actually only a 30-page booklet) I read in my life was *Der Kampf um Narvik* (The Battle for Narvik). It described the German naval and military expedition that captured the northern Norwegian iron ore port of Narvik in the spring of 1940. Far from being a Mennonite pacifist then, I was worried that I might be too small to be taken into the army once I reached the proper age.

The geographical stage for all our boyhood adventures must be visualized as spacious and relatively open for us to roam. Streets were

wide. Houses had yards and gardens that seem unkempt in retrospect, but were accessible to us without many restrictions. Even the famous old Chortitza oak—dying now, alas—spread its mighty branches over a large area suitable for picnics and games. And outside the village the cultivated land occupied only part of the landscape. There was much open terrain with ravines, creeks, and slopes, where boys could play and explore. To the east, the Dniepr, only about five kilometres away, was by far the major geographical attraction of the region.

Our games were unregulated by formal rules, leagues, competitions, courses, standard equipment, and the like. We threw stones (balls were mostly unavailable), made sling shots, played hide-and-seek or war, climbed trees, and went swimming.

I do not remember any physical education classes in school, although there may have been some. For a while, a *HJ-Führer* (Hitler Youth leader) and a *BDM Führerin* (*Bund deutscher Mädchen Führerin*: a young woman leader from the Society of German Girls) worked with us in a quasi-political assignment. We had to line up in parade form and were given some patriotic information. For the most part, these youth leaders engaged us in various group activities of an outdoor nature that resembled very much what Boy Scouts and Girl Guides do in Canada. There were also Sunday school classes. However, most of our life, with the exception of school, was unstructured.

During the summers of 1942 and 1943, swimming became a favourite activity. For me this is inextricably associated with the Dniepr, but we learned the rudiments elsewhere. Through Chortitza and into the Dniepr flowed the small creek that had given the village its name, the Chortitza. It was muddy and had an irregular bed, both in width and in depth. At two places older boys had dammed up the water to a depth that generally did not reach even to my shoulders, small as I was. In these muddy water holes, and without any instruction other than watching others, we learned to swim. There were no classes, no badges, no lifeguards, nor any of the other formal aspects of Canadian swimming lessons, and yet, there were unofficial tests and yardsticks.

These tests came when we went to the Dniepr, something we did almost every other day during my last summer in the Ukraine. A group of older boys, in their upper teenage years or early twenties, took the lead, and we younger ones went along. Our favourite spot was the sandy western bank of the Dniepr just north of where the Chortitza flowed into it. The sand was fine, white, and wonderful to lie on or walk barefoot in.

Here the Dniepr was divided into three arms by two islands: the large *Insel Chortitza* (Island of Chortitza) and *Die kleine Insel* (The Small Island); also called *Die grosse Kamp* and *Die kleine Kamp*, respectively.

The river arm between the western bank and the small island became relatively narrow in summer, but it had a swift current and a shifting bed of sand. Whoever could swim across this arm to a large stone on the island, called *die Platform* in keeping with its shape, had passed the test and could say that he could swim. For the first try an older boy would swim beside the beginner as an unofficial lifeguard. My companion for this purpose was one of the sons of Lehrer Harder, either Peter or Heinrich.

There were further unofficial standings to be achieved, such as dive-jumping from three different rocks varying in height. The lowest was the Platform. Even I could jump from this flat stone about two metres above the water. Much higher was the rock called the *Ba* (a name I cannot explain), and only the best swimmers dared to jump from the *Turm* (Tower), a rock of considerable height. Drownings occurred, some of them among the German soldiers, who were less wary of the river's dangers than the native Mennonite and Russian youths. Nevertheless, going to the Dniepr is one of my most pleasant memories of those years.

School was the only part of life that was structured. Although I was now in Grade 2, I had to learn to read and write all over again, this time in German, since my Grade 1 had been taken in the Russian language. My home room teacher in Grades 2 and 3 was Frau Winter. I liked her, and I liked school generally, although I was less ambitious to get high grades than I had been in Grade 1, probably because of the many diversions available to me.

For some purposes, like morning devotions and singing, we met together with the other grades. I turned out to be a non-singer. As my father's letter had indicated, my lack of musicality had been evident in my earliest years already. Later, but still in early childhood, I developed an aversion to singing due, in part at least, to my association of Mother's singing with sadness. Understandably, she was often sad, longing for my father and generally for the better times of the past. Then she would sing sombre Christian songs like "So nimm denn meine Hände" (Take thou my hand, O Father), songs that must have given her consolation and hope, but impressed me as sad. Or she turned to melancholy Russian folk songs in a minor key. In either case, I would plead with her to stop singing, because it signified sadness to me.

Whether I could have learned to overcome these obstacles to musical development at that early time of life remains a moot point. My friend Edgar Froese, who had access to a piano at home and was learning to play it, tried to teach me simple melodies. I memorized the positions of the keys to be struck for playing “Hänschen klein,” a well-known German children’s song. In fact, I learned it so well by rote that I can still do it, but someone has to tell me where to start; the Froeses’ piano had a chipped key that was my indicator! Many more attempts have been made later, by teachers and others who thought that every child can learn music, to make this apply to me, but it never worked.

One of the revived Mennonite traditions during these years was the school Christmas program, consisting of Scripture reading, music, poems, and more. There was a decorated Christmas tree which didn’t have to be hidden from public view. For one of these programs I had to recite a longer poem. I did so bravely and with gusto, but when I came off the stage, I was told that I had left out the last stanzas. I have never been a good performer on stage, whether in recitation or drama, not to mention music. After the program each child received a *Tüte* (paper bag) with goodies. The village women had joined together and baked Christmas cookies. In the absence of sugar, they used beet syrup as sweetener. This gave the cookies a somewhat potent, molasses-like taste, but we children were delighted. I don’t recall what else was in the *Tüte*. The two Christmas celebrations during these years, 1941 and 1942, are conflated in my memory. Both, however, were surrounded by an aura of the supra-human and special; in retrospect, I might call it holiness.

By the summer of 1943 no one could escape the reality that the Germans were retreating, even though the defeat of the Sixth German Army at Stalingrad in February of that year was followed by some victories and much victory rhetoric. During the summer a military hospital occupied our school. Living on the yard, we could see soldiers, bandaged or on crutches, walking about, but also the truck that carried the dead away every morning. The older medical officer billeted with us during that time was very serious and said little.

School opened again in September. I was in Grade 4 now, Lehrer Harder’s class. Among other things, we had grammar drills, not very interesting but very thorough. New books from Germany had arrived and were unpacked, as if nothing would be changing. Far away, however, we could sometimes hear the dull and hollow rumbling of exploding heavy cannon shells or bombs. All of us began to be increasingly

preoccupied with our chances of escape. We began to pack. I remember Mother standing in our living room and asking a German officer staying with us what we should take along. He looked around, then pointed at an original oil painting by my great-uncle Johannes Janzen. *Das!* (That!), he said without hesitation. We took it out of its frame, rolled it up, and packed it, but—like most other things we were able to take as far as West Prussia—we lost it later.

On October 1, the German authorities finally gave the official order to evacuate. Unlike those employed in agriculture, who set out on the now infamous terrible trek with horses and wagons, we were to leave by box-car train. It was no longer safe to depart from the Chortitza railroad station, since Russian planes had begun to fly overhead. Instead, we set out, by whatever means of transportation everyone could find, for the little country station Kanzerovka, several kilometres southwest of Chortitza; it was not much more than a railroad siding. There we were awaited by a long train of boxcars. We were distributed in groups of some 30 persons to a car. We sat on our belongings, which were piled high, with hardly any actual floor space visible.

I do not know how the adults felt at the prospect of leaving their homes and their homeland for an unknown destination. Mother was so occupied with the move itself that she did not say much on the subject. For her, of course, this did not mean leaving her ancestral home or village; we had done that long ago when we left Ohrloff in the Molotschna colony. As for me, I remember only a sense of relief that we were actually getting away before the Russians could capture us and send us to Siberia. A cause for mild sorrow was the fact that I had to leave behind my little grey cat, the only pet I had ever owned. While we had lived in cramped one-room quarters earlier, a pet had been out of the question, of course. We set her free and hoped she would find a good home. The train left around midnight, under cover of darkness.

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## Part II

West Prussia and Mecklenburg  
(October 1943–December 1945)



# 10

## *From the Ukraine to West Prussia*

Under cover of darkness we began our 11-day train journey westward. Unlike so many Mennonites who escaped from the Soviet Union in a wagon trek that wound its way towards Germany for months and through untold hardships, we were privileged to travel by train. It was a long train of freight cars, to be sure, crowded and without luxuries. Each car must have held some 30-40 persons of all ages, sitting cramped on top of their baggage, with little possibility to stretch out fully at night. Children were often crying, while old and frail people were groaning and shifting position. Toilet facilities were lacking, as far as I remember, although there must have been some pails for those who could not find a place behind bushes or elsewhere during the many longer or shorter stops.

Nevertheless, we were fortunate, and the weather was nice and warm, at least during the first nine days; and the mood was generally one of relief to have escaped the approaching front line and the grim fate that would have awaited us if we had not gotten away in time. For us young people, there was adventure in all this, too. We took turns sitting on the floor in the wide open wagon door, letting our feet hang down and watching the countryside roll by.

Stops and starts were totally unpredictable. Some stops lasted for hours, perhaps in an open field, perhaps in a little station. As soon as the train came to a halt, a whirl of activity began. Food needed to be fetched from a distribution car. Water had to be found, both for drinking and washing. The long train had to be searched to be assured that friends unaccounted for so far had “made it” and were safely in another car. And there was always the need to find toilet “facilities” with a semblance of

privacy, but not too far from the train, since it might start moving at any time.

When the train began to move, there was much hurrying and scurrying to get on. Fortunately, its length made for a slow start, so that even those who had ventured a little farther away could run along and jump in. Not everyone made it to his or her own car, however, and some anxious parents had to wait till the next stop to be reassured that their son or daughter had managed to get into another car. It also happened occasionally that some were left behind and had to find another train to catch up with ours. One time a group of teenagers, left behind earlier, waved from a train overtaking ours while we stood in a little station. Somewhere further on, they rejoined their anxious families. As far as I know, only one old man, left behind at some stop, was never heard from again.

Stark reminders of war and danger appeared along the way. Eventually we passed through long stretches of Polish forest. These were the realm of guerrillas who aimed to sabotage communication between the German army in the field and its German home bases. Witness to this were derailed and burned-out train skeletons lying beside the track. Would we fall victim to such planned derailments and attacks? It was always a possibility, but we were preserved.

From early childhood on, I had been interested in maps, but none was available to me during this trip. Occasionally we could read the name of a larger station: Lemberg (Lwów) and Krakau (Kraków) were among these, I think, and later on Litzmannstadt (Łódź). Firmly etched into my mind is the name Przemyśl, right on the border between Russia and Poland. Here was the *Entlausungsstation* (delousing station), where everyone coming from Russia had to undergo “delousing.” The station looked like a big hospital or factory. We had to make our way through long hallways from one process to another: take a shower, retrieve our clothing that meanwhile had been “baked” at high temperatures, and have our hair dusted with some powder. The whole process took about half a day. Then the journey proceeded.

The last two days were quite cold, so that we were glad when we arrived in Konitz (Chojnice), close to the western border of what had been the Polish Corridor since the end of World War I, but was now the German *Gau* (province) of West Prussia. This was the end of the journey for about half of the transport, including my mother and me. I do not

know on what basis we were divided, but many of our travelling companions were placed in Preussisch Stargard, some 70 kilometres further to the northeast. Among the latter were our friends, the Froeses.

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# 11

## *Konitz*

Konitz was then a *Kreisstadt* (county seat) with a population of approximately 27,000 inhabitants. We were quartered in a large, old-looking, four- or five-storey red brick building that formed part of an extensive complex of buildings of various sorts and sizes, but most of the same brick. Our building, and possibly the whole complex, was surrounded by a high wall, also of the same red brick. As we learned eventually, this had been an *Irrenanstalt* (mental asylum) until—so rumour went around—many or all of its inmates had been “disposed of” as being, in Hitler-perspective, “unworthy life.”

Mother and I, together with many others from Chortitza, were assigned to a large room with 50 or more bunk beds. At intervals there were open spaces for socializing, with a table and some chairs. Mother and I received one bunk bed with about one metre of space between us and the next bunk. We got grey army blankets for partitioning off our space from the surrounding bunks with a curtain-like “door” to one of the open spaces. Mother could sleep in some privacy in the lower bed. I in the upper bunk could see all the others in the upper beds tucking themselves in for night. For Mother, who valued privacy and dignity very highly, the lack of privacy required considerable adjustment, while I took it in my stride. Although everything was very primitive, I did not mind the close fellowship because, after all, we had escaped! Eventually we were transferred to a room with only about a dozen bunk beds.

For reasons unknown to me, we were not allowed to leave the compound for several weeks. Life inside was leisurely and somewhat boring, but never lonely. We boys often played cards; so often, that I have never in my life yearned to do so again. The food was frugal, but adequate. Turnip soup was a frequent dish, and one I did not like very



much. There was jam for our bread, however, and even some butter, a luxury I had rarely enjoyed in Russia.

Later we were permitted to go downtown and explore the city of Konitz. This was very exciting, because it was a typical old European city with narrow streets, wide squares, and nice old churches. The *Altstadt* (old city core) had once been surrounded by a city wall with fortified towers, one of which was reasonably well preserved. Konitz also had interesting shops displaying their wares, but these were not available to us at first, since we had not received ration cards as yet—our needs were being looked after through the refugee camp.

The camp was supervised by a limping military or SS commander, who had probably been injured in the war and was therefore given this home assignment. He walked about the camp, but his presence was not obtrusive. After a while, a *HJ-Führer* (Hitler Youth leader) arrived, a young man in uniform who led us boys in a number of activities. These included lining up in formation and marching, which I hated, but also going on outings into the nearby forest, which I loved. This was my first encounter with the wonderful German woods that would remain a prominent part of my life in Germany. On the whole, our activities were not particularly political in nature; they were roughly equivalent to Boy Scout activities in Canada. I assume there were similar activities for the girls.



In Konitz at age eleven

For some reason the HJ-Führer took a liking to me, and he periodically invited me to join him in his room in the evening. Usually we worked on pre-printed models of warships, cutting out and pasting the parts together. Once he gave me an apple. Mother was a little concerned about these evenings, but my host was never improper in his conduct in any way. I think he was simply lonely and bored.

On one occasion I had a little conflict with my “friend” that could have led to serious consequences, but was resolved amicably. On Sunday mornings we had worship services in a large room. I do not remember who led them at first, but later some Mennonite ministers from the

Danzig area would come, and once we were visited by Professor Benjamin H. Unruh, also originally a Russian Mennonite who now was living in Karlsruhe. He was a man who had extended much help to his fellow Mennonites ever since they began to emigrate from Russia during the 1920s.

One day, our HJ-Führer announced that we would have our next activity on Sunday morning. I objected to that and told him that I wanted to attend the worship service instead. There was some arguing between us with the other boys as witnesses. The result was a compromise. He shifted the time in such a way that there would be no direct clash with the service. He did not seem to hold my objection against me later. I don't know whether this scheduling was a first step in a plan to steer us away from the Christian faith, and whether his concession to my objection was a strategic move to tread more softly in this matter, or whether his original intention to meet on Sunday morning had simply been thoughtless, and a change of time a matter of little concern.

What is more interesting to me is my own reaction. There was no heroism involved, since at that time I did not perceive the political system to be anti-Christian. Many other Mennonites shared this perspective, although there had been some uneasiness in Chortitza at the shifting of religious instruction from the Mennonite public schools to church-sponsored Sunday schools. My puzzlement is with respect to my own desire to attend a worship service rather than participate in boys' activities that I normally enjoyed.

I had been much more interested in the army, its machinery, and all the exciting events war brought to us, than in what seemed to me in Chortitza to be rather boring church services and Sunday school lessons. What had changed within me in so short a time? I recall no special religious experience, nor any conscious influence on me from others that could account for this. The fact remains, however, that from the early months in West Prussia on, it was important for me to be a Christian, and I (not my mother) took the initiative to attend church services, generally in churches where I didn't know a soul, and where the forms of worship were remote from anything in my background and experience.

Eventually, we children were sent to local schools. That was a mixed experience for me. I was placed in Grade 4, the grade I had begun in Chortitza. The students were mostly *Eingedeutschte* (literally, Germanized persons). The part of West Prussia in which we lived had

belonged to the Polish Corridor, a region that was taken from Germany and given to Poland after Germany's defeat in World War I. Having belonged to Poland for the last generation or so, the people seemed more Polish than German now, but while under German rule they had to adapt to the German language and German ways. Many "real" Germans looked down on them as sort of half-Germans.

To those "real" Germans belonged our teacher, a Herr Potschmann. He was also a teacher of the old school that believed in the power of the rod to instill knowledge, and he used it freely, not only in response to discipline problems but also as punishment for poor academic performance. I was never spanked by him, however, either because I learned well or because I was a *Volksdeutscher* (an ethnic German, in contrast to a *Reichsdeutscher*, a German from Germany itself) rather than an *Eingedeutschter*, as the Polish-German people of West Prussia were called. Nevertheless, I found the class atmosphere oppressive, and the learning at a low level.

When I told my mother about this, she could empathize well with me. She went to the principal, a Herr Kant, who was a refined gentleman, very different from Herr Potschmann, and explained the situation. His response was to transfer me into his own class, Grade 5. That made a great difference; I had no academic difficulties due to the advancement, and I could enjoy school again. The weekly class in Religion, in which I was the only Protestant, was conducted by Herr Kant himself in a way that impressed me deeply. Even though he was a Party member, he was a devout Catholic and expressed his faith freely in class.

One of the most positive memories of that time is the friendship shown me by a fellow student, Edmund Sperra. Even though the school day ended in the early afternoon, we had a longer lunch break in the morning. When Edmund noticed the meagre sandwich constituting my lunch, he brought an extra sandwich for me each day. That might seem little in our affluent society now, but it was a valuable gift, both of food and of friendship, on the part of this fellow student and his parents.

During our time in Konitz, we made more than one trip to Preussisch Stargard to visit the Froeses and other friends. Another trip in the same direction, but somewhat longer, took us to the city of Marienburg, where we joined a guided tour through the majestic fortress by the same name. It was a prominent stronghold of the *Deutschritterorden* (Order of the Teutonic Knights) that either governed

or played an important political role in these outlying regions of Prussia for centuries.

In early February, we made a longer trip to visit the Wagners in Insterburg, East Prussia. Tante Greta Wagner, nee Janzen, was the daughter of my great-uncle Johannes Janzen, teacher, minister, and painter in Ohrloff, Ukraine, but for me, above all the author of the *Märchen vom Weihnachtsmann* (Fairy Tale about Santa Claus) that we had heard as children during every Christmas season. It is a beautifully imaginative children's fairy tale about the *Weihnachtsmann*, a sort of Santa Claus without the vulgarity attached to him by North American commercialism. Tante Greta, moreover, had stood model for the "Gretchen" in that tale, I am sure, even though she insisted years later—when I undertook to re-publish that fairy tale in Canada and consulted her in the matter—that the children in it are imaginary and not the real children of Onkel Johannes.

Having married Otto Wagner, a German citizen, Tante Greta had been able to move to Germany before the war. Mother and I spent a pleasant week in their home with her and her three boys, Hardi, Ludwig, and Helmut. Her husband was in the army, and her oldest son, Winfried, was missing at the eastern front and is presumed to have died there. Ludwig was closest to me in age, and we got along well. I recall few particulars of that visit, but what stands out in my mind is that we could live a little like normal civilians rather than as refugees.

Meanwhile, my mother and some of the other Mennonite teachers were recruited to take up teaching positions in some of the village schools of the district or county (*Kreis*). My mother was to teach in Schönhain (Polish: Long), northeast of Konitz.

Before we moved there, we celebrated Christmas with our fellow townspeople of Chortitza in the refugee camp. There was a Christmas program in the hall where the worship services took place, and we children received bags of goodies. I do not recall the content of the program. Mother and I also set up our own little "Christmas tree," actually no more than a few evergreen branches decorated with coloured paper cutouts, in our tiny bunk bed compartment.

Whenever I think back to that Christmas, as well as to our humble Christmas celebrations in Russia with all their poverty, I realize how important it was for us in those years to celebrate. I did not know the reason for this then, but I see it now as the need in dark times to claim and proclaim a brighter world. The reality as it is, we were saying

symbolically, is not all there is, and the darkness cannot altogether hide a greater and ultimately victorious reality.

Before we moved to Schönhain, we became German citizens. The naturalization process by means of which we received German citizenship took place in a railway train in Preussisch Stargard. We entered the train at one end as Russian citizens, moved from office to office within the train, and emerged at the other end as German citizens. However, this German citizenship was not recognized by the Allies after the end of the war so that we immigrated to Canada as Russian citizens. I still have my German citizenship document, but it has never served any practical purpose.

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# 12

## *Schönhain*

On March 17, 1944, Mother and I made our move to the large Polish-German village of Schönhain (Polish: Long), Kreis Konitz, where Mother had accepted a teaching position. Schönhain was located on the main railroad line leading from Konitz to Dirschau and then on to Marienburg, Elbing, Königsberg, Insterburg, and on. It was 37 kilometres from Konitz to Schönhain.

Next to the small railway station stood the elementary school, an old building with two classrooms and a teacher's apartment downstairs and a vast attic above. At one end of this attic another classroom had been partitioned off, and at the opposite end, facing the station, another teacher's dwelling.

The principal of the school, Herr Borchert, lived some distance away. The lower apartment was occupied by a Frl. Hollez, a young lady teacher from Vienna, and the attic apartment became ours. Between the attic classroom and our apartment stretched an extensive, unused, and dark attic space. North of the school, in the direction of the station, lay a sizeable school playground, bordered on the station end by a row of fine large linden trees.

The main part of the village stretched south for about one kilometre, up to the stately Catholic church and beyond. Not too far from the station and the school, the Reichsstrasse 1, the main highway from Berlin to Königsberg, dissected the village into two unequal parts, the smaller one toward the station in the north, and the larger one toward the church in the south. In spite of its size, Schönhain was considered a village. Most people were peasants, but there were several general stores along the highway, a dairy near the church, and several other small businesses.

All of this I did not discover for a while because I was sick with fever during our move. When we arrived, Mother made me a bed and promised that she would bake me a cake as soon as she had done some shopping on our newly received ration cards. When she returned and showed me her purchases, I could hardly believe my eyes. There was bread, of course, and flour, and other staples, but also butter, marmalade, and even cocoa powder, something I had scarcely, if ever, seen before. To be sure, everything came in the small quantities indicated on the ration cards, but it was actually there!

Mother baked the promised cake, *Rübelplatz* (a sort of crumb cake). That was no simple undertaking because there was no bake oven. Our large main room was heated by a *Kachelofen* (tile stove) which was fired with wood or coal. Nor did we have any baking pans. Mother had to improvise by heating up the stove, allowing the fire to die down to what she estimated to be the right temperature, and using a cast iron frying pan to bake the cake. It tasted wonderful, and it felt so good to be living on our own—at least at first.

Besides the large room, our “apartment” had two small side rooms with slanted walls under the roof. One became our tiny kitchen and the other my bedroom. Mother slept in the main room. Only the large room was heated. There was no electricity; a kerosene lamp and a carbide lamp provided us with artificial light. Kerosene lamps were familiar to us from the Mennonite villages in the Ukraine, but Chortitza, due to its proximity to the massive hydroelectric dam, the Dnieprostroy, had had electrical light throughout my childhood. Carbide came in the form of a grey substance broken into clumps. When these were immersed in water, in a lamp especially constructed for this purpose, a gas was emitted through a “chimney” with a fine nozzle. When lit, it produced a bright flame. This method of lighting was a novelty for us.

Of course, I had to go to school. The academic level of our local school was very low, since many children had a limited knowledge of German, the language of instruction. It was decided that I should join Herr Borchert’s section which comprised the higher grades of the eight-grade school. I remember nothing, either positive or negative, of my short time in this class. It was merely another brief interlude in my fragmented educational experience of our refugee years.

This school situation did not last more than one or two months, however. Mother and I took the train back to Konitz one day and paid a

visit to the Principal of the *Oberschule* (now *Gymnasium* in Germany; that is, high school), Herr Wollentheid, to register me in that school. He was a kindly gentleman who asked me a few questions to ascertain my knowledge. One was, "How do you spell 'machine' [in German, of course]?" I promptly answered: *M-a-s-c-h-i-e-n-e*. Wrong! *Maschine* is a word spelled without an "e" after the "i," contrary to what one would expect, and therefore suitable as a spelling tester. Mother was embarrassed, I'm sure, but I was admitted anyway. I started my schooling in Konitz on May 8, 1944.

High school began with Grade 5 then, as it still does in Germany. To enter it, prospective students normally had to write an examination. My admission had therefore only been provisional. Herr Wollentheid had explained that, as part of a progressive paedagogical move, the school had abandoned that entrance examination and had introduced, instead, a *Klasse 0 [Null]* (grade 0 [zero]). This was a class into which sufficiently promising pupils from Grade 4 were taken for the last approximately two months of the school year. They were taught by an especially qualified teacher and evaluated with respect to their admissibility to high school, with prospects of an academic career.

It may seem odd that the school would carry on such a paedagogical experiment. After all, we lived in wartime. The German front line was receding. We ourselves were refugees, and the people of Konitz and surroundings would predictably be reached by the front line in the near future. Who would think of paedagogical innovations under these circumstances? And yet, even in the most turbulent times life goes on. Somehow in these war years I studied English and Biology, Mathematics and Latin, and other subjects in the intervals between flights or, later on, in the hours of the day before the air alarm sirens warned us of the approach of British and American bombing squadrons.

I was reminded especially vividly of this tenacious persistence of life in the midst of turmoil when I visited Israel decades later, during an especially tense period. Road blocks, armoured vehicles with mounted machine guns, and the scream of jets overhead did not allow anyone to forget Israel's beleaguered state. And yet, the children went to school, the farmers took their produce to the market, and the city people hurried to their jobs. This is one of the paradoxes of war.

The *Klasse 0* was taught by Frau Jager, a very fine and likeable teacher. I enjoyed it fully, although I remember few details. One negative experience stands out, however. Music was taught by a different teacher.



This nice young woman had the not-so-nice idea of determining our final grade in music by having us rise in turn and sing any folksong of our choosing solo before the class. I chose “Auf, du junger Wandersmann,” but the teacher interrupted me after little more than one verse and told me, not unkindly, that I need not continue. She gave me a low mark, as was to be expected, but not so low as to jeopardize my entry into high school. This event stands out in my memory as one of the many “exclusion experiences”—to use a modern concept—in my life due to my lack of musicality. Herr Borchert in Schönhain had defended firmly the position that everyone can be taught to sing or to play a musical instrument. He made a few attempts to teach me mouth organ, but alas, with no success. To conclude, I did pass Klasse 0 and was admitted to high school as of the fall of 1944. In the farewell hour of our Klasse 0, Frau Jager, referring to my Russian-Mennonite accent, said praisingly to the others, “See, now he speaks almost like we!” I felt greatly affirmed, and I remember Frau Jager affectionately.

All of this, of course, transpired in Konitz, not in Schönhain. I had become a *Fahrschüler* (commuter student). Mother would wake me as kindly as she could at about 5:00 a.m. I would get ready and watch the railroad barriers at the nearby station close. This was my signal to rush to the station and catch the train for Konitz. There I had a walk of about one kilometre from the station to the school. Eventually I became part of a half-dozen or so other commuter students, although I had the furthest to go. By supper time, I was home again.

The commuter group was brought together by circumstance, rather than friendship, and it was not always congenial. I found it especially painful that some of the fellows—probably sons of political functionaries—engaged in anti-Christian mockery. On one occasion, when one of them made derisive remarks about Christ on the cross, I gathered my courage and said firmly that I for one believed in Christ. That ended such talk for a while, at least in my presence. In retrospect I am again puzzled at the rather sudden and unexplained sense of importance of the faith to me.

Commuting was not an easy way to attend school, and I was often very tired. However, since I liked the school and the teachers and was academically interested, I did not mind the effort. In any case, summer holidays lay ahead after Klasse 0.

That summer in Schönhain lingers in my memory as a pleasant and sunny time in a rural setting. Schönhain was surrounded not only by

agricultural land but also by heath—it lay in the *Tucheler Heide* (Tuchel Heath)—and pine forests. The river Schwarzwasser wound its way about two kilometres east of us. The linden trees on the station side of the school playground spread a sweet scent, inviting us to gather their blossoms for a fine herbal tea.

Being a “real” German, not an *Eingedeutschter*, I was appointed leader of a little *Jungvolk*-group (literally, young people’s group), the name of the pre-*Hitlerjugend* (Hitler Youth) for boys 10-14 years of age. As in the refugee camp in Konitz, we did not engage in specifically political activities, but played games, went hiking, and so on. Attendance on the part of the *eingedeutschten* boys was not very good or enthusiastic, and my “leadership” did not amount to much. Nevertheless, we fulfilled the state requirement that every German boy had to be a member of such a *Jungvolk*-group. Since I had loved maps from my early childhood on, I spent some time studying the map of our area and planning a longer hike for the following summer, even though the thought that there might not be a following summer for us hovered in the background.

Our social contacts in Schönhain were extremely limited. We had some contacts with the other two teachers, Herr Borchert and Frl. Hollez, of course, but I do not remember any social visiting. There was the stationmaster, Herr Kemp, and his young family; they were very nice, but again there was little social contact between us. Mother was invited for a social visit to the local forester and his family, since one of his three daughters was in her class. She enjoyed the visit and came back with much information about the guerrillas in the vicinity, from whom the forester’s lonely house in the woods was in constant danger.

All these persons were Germans (that is, *Reichsdeutsche* or *Volksdeutsche*). Mother was liked as a teacher and had a good relationship with the parents of her students, many of whom hardly knew any German when they came to class, but none of these *eingedeutschte* local people stands out in my memory as closer acquaintances, except the family of Frau Radschinski, the school caretaker. When the front line came closer and we began to think of fleeing west, she and some others told us not to leave; they would speak for us and nothing would happen to us. That was well meant and kind, but we knew they would not be able to protect us from the Russian troops and the Polish patriots.

Someone took Mother along to the Roman Catholic Church for a worship service one Sunday, a memorable but disturbing experience for

her. She was quite wrought up when she returned. She was impressed deeply by the piety and the sense of holiness that pervaded the church and the large Polish Catholic congregation, and yet, everything was so different from her background and convictions. The ornateness, the Latin, the adoration of Mary, and other features seemed almost idolatrous to Mother, even though she had had some exposure to the Russian Orthodox Church and held much admiration for its priests under Soviet persecution. Vicariously, through Mother's account, her visit to the Catholic church, in addition to Principal Kant's religion classes in Konitz, belongs to my own first exposure to Roman Catholicism.

Our life in Schönhain included several visits to two Mennonite families in the vicinity. One was to the Sudermans in Heiderode (Czersk), a small city one railroad stop away from us towards Konitz. Frl. Anna Sudermann (always called Anna Davidovna) had been a prominent personality in Chortiza and the principal of the Zentralschule there during the time of German occupation. Like my mother, she had received a teaching assignment while in the refugee camp in Konitz. With her lived her other family members we knew from Chortitza: Tante Tinnen; Tante Liese with her three children, Leni, Heinz, and Gredel; as well as their cousin Lieschen. We exchanged several visits, and I got along well with Heinz and Gredel, who were closest to me in age.

Another Mennonite teacher, Frl. Martens, had found a position in the nearby village of Klasgen, where we also paid a number of visits. She lived with her elderly mother and one or two sisters. I remember going blueberry picking there, and also attending the wedding of one of the sisters to a young man home on furlough from the war for this occasion. To have these Mennonite families close by was certainly an encouragement, especially to my mother.

However, not all was sunshine, nature, and visits. Although the front was still far away, it was coming inexorably closer. Locally, Polish guerrillas made the woods unsafe for Germans, and reports of attacks were circulating. Once in mid-summer, a detachment of German soldiers combed the woods for guerrillas. One day Frl. Martens from Klasgen, deeply distraught, told my mother that ten men from her village had been randomly selected and shot by the Germans in retaliation for the assassination of a German by guerrillas in the vicinity. One of the ten men had been the father of one of her pupils.

In mid-summer also, on July 20, came the unsuccessful attempt by Graf Stauffenberg and others to kill Hitler. A mass meeting in the town square of Heiderode was organized to affirm loyalty to Hitler. All teachers were required to attend, which meant that Mother had to participate also, and I went along. I cannot imagine that Mother went gladly; political mass rallies under duress had been a continual part of her working life in the factory in Russia. This event was a further reminder that Germany's future was bleak, and for us that meant first and foremost that Communist Russia might win the war; a sombre prospect.

Life continued with some semblance of normalcy, however, and a new school year was approaching—my first year of high school. Because of the hardships of commuting, Mother had registered me in a student residence attached to the high school in Konitz. Life there was easier in some respects than the long commuter days had been, but for me it was more burden than pleasure. Boarding schools are inevitably marked by regimentation, something I hated. It was also my first time away from home, and I was homesick. For some Sundays—we had no “weekends,” since Saturday was also a school day—I could go home, and on some, Mother came to visit me. Then we would make a long *Spaziergang* (leisurely walk) to and through the park-like forest at the edge of town. Mother would always bring some *Rübelplatz* or other goodies. Still, I did not like the boarding situation, and when some of the school facilities were converted into a military hospital and all those who could commute were ordered to commute again, I was not sorry.

Two events of great academic significance for my future fall into this period. First, I began to learn English. My teacher was Herr Kroeker, an elderly man with some walking handicap. In addition to the introduction to English, I remember two things from his classes. First, Herr Kroeker explained to us that English draws words together into flowing word groups, while German separates every word from the others, even if ever so slightly. As a teacher of German I have explained this basic difference to many a class of my own in later years.

Second, we read about wealthy English estate owners in British colonies who sit on their verandas eating grapefruit. At this time I had not the slightest notion that English would become the primary language of my teaching career, and I had no idea what a grapefruit was; English was merely another school subject. When years later we crossed the Atlantic by ship for Canada, however, the steward serving breakfast

brought halves of grapefruits for us, and I felt for a moment that I had “arrived,” joining the league of rich colonial farmers sitting on their verandas and eating grapefruit!

A second experience with lasting significance for my later life was a matter of attitude rather than of learning. I might call it an “academic conversion.” In Grade 1 in Chortitza already I had been a competitive student, a reach-for-the-top kid. Here in Konitz I vied for first place in class with another student and a friend of sorts, Uwe Staeck. One day I was walking down the wide, curved staircase of the school building when, half-way down, suddenly and for reasons unexplainable to me—and certainly not as a “sour grapes” feeling—a flash-like decision shot through my mind: “I don’t want to strive for first place in class! I will deliberately let Uwe get ahead of me.” From that moment on I have never attempted to “reach the top” academically, even though I have always tried, and succeeded, in being a good student.

The fall of 1944 turned to winter, and Christmas was approaching. When our Christmas holidays began, it was clear to most that we would not return to our school again. The front was moving closer. The Russians were advancing. Refugees from the east began to pass through. It was only a question of time as to when we would join their trek westward.

Against the backdrop of this larger scenario we celebrated Christmas. It was the loneliest Christmas I have ever experienced. On Christmas Eve, Mother and I huddled around our table dimly lit by the kerosene lamp. Our attic apartment seemed surrounded by darkness. Sometimes big boys ran through the school building, evoking the thought of guerrillas. As far as I can remember, we had no Christmas tree nor any candles, except one tiny improvisation from a thin spice flask with oil and a woollen wick; only the faintest resemblance to a Christmas candle. Mother had managed to get me, the map lover, a jigsaw puzzle map of Germany. In a mere few minutes I had put the limited number of pieces together, but I enjoyed it tremendously, timing myself and setting new records of speed in assembling it.

We lived between reality and unreality: the reality of war and the make-believe of peace and normalcy. This is brought home to me with special clarity when I think of a move we made in early January. The school inspector had decided that our attic apartment was inadequate, and he had procured a larger one on the main floor of a house for us, farther away from the station and the school, and close to the Catholic

church. He had also seen to it that we received ration coupons for new furniture, curtains, and other amenities. This was a gesture of recognition for Mother, but predictably we did not enjoy this improvement of our living conditions for long.

On January 26, Mother and I walked toward the school to hear news about the front line and the state of urgency of our departure. When we reached the Reichsstrasse 1, the major highway that passed through the village, we saw a column of several military trucks parked by the roadside. When we walked over to ask the soldiers about the state of the front line, we saw that Herr Borchert, with his wife and daughter, was already sitting in the back of one of the tarpaulin-covered trucks, ready to leave.

The officer in charge immediately told us that if we were Germans and still wanted to escape, we should come along right away; the Russian spearhead of tanks had already overtaken us south of Konitz. Mother asked whether she could quickly run back to our apartment and collect a few things we had already packed in preparation. He agreed, and Mother hurried to get our backpacks and a roll of bedding, while I stayed close to the officer to remind him not to leave without us. Loaded down and out of breath, Mother returned with the few belongings she could carry, and we were off to an unknown destination, as long as it was somewhere in the West out of reach of the Russian troops.

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Flight from Schönhain to Techentin

We could no longer take the Reichsstrasse 1, which led southwest to Schneidemühl, because the vanguard of Russian tanks had already appeared there. Instead, we followed smaller country roads due west. Soon we were driving slowly through snow-laden forests. Even to ascend a moderate elevation, a vehicle with caterpillar chains would pull one truck after another up the incline, a procedure meant to save fuel. Meanwhile, the other vehicles stood waiting. We passengers could look out only to the rear because the tarpaulin covering the truck was open in that direction. I remember the beautiful snowy forest scenery. In spite of the deep snow, it was not cold. We advanced very slowly, but we were going west.

Among my few belongings was a little notebook, 12.5 by 8.5 centimetres, neatly bound in a brown hard cover decorated with a gold trim. It must have been a gift, for such a little treasure could not be bought in the stores then. I had made a few entries in it before we left; they consisted of certain addresses, including that of Prof. Benjamin Unruh; some family information going back to my grandparents; and a note to the effect that I was carrying with me 69.06 Reichsmark in cash, with an exact count of bills and coins. The rest of the booklet was empty. Into it I would enter some of the most important data and observations of the next five years of my life, beginning with a terse diary of our flight from West Prussia to Mecklenburg, and ending with an entry dated December 28, 1949; that is, a little over a year after I came to Canada. Since I still have this little notebook, it will offer much information in the further course of writing my memoirs. In future references to it I will call it my *Braunes Büchlein* (Brown Booklet). With its help, supplemented by my memory, I can now give a precise, if brief, account of our flight.

January 26, 1945. We travelled from Schönhain via Heiderode, Karschin, Prechlau, and Hammerstein to the village of Drensch in Pommern (Pommerania). There our whole group was received very hospitably by the people, given sandwiches, and provided with sleeping accommodation on straw mattresses in the school building.

January 27. The journey continued slowly along snow-covered roads. We got only as far as Zechendorf. Again we were received in a very friendly manner. Mother and I stayed with an older lady who made up clean beds for us in a warm room.

January 28. The journey proceeded faster than on the previous day. We travelled via Berwalde and Tempelburg to Selshagen. It was hard to find lodging there. Eventually we slept (poorly) on straw, in the company of soldiers, in a crowded school classroom.

January 29. We travelled well and reached Teschendorf. This was as far as our military convoy was going, but we found another army truck that took us to Stargard in Pommern. There we were directed to a movie theatre filled with other refugees. It was crowded, and all we could do was sit in the theatre chairs and wait for I don't know what. Mother's mood was very low. Suddenly we heard a voice calling into the big room, "Frau Janzen, Frau Janzen, wo sind Sie?!" (Mrs. Janzen, Mrs. Janzen, where are you?) It was Fr. Hollez, Mother's Viennese fellow teacher in Schönhain. The Borcherts, who had also travelled with our military convoy, must have had contact with her, looked her up at her relatives' place, and told her of us. She literally rescued us from hopelessness and took us to relatives of hers. There we enjoyed friendly hospitality until the following morning.

January 30. From Stargard we could continue our flight by train. We travelled in boxcars and, due to endless stops, required the whole night to reach Stettin, *Hbf.* (*Hauptbahnhof*; that is, main railroad station), a trip that might normally have been made in about one hour. It was January, and the train was very cold.

January 31. Now we had entered the part of Germany accessible to Allied bombers. Stettin (now Szegedin, in Poland) was the capital of Pommern, a city of over 200,000 inhabitants. We spent all morning in a huge subterranean bunker, but suffered no air attack.

It is strange to imagine that we bought tickets for Berlin, even though no one really checked or cared any more. Mother's plan was to head eventually for Wernigerode in the mountainous Harz area. There she knew of a certain Mr. Jakob Kroeker, a Mennonite who had come

from the Ukraine earlier and was now involved in the mission organization *Licht im Osten* (Light in/for the East). As far as I remember, Mother did not know him personally, but—like Professor Benjamin Unruh—he was known as a helpful fellow Mennonite. His presence there would offer at least a tentative goal.

Around noon we stood shivering on the platform, waiting for our train to Berlin to arrive. Instead, a train pulled in on the track opposite ours. Well, we thought, all trains go west now; let's get in. That was one of those moments that gives one pause to ask in later years, "What turn would our life have taken if we had caught the Berlin train instead?" We never reached Berlin. Our train went west only as far as Pasewalk, from where our route continued north along the Baltic coast. Although this was a passenger train, it also proceeded with starts and stops, taking the remainder of the day to traverse the distance normally requiring about one hour. But while our train from Stargard to Stettin had been bitterly cold, this train, crowded with passengers, was badly overheated, and the windows could not be opened. Somehow we suffered through hours of standing, moving a bit, standing again, and sweating. We spent the night in the waiting room of the Pasewalk railroad station.

February 1. In the forenoon I went downtown to do some exploring, while Mother sat in the station with our few belongings. I am surprised in retrospect that she was not averse to letting me go into a strange city in these wartime circumstances, but this was not the only such occasion. In the afternoon we were able to take a freight train to Stralsund. There we were lodged in a hotel, received a warm supper, and slept well on straw mattresses in a warm room. Government organizations in all these stations and towns looked after the stream of refugees coming through.

February 2. We spent the morning in the railroad station, with a foray into town on my part again. In the afternoon we took a train to Rostock, Hbf. There we changed to another train. It was so crowded that we were literally shoved by force into a compartment by a railroad official, who then heaved in our baggage after us, right over the heads of the people. In this way we travelled to Bützow, where we stayed overnight.

February 3. In the morning we continued by train to Schwerin, the capital city of Mecklenburg. There we first experienced an air raid. We sat with many others in a rather narrow bomb shelter. After a while, bombs began to explode, although not in the immediate vicinity. The walls shook. Children started to cry. I felt very claustrophobic, helpless,

and afraid. The fear of being buried by a collapsing basement-like structure made this different from the artillery bombardment we had experienced in Chortitza. In the afternoon we headed on to Ludwigslust, in the southwest corner of Mecklenburg, where we spent the night in a school building.

February 4. Our vague destination was still Wernigerode, even though our decision in Stettin had embarked us on this northern detour. Consequently, we went on south to Wittenberge. There, however, we noted more industry, as well as air balloons overhead as protection against air raids. We concluded that the air raid danger would continue to increase as we moved further into central Germany. Consequently, we decided to return to Ludwigslust, a small city with a population of approximately 5000, where the situation had seemed rather peaceful the previous night. So we took a train back to Ludwigslust and spent the night in the same school as the night before.

February 5. We reported to the refugee agency and were sent, by horse-drawn wagon, to the village of Techentin, about one kilometre south of Ludwigslust. The account in my *Braunes Büchlein* concludes: "Dort wohnen wir jetzt." (That is where we live now.)

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14

In Techentin before the Fall of Germany

Our sojourn in Techentin, a time of only ten months, has impressed itself on my memory as a long and full sequence of experiences, subdivided by two momentous events: the end of the war on May 8, 1945, and the Russian takeover of our region some weeks later.

After a short ride from Ludwigslust on a horse-drawn wagon, we were deposited at the refugee distribution centre in the nearby village of Techentin, where we received the address of the people with whom we were to stay. All residents in the western parts of Germany were under obligation to take in refugees, the quota being determined on the basis of the ratio of occupants to space available. In most cases the assignment of refugees to home owners and renters was probably arbitrary without any consideration of preferences or compatibilities. Co-existence between residents and refugees under these circumstances could be very stressful, even where goodwill existed on both sides. Some refugees had horror stories to tell later, but many others continued lifelong friendships with the people who had been forced to take them in.

The people to whom we were assigned received us in a friendly manner. The only room available for us, however, was a *Durchgangszimmer*, that is, a room through which others had to pass to reach another room. I was happy enough to be able to settle in, but Mother, a very private person and now tired and stressed due to the trek of the last ten days, sat down in our room and cried. Our hosts asked with concern why she was so upset, and tried to console her, but to no avail. Eventually she calmed down and explained how hard it was for her to live in a *Durchgangszimmer* with almost no privacy. Although she was generally not given to complain or show dissatisfaction, she decided to go back to the refugee distribution centre and ask for more private accommodation.

The officials complied, and we were assigned a room in the apartment of Frau Bertling, located in a duplex. It was not a large room, but adequate under the circumstances. That we had to share kitchen and bathroom facilities with Frau Bertling and her young son was a fact of refugee life that was taken for granted.

Frau Bertling was a middle-aged, comfortably roundish woman. She was generally friendly toward us and even allowed us access to her well-kept living room to listen to the radio, and perhaps on other occasions.



Standing between “our” two homes in Techentin (1992)

However, she was very neat and persnickety and Mother, always afraid to disturb or cause trouble to landlords, anxiously admonished me as soon as I made the least bit of noise or otherwise behaved in the normal ways of a 12-year-old boy. Of course, Mother had good reason to be

extraordinarily considerate since we had lived in other people’s houses throughout my life in Russia, with the exception of the two years in the teachersage in Chortitza. During Communist times, the people who had taken us in had even incurred personal danger by harbouring a minister’s family. On the whole, however, we got along well with Frau Bertling and her son during the few months we stayed with them. Still, when a somewhat more adequate living space was offered to us by the Duesler family two houses down the street, we gladly accepted it.

A fortunate circumstance for us was the fact that the other half of Frau Bertling’s duplex was occupied by Frau Ruth Schepler with her two children, Windi (Winfried, about four years old) and Gundi (Gunhild, about two years old). Frau Schepler, a very pleasant and intelligent young woman a few years younger than Mother (who was 39 years of age now), befriended Mother and me and became Mother’s much needed emotional support. She also helped us in tangible ways; it is hard to imagine in retrospect how much less happy our ten months in Techentin would have been without Frau Schepler.

As in Konitz and Schönhain, a new place meant a new school for me. Soon after arriving in Techentin, I was enrolled in the appropriate grade—Grade 1—of the Oberschule in Ludwigslust.

While we had a certain sense of having escaped and being able to settle down again, we were never allowed to forget that the war was



Frau Schepler and baby

continuing. The tangible reminders were many. There were almost daily air raid alarms and one major air raid. We were on the route of Allied bombing squadrons flying in from the North Sea and heading for Berlin. When the advance alarm was given by howling sirens, we, together with the others in the house, dragged ourselves from our beds and stumbled down to the basement. Then came the full alarm, and soon we heard the low droning of the squadrons above

us, wave after wave. Eventually the droning receded, the *Entwarnung* (siren to announce the end of the danger) sounded, and we could return to bed, wondering perhaps about the fate of people in Berlin and other cities.

I always felt afraid and claustrophobic in the basement. What would happen if the house should collapse or if the water pipes burst? If an alarm was sounded during the day, Mother and I would go to the nearby *Sandgrube* (sand pit), a sizeable area of sand banks, shrubs, and patches of small trees. We could easily dig a shallow pit and camouflage it against view from the air. We felt much safer there than in the basement of our house.



Gundi and Windi (1946)

Ludwigslust, a non-industrial town of approximately 5000 people, was not a prime bombing target. It was therefore all the more shocking when one squadron did unload its bombs, and severely damaged several street blocks. The number of casualties was in the hundreds. This sent a shock wave through the population, and the main church, which normally was very sparsely attended, was filled for the next few Sundays. The bombing may have taken place on March 18, 1945, for an Internet

listing of United States bombing missions on that day mentions Ludwigslust, not as the main destination, but as a “target of opportunity!” A few enthusiastic American flyers had an opportunity to get rid of a few bombs and a few Germans. That is war.

The high school I had barely begun to attend was soon requisitioned for military purposes, and our grade was taught henceforth, with reduced hours, in a room in the city hall. On many days, however, the shrill advance alarm sirens would sound after the first hour and we would be dismissed. I made my way home to Techentin, and found myself walking along the approximately one-kilometre long, tree-lined road from town to village when the Allied planes were overhead. On several occasions, Allied fighter planes strafed this road with machine-gun fire so that I had to throw myself into the ditch or hide behind a tree. This was the time when jet fighters were introduced. While the approach of the traditional propeller planes was announced some time ahead by their engine noise, the jets—faster than the speed of sound—appeared overhead suddenly and unexpectedly; they could be heard only as they roared away.

Sometimes the village was also strafed, and our house had several canon bullet holes—slightly bigger than ordinary machine-gun shot holes—as evidence. No one in our house was injured, however. One time Mother and I had to seek shelter quickly beside an open country road when a dog fight between a German and an Allied plane took place close by, though not directly overhead. One of these planes was shot down, and we could later visit its burned-out hulk in a field.

Of course, we listened to the radio reports, both to hear advance warnings of enemy air squadrons and to get a sense for the state of the war. The prime source of news was the *Deutschlandsender* (Radio Germany) in Königswusterhausen near Berlin. In spite of the official attempts to sound upbeat, there was little doubt that Germany would lose the war within the near future. Hitler’s impassioned speech calling for all Germans, including young teenagers, to offer every possible form of guerrilla resistance to the enemy in occupied parts of Germany, was particularly chilling. I remember Mother’s outrage when she heard it.

However, war was not the only reality in our life even in these its last few months. I attended school again and had some homework to do. Brief and interrupted by air alarms though our class hours were, I studied English, Biology, and other subjects. None of my teachers left a deep impression on me during these few months.

Soon after arriving, Mother and I visited the *Superintendent* (literally, Superintendent or Dean, that is, the chief minister of the Lutheran church district). He was also the chief pastor of the large, architecturally and artistically imposing *Stadtkirche* (town church; a fine Baroque Catholic church) or *Schlosskirche* (palace church), thus called because it had earlier doubled as the church of the Grand Dukes of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, whose summer palace, the *Schloss*, faced the church across a spacious park-like area. Behind the *Schloss* lay the extensive park with its grand beeches and many other trees, its well-kept hiking paths, and even some artificial ruins. The cultivated park gradually receded into a large forest.

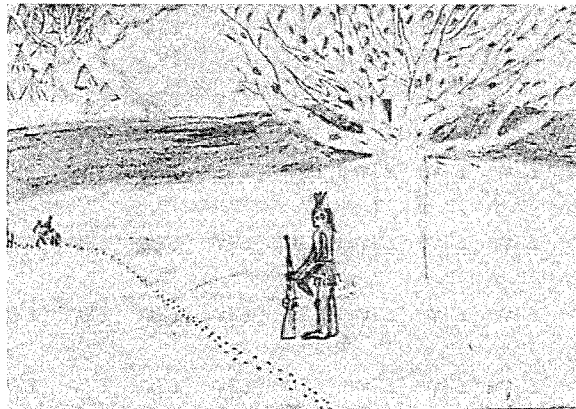
The Superintendent, Pastor Haack, was a kind elderly gentleman who welcomed us graciously. I assume he was glad for all persons interested in the poorly attended church and its work. He asked Mother to assist with a children's service, which she did. I was enrolled in the confirmation class, since I was of the age when Lutheran children were confirmed. Due to the brevity of our stay in Ludwigslust-Techentin, however, I have hardly any memories of this class.

We attended Sunday church services regularly, joining the very small congregation that filled just a few pews in the large and beautiful church. North German church life seemed at an all-time low. Since much of the Lutheran liturgy required sung congregational responses, a professional singer sat in the back, shielded by a low partition with a small open window, and sang the responses loudly and clearly. I found this rather pathetic, but it did not diminish the importance of attending church for me.

Then there was the countryside. The village consisted in the main of red brick buildings, some of them small workers' quarters, while others were old *Bauernhöfe* (farms), often with large barns built partially in *Fachwerk* (half-timbered construction). The surrounding land was flat and sandy. Besides pastures and fields with common grain crops, there were fields with long heaped-up rows of sandy soil for growing asparagus, stretches of heather—we were just across the Elbe river from the *Lüneburger Heide* (Lüneburg Heath)—as well as extended fir and pine forests. It was an unspectacular but pleasant countryside.

From the time of my encounter with the forests around Konitz and Schönhain, I had become a nature lover. In one small essay I still have, called "Die Sandgrube" (The Sand Pit), I mention my desire to become a *Förster* (forester). This love for nature was fed from another source also.

At this time I was introduced to the books of Karl May, author of many American novels of the Wild West and other adventure tales that every



My Karl May-inspired drawing

German boy was reading and that are known and available in Germany even today. They have shaped the romantic notion of the “noble savage” of the American Wild West, like the Apache chieftain Winnetou, for generations of Germans, and for me also.

How did we survive? Mother did not have a job, but that seemed not to matter in those last months before Germany’s collapse. Money was devalued. Perhaps we had brought along some savings from Mother’s teacher’s income in Schönhain. We probably also received some refugee subsidy, so that we had enough for our immediate needs. Nevertheless, Mother applied to the *Suchdienst* (literally, search service; an agency engaged in rejoining family members separated by the war). She mentioned her knowledge of Russian as a special qualification, a fact that was to have far-reaching consequences for our future. The German food rationing system functioned to the very end of the war, so that we had enough to eat, though never very much. With Mother, I made forays into the countryside and the woods to gather *Sauerampfer* (sorrel) and mushrooms to supplement our meagre diet. With friends, I simply went exploring. The really hard times with respect to food were to follow later.

Mother and I had virtually no social life other than that provided by the inevitable contacts with landlords and neighbours. There was Frau Schepler, however, who was always ready to help us and with whom Mother had many long talks. It was a mutual friendship that sustained both of them in these difficult times. Our church attendance offered no social dimensions; it was strictly devoted to worship. Due to our short and often interrupted class time, school attendance was also not conducive to developing friendships.

The exception to this virtual absence of social contacts was my friendship with Erwin Paul, a red-haired boy my own age. I met Erwin in school, but we soon discovered that both of us also attended church. Our shared Christian faith was a strong bond between us. We spent a considerable amount of time together, roaming through the park, the woods, or the *Sandgrube*, and doing much discussing. It was a boys' friendship carried on outside of our homes and mostly outdoors.

What did we discuss? There was school, of course, and there was the war. Then also, we were at the threshold of puberty, and had many questions about the opposite sex, most of them unanswered. Mother came from a background where "such things" were never mentioned, and I would certainly not have turned to her for enlightenment. Erwin's parents must have been an equally unlikely source of information. Further, neither of us had sisters or any other closer contact with girls. Of course, both of us had gathered bits of information from other boys. In Chortitza already I had been told how babies are "made," but I had refused to believe that my parents would have done "anything like that." In retrospect it is strange to think of how children can know yet not know. Printed information of the kind that now abounds on every library or drugstore bookshelf was unheard of in those days. Our discussions were purely theoretical and in many ways ill-informed.

However, it was not only our age and natural curiosity that raised questions of sex for us. The front was coming closer, and there was widespread talk among adults at all kinds of gatherings about what the Russian soldiers did to women and girls. That older children like ourselves would pick up such talk was inevitable, and we knew enough to understand what it meant. The frequency and vividness of reports of rapes by Russian soldiers increased as the front approached. In spite of all the talk, however, we boys had many unanswered questions and, for an open and coherent presentation of sexual intercourse, conception, pregnancy, and childbirth I had to wait for a church-sponsored youth retreat in Bavaria some two years later. Meanwhile the end of the war came closer.

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15

A Time of Transitions

One day we heard in the news that Hitler had died by taking his own life (on April 30, 1945), having first appointed Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz as his successor. Strangely, I don't recall my emotions when getting that news. They must have been a mixture of sadness that Germany's defeat was imminent and relief that Hitler was gone.

A widespread North American or Allied misunderstanding often leads to a false picture of the German situation in the later phases of World War II. North Americans especially tend to see it as "Hitler's war," which makes them surprised that the German armed forces fought so bitterly to the end. They can see this only as fanatical or unexplainable devotion to Hitler. Of course, there were Hitler loyalists and fanatics, but the majority of German soldiers did not fight so much *for* Hitler as *against* the enemies. Among those, the Soviet threat was most prominent. But those who see things from the vantage point of Western Allies fail to realize that Germans did not see in the Western Allies those crusaders for freedom and democracy that they believed themselves to be. Many viewed these Allies as the enemies that had not only engineered the Treaty of Versailles, but had laid their cities in ruins through unimaginably massive and brutal bombings. Many Germans kept fighting fiercely to protect their homeland and their families, and not to uphold Hitler. Even then at my young age I was aware of this. The fact that Germany had bombed British cities, too, did not change this; and Germans knew, of course, that Britons had similar feelings towards them. Wartime feeling is characteristically one-sided, each side maintaining its perspective through massive propaganda.

Having said all this, I hasten to repeat that the fear of the enemy's victory was not equally focused on the Soviet Union and the Western

Allies. One of my teachers in Ludwigslust expressed to us students her view that it would be so much more logical for Germany and Britain to unite even now against the Soviet Union. When Roosevelt died, I heard at least some expressions of hope that a separate peace treaty with the Western Allies might now be possible, perhaps because Roosevelt had been part of the Yalta Agreement. What I have said here is not researched political analysis, but merely an attempt to explain how the imminent fall of Germany could make a 12-year-old German boy sad, while the death of Hitler did not.

In contrast to my lack of emotional response to the news of Hitler's death, a well-remembered emotion of nostalgia and sadness came over me when I heard the *Deutschlandsender* (Radio Germany) in Königswusterhausen, near Berlin, give its last news report, and then said its farewell as the Russian troops were approaching. This had been the voice we had listened to so often that for me its disappearance from the air marked the imminent collapse of Germany more clearly than the death of Hitler. Over 50 years later I drove toward Berlin with younger West German friends when a road sign pointed the way to Königswusterhausen. A deep welling-up of emotion came over me. I asked my friends whether that name meant anything to them. In a casual tone they answered: "No, do you know the place?" They belonged to a new generation, and I refrained from explaining.

The week after Hitler's death was a time of anxious waiting to see whether we would be occupied by the Russians or the Western Allies. We were fortunate to come under American occupation a few days prior to Germany's capitulation on May 8, 1945, although the border with the Russian-occupied territory was not far away. One bright and sunny day stands out in my memory; it was either the day when the war ended or one soon thereafter. I was walking from Techentin to Ludwigslust, choosing a shortcut through the cemetery. A deep inner peace came over me as the sun shone on me with the realization that the war had actually ended. The guns were silent. The bombs no longer dropped down. I gave thanks to God.

A gentle melancholy was admixed with this sense of relief and peace. Germany, the country that had rescued us from the Stalinist Soviet regime and had shown us great hospitality under difficult circumstances, lay defeated. One picture in my mind is particularly symbolic of this. I stood at a junction of two major roads in Ludwigslust. Along one of them came a long column of German soldiers, walking three deep, still

orderly, but tired and without arms. Their commanding officer, his two adjutants on each side, led the march into final defeat. Soon they would be met by American forces and enter captivity. That was Germany now.

The next few weeks were marked by our encounter with the Americans. I do not recall my first sight of them, but soon they were omnipresent. Their light green uniforms, in contrast to the darker green of the German army's, and the abundance of their dull-green coloured trucks, jeeps, and other machinery could be seen everywhere. We were glad they were there, rather than the Russians.

The Americans became an enigma to us, however. Were these tall, friendly boys, as most of them looked to us, the same Americans as those who had dropped countless tons of bombs on German cities, or strafed us civilians with machine guns from the air? They seemed to be jolly and to love the children. Soon certain rumours circulated: Did you know that the Americans have chewing gum and peanut butter? And their bread is whiter than any bread you have ever seen; it looks like cake! It was hard for me to imagine that people would chew gum, which I could only visualize as something like a piece of rubber tire. And peanut butter? That evoked no image at all. Soon, however, we found out, for the Americans shared chewing gum freely with the children.

American material abundance was impressive. The streets were soon littered with discarded packages of all kinds, and were not always completely empty. For us it was a novelty that everything was so nicely packaged. Their garbage dumps were interesting places where one could hope to find a bumped-up but unopened tin can of cheese, a wax-coated box of crackers, or other things that were real treasures for us. Once I picked up an interesting-looking unopened little package of a kind I had seen repeatedly on the street. I brought it home and showed it to Mother, who recognized it as contraceptive condoms and told me with embarrassment to throw it away. The used variety was also in evidence on the streets.

Sometimes it seemed as if the Americans left things around deliberately for us to pick up. One such instance occurred in the garden behind our house just before the Americans were to hand over our region to the British. Several soldiers began to dig a hole somewhat more than a square metre in diameter and over a metre deep. We children watched openly, and the adults stealthily, as the soldiers deposited all kinds of foodstuffs, and even containers with wine in this hole. Then they topped it up with soil and went away. Were they storing it for some

purpose? Were they disposing of their over-abundance? Soon the rumour circulated that the Americans had orders not to fraternize too openly with the former enemy population, but that these particular soldiers had left their extra supplies for us to dig up once they had left. That is what we did. The treasure was divided among the neighbours, and we tasted goodies we hadn't had for a long time, if ever.

While the Americans seemed friendly and magnanimous, at times they also behaved like naughty or careless boys. One time a group enjoyed itself by firing off flares. When one of these fell on a barn and set it on fire, they seemed regretful and made some attempts to extinguish the blaze, although without success.

A more serious and potentially dangerous incident took place on a sports field beside the road from Techentin to Ludwigslust. There the Americans had brought together a huge assortment of captured German military equipment such as trucks, tanks, and ammunition. Through some carelessness—or was it deliberate action?—an explosion took place, setting off another, and another. In shock, we wondered whether fighting had broken out again as missiles hissed through the air and thunderous explosions sent smoke billowing up. When all was over, the whole ball field was one great tangle of charred and twisted metal. We boys spent some time climbing through the burned-out vehicles, looking for something interesting to salvage, but everything was thoroughly twisted and gutted.

I have not been able to find out how long the American occupation lasted and when the British took over, as determined in the Yalta Agreement. Nothing changed very significantly when they were there, except that they seemed more taciturn and kept a greater distance from the German population. They, of course, had experienced Germany as the enemy which inflicted great destruction on their own home country, resulting in an enmity much deeper than that felt by the Americans.

Nothing from the brief period of British occupation stands out in my memory as particularly important or impressive. Possibly our first encounter with concentration camp realities fell into this time, although it may have taken place during the American occupation phase already. In any case, we were witnesses to a mass funeral for concentration camp victims that took place in the open area in front of the Stadtkirche, if I remember correctly. It is very vague in my mind, and I do not even know whether we actually saw the dead in striped prisoners' clothes, or whether the many pictures of such scenes that I have seen since then

have overlaid the actual experience. Nor do I know why we were there. Had there been some kind of compulsion to make us witnesses? I do not know.

It must have been during this time that we moved from Frau Bertling's place to the Dueslers, a couple of houses down the road. The new living quarters offered a small improvement and a little more privacy. We moved to the second floor, where we had one room to ourselves and a kitchen shared with another refugee family. That family consisted of the grandmother, Frau Rautenberg, with her daughter, Frau Perkonik and the daughter's little boy, Peter, who was two or three years old. We got along fairly well, although Mother often became tired of Frau Rautenberg's lamenting the bad times. Our landlords, the Dueslers, lived on the main floor. As far as I remember, there was a grandmother, then our landlady, Frau Duesler, with three children: an older boy, a daughter Rosi, about 14 or 15 years old, and a younger boy. Frau Duesler and Rosi were especially good and friendly to us, but the others were also nice people. We were glad that this move still left us close to Frau Schepler.

The British occupation phase was brief; it ended suddenly and, for us, unexpectedly. One evening a curfew was declared, and on the next morning the Russian Army moved in. It was a total surprise, and there had been no chance to flee further west. After four years of deliverance, we were back under Stalinist rule.

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16

Soviet Takeover and a Second Escape

I stood at the window of our room and watched the Russian tanks drive along the street. It was a grey morning, and the future lay grey before me. After an interval of four years we were in the grip of the Soviets again. We did not know then yet that the evil system would spare no means to send people like us to Siberia, and that this would be the fate of two-thirds of the Mennonites who had fled from Russia. Nevertheless, we expected nothing good from the system we knew all too well. For us there seemed to be no future and no hope.

It was fortunate for us that the Russians did not move in as fighting troops but as occupiers succeeding the Americans and the British. Since this was before the beginning of the Cold War, they had to uphold some semblance of a good image before their Allies. Their troops were therefore stationed in garrisons with limited permission to go out. This also served the purpose of minimizing the possibilities that their soldiers would witness the higher standards of German life—that would have exposed the Soviet propaganda which portrayed Russia as the workers' paradise. Thus, while many rumours of rapes and other violence continued, our situation was much better than that of the regions where the Russian troops had moved in fighting.

One spectacular testimony to the character of the new regime could immediately be seen on the ivy-covered back façade of the beautiful Baroque *Schloss*. Its sizeable library collection was promptly thrown from the upper floor windows. The whole façade was covered with books and papers caught in the ivy, a sorry sight which witnessed to the cultural level of our occupiers.

Less spectacular but more devastating were the changes affecting the everyday life of the people. While the German food rationing system had

been taken over intact and continued by the Americans and the British, it collapsed immediately following the Russian occupation. The conditions we knew from Russia seemed to be there overnight: lack of food and long queues for the necessities of life. Soon the food shortage became severe. The little bread we got was partly baked from unshelled oats that could leave slivers in the mouth. Potatoes and *Wrucken* (turnips/rutabagas) were our main sustenance. I remember thinking that I would consider myself fortunate in life if I could always have enough potatoes and rutabagas cooked and mashed together. As it was, even this “delicacy” was in short supply.

We did not suffer outright starvation, but for long stretches of time we never felt really filled and satisfied. Under such circumstances, one’s thinking moves from meal to meal. If I could get a Karl May book, I would read it to make me forget my hunger. Now and then, friendly *Bauern* (farmers, the German version) or garden owners gave us some produce. Frau Schepler had relatives on a nearby farm, a source of occasional extras from which we also benefitted. We gathered mushrooms, sorrel, and berries whenever we could, but since many other people did the same and since the woods were not altogether safe, this source of food was limited. Once, while gathering blueberries together with a few other people, we were approached by a Russian soldier. Mother and I became fearful immediately, but it turned out that he was just a homesick boy who wanted to chat with us in his broken German. We were careful, of course, not to reveal that we knew Russian.

Eventually, the shortage of food, and possibly infection spread by the Russian army, resulted in a typhoid epidemic. Many people became sick, and the total number of deaths became high enough to necessitate extending the town cemetery beyond its brick walls. Immunization was available, but I apparently got my shot while already infected, a factor that may have exacerbated the illness once I got it. For several days I lay in bed with high fever and great thirst. Malnutrition did not help recovery, of course. I will not forget the time when my mother, always concerned about preserving dignity and careful not to be a burden to others, went to neighbouring farmers to beg for some food for me. She brought back an egg and a few apples. Frau Perkonik also caught typhoid, but we both recovered.

One of the first significant events was a call for Mother to report for work as a translator. During the American occupation, she had given her name to the *Suchdienst* as a German-Russian translator. She would never

have done this if we had known that the Russians would take over. Now there was no escape; she had to report. Fortunately she was assigned to work in the German *Landratsamt* (approximate equivalent of county administration) rather than for the Russian military authorities. This led, in a sense, to our eventual escape.

Mother's work did involve constant contact with Russian officers, since she had to translate the interactions between them and the German civic administrators. This made her quite uncomfortable, because these officers would naturally ask where she had acquired such a good knowledge of the Russian language. The officers were civil to her, however, and she never encountered real trouble. Often she could even help to smooth the way in some issues by helping the German officials to understand the Russians' perceptions and customs.

An uncomfortable situation arose when a Russian officer fell in love with a young German woman, and he asked Mother to be the translator for an evening when he wished to invite the young woman and get to know her better. Mother realized that he was quite serious in his intentions, while the young woman seemed to take a playful attitude. That could hardly end well! Mother took me along as her "chaperone." We had what for us was a lavish supper. I no longer remember how the whole affair ended. I imagine that Mother, as always, was very tactful, and that she probably did much to steer the conversation in as positive a way as possible. In any case, no difficulties resulted from this event.

The Russian occupation took place in summer. In many ways, our life went on with some degree of normalcy, if such a term is even applicable to those times and circumstances. Mother had a job now, albeit an uncomfortable one. I continued to associate with Erwin Paul. We roamed the countryside, the park, the woods, and the *Sandgrube* until the summer holidays ended.

In fall, we started school, now in the proper school building again. The teaching staff was little changed. A new subject on the curriculum was Russian Language. In this, I had a great advantage, of course, since I was fluent in that language. I tried to "lie low" with respect to my knowledge, since we were wary of Russian reaction if we should be found out, but could not hide my fluency altogether.

There were many *Johannisbeergärten* (currant gardens) around Ludwigslust. When the berries were ripe, we were sent out by school classes to help with the picking. In a way this was fun, since no one could forbid us to eat our fill, but it could also get hot and tedious. Sundays

were included in our work schedule. This presented a problem for me because I wanted to attend church. I sought counsel from Herr Henning, an older teacher whom I respected and whom I had occasionally seen in church. In retrospect I realize into what a difficult position I put him because under Soviet rule he could impossibly have given me dispensation to miss my harvesting work in order to go to church. Any such move would have had immediate and dire repercussions for him, and perhaps also for my mother. He suggested, no doubt with great uneasiness, that it might be all right for me to miss some church services for this purpose. This I did.

In late summer or early fall we made our first attempt at escape to the west. The danger of staying and the urgent need to escape were impressed on us in two ways. First, Mother observed in the Landratsamt that, at the direction of the military occupation authorities, questionnaires were being prepared for some sort of popular census. These included a line for indicating one's religious affiliation, and under it, in fine print, the suggested options were listed: Lutheran, Catholic, Reformed, and *Mennonite* (my italics). There were no Mennonites in these regions other than those who, like us, had escaped from the Soviet Union. The message was clear: the Russians wanted to find *us*!

This was confirmed for us by a Mrs. Klassen, who lived in Ludwigslust with her young daughter and whom we came to know around this time. From her we learned that there were camps in various parts of the Russian Zone where refugees from the Soviet Union were being gathered to be repatriated as escaped traitors. We knew that our destination would certainly not be the former Mennonite settlements but exile in Siberia.

Mother obtained a passport from the helpful German authorities in the Landratsamt. Its information was fully correct and true, but after Mother's (correct) place of birth with the German name "Eugenfeld, Kreis Halbstadt" there was no indication that it was located in the Ukraine. This passport was a reward for Mother's helpful and appreciated work in the Landratsamt, and it became one significant factor in our eventual escape.

We packed a few essential belongings, no more than could be easily carried. Among these I hid a few photos; I first made sure that every Russian word or other telltale sign of our origin was carefully scratched out. Only Frau Schepler was taken into full confidence, although we must also have said something to the Dueslers to have them keep our

room for us, at least for a little while. Thus, early one morning we met Frau Klassen and her daughter (who was about ten years old) and took the train south.

At this time, the border between the Russian Zone and the West was not yet guarded tightly with barbed wire, watch towers, and other means, as it would be later. Rumours kept circulating among the German population as to where an escape to the West might be easiest at the time. Guided by such underground information, we headed for the central part of the zone border west of Magdeburg. It was a long train ride via Wittenberge and Stendahl to Magdeburg. A branch line took us further to Haldensleben, and an even smaller line from there to Weferlingen, a small town close to the border.

From the small end station of Weferlingen we walked towards the border some two to three kilometres away. The border itself was a narrow dirt road through a forest. As we entered the forest and made our way carefully between trees and bushes, we realized that we were not alone. Silent and watchful figures could be seen here and there, headed for the same destination as we were.

Suddenly a Russian patrol of three soldiers approached and stopped us. We had reckoned with this and pulled out a little alarm clock to bribe them. They exchanged a few words with each other, which we of course understood without letting on. Then they accepted the clock and waved us on. This scene was repeated with a hair clipper, and then a third time with another bargaining item that I no longer remember. Somewhere we lost touch with Frau Klassen and her daughter. The last stretch lay before us as we wound our way through the underbrush. We could already see the British guards on the other side when a Russian soldier came running up to us, gun in hand, and drove us back.

It was late in the afternoon by now. Soon a Russian cavalry troop appeared and combed the forest for escapees. (German forests are not like Canadian "bush," where such an action would be impossible.) A group of perhaps 50 persons was gathered together on a field at the forest's edge. We were herded against a caragana-like windbreak. Only a few sentries remained to guard us, while the main troop returned to the forest. Mother and I found ourselves crowded against the row of bushes with a hole in the hedge right behind us. Stealthily, we slipped through this hole and walked away on the other side of the hedge. I do not know what happened to the other detainees.

On the way to the station we encountered a frightening scene. Some Russian officers were surrounding a little group of Germans, probably also on their way to the border. One of the Russians was aiming his pistol at an older man, and we heard—understanding their Russian—that they were deliberating whether or not to shoot him. Mother, knowing that Russians often had a soft heart for children, asked me to go with a few other children and plead for the man, in German of course. It had the desired result; they let the man go. For some reason or other they did not stop or question us.

We reached the station of Weferlingen, were able to catch trains to Haldensleben, then to Magdeburg, and eventually back to Ludwigslust. The journey was long and difficult. For one stretch we travelled in the brakehouse of a caboose. At another time we were in a freight car that had held coal and was dirty wherever we touched it. During a night stop in Magdeburg, while I wanted to sleep a little on the station platform, Mother noticed to her horror that a louse was crawling over me. And, of course, there was always the fear that we might be stopped by Russian control sentries and questioned.

Worst of all, we felt defeated. We had failed to escape, and we had no place to go but back to Techentin with the danger of being caught and sent to Siberia. It was at Magdeburg where Mother remembered that Frau Schepler had tucked a letter into her pocket just before we left. She searched for it, found it, and read it. Then she read it to me. It was like an angel's message. Frau Schepler assured us, among other kind words, that, should we fail, we would be most welcome to return, and she would do her best to help us. I don't know how Mother would have managed without this letter, but now she took new courage, and so did I.

We returned to Techentin and to our place at the Dueslers. Mother went to work the next morning, and no one asked her concerning her absence. Her German superiors undoubtedly guessed the reason for it, but they remained discreet. Since Frau Klassen and her daughter did not return, we considered it likely that they had been successful. We have never heard of them again.

Fifty-four years later, in 1998, that is, after the *Wende* (the unification of Germany), I was invited to give lectures at the Mennonite Church in Wolfsburg, the Volkswagen City. Mary, my wife, and I were travelling by train. Looking at the map to check our route, I happened to spot the name of a little town only a few kilometres southeast of Wolfsburg; a name I had almost forgotten, though not the events it now

recalled: Weferlingen! When I told Pastor Daniel Janzen, our host, about the events this name recalled for me, he immediately suggested an outing there for the following day. So we went, and there was the same little brick railroad station, hardly changed, except for the signs of decay ubiquitous in the former DDR (Deutsche Demokratische Republik).

What course would my life have taken if our escape had been successful? How does God lead? Humanly speaking, I would not have experienced the years in Scheinfeld, some of the most formative in my life. We might well have been handed over to the Russians by the British, a practice the British and Americans engaged in at first, but had stopped by the time we made our second—this time successful—attempt at escape a few months later. What we could see only in darkest terms at the time has taken on a different perspective since then, even though the remembered despair still makes me hesitant to call it good.

We were back in Techentin. When I think of the next few months, the time of fall and early winter, I do not remember sunshine and nature, but only a life painted grey on grey. Mother left for work early while it was still quite dark, and I joined her since my school was close to the Landratsamt, even though it was still too early for me. Somehow the darkness seemed like a secure cover. There must have been sunny days, outings with Erwin Paul, and times of relative joy, but I don't recall them. It was probably at this time that I fell sick with typhoid. Some three months must have passed in this mode before we made our second attempt at escape.

Frau Schepler kept her word. She was acquainted with the mayor of Techentin, and through that connection she managed to have us placed on an exchange list to Bavaria. This meant that we were listed as Bavarians caught in Mecklenburg by the circumstances of war, but were allowed to return "home." Our only "evidence" for being at home in Bavaria was the address of Tante Mariechen from Chortitza, who had escaped to Bavaria with her mother (Tante Froese) and her sister (Tante Lena). According to the return address they lived in the village of Thüingfeld, adjacent to the town of Schlüsselfeld in Franconia, the northern part of Bavaria.

To qualify for this exchange to Bavaria, we had to go through various formalities, but these were handled by German officials, not by Russians, and they closed an eye to our inadequate documentation. Among other procedures, we had to pass a medical examination. The doctor asked me whether I knew what a *Mass* was. It means a measure, but for Bavarians

it has the added meaning of a measure of beer, or a beer tankard. I understood "Mars" and answered, "a planet." The doctor laughed and said: "Du bist mir ein Bayer!" (approximately, "You're a real Bavarian, I am sure!") He meant it ironically, of course, but he did not betray us.

Some time after our arrival in Bavaria I entered a very brief summary of our trip from Mecklenburg to Bavaria in my *Braunes Büchlein*, introducing it with the remark that keeping a diary during the trip was impossible because it was dark and cold in our railway box car. We left Ludwigslust during the night of December 6 and arrived in Wasserberndorf on December 14.

During the first few days we travelled in a start-stop-start fashion almost due south, probably through Magdeburg, Halle, and Plauen until we reached Ölsnitz, our last destination in the Russian Zone. In my retrospective notes I stress how cold it was. There was no room to move, and we could leave the train only for occasional brief stretches on a station platform. Otherwise we sat on our feet to try to keep them warm, or at least to keep them from getting frostbite. In my diary I write: "Selten frieren sie so wie auf der Flucht." (Seldom do they [the feet] get as cold as during a flight.) I think it was on this lap of our refugee travels that I saw a boy about my age being carried because his feet were frozen. But the psychological tension was even worse than the cold. Would we really get out, or would we be discovered at some checkpoint after all and sent to Siberia?

The tensest time came at Ölsnitz where we spent a night in an overcrowded refugee camp. I write that there were four people to a bed, and that we hardly slept at all. We had to pass some control point again, but I have forgotten the details. Finally the train moved on. Somewhere we crossed the border between the Russian and the American Zone. And when we arrived at the station of the Bavarian city of Hof, we knew we had escaped.

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Part III

Bavaria and Württemberg
(December 1945–October 1948)

17

From Hof to Wasserberndorf

We had escaped! The date was December 10, 1945. Our first night in the West was spent in the refugee reception camp of Hof-Moschendorf. We arrived after dark. It was winter. The camp was overcrowded. And I suffered a bad fall on a slippery spot. My head hit a hump of ice, leaving me momentarily stunned and seeing stars not belonging to the starry sky. Nevertheless, my mood was one of unspeakable euphoria, a feeling that still returns to me as I write this 58 years later. We had escaped for the second time; first, when we had left the Ukraine, and now again as we had left the Russian Zone.

On that first evening we experienced a small miracle of sorts. The barracks of the camp were so crowded that the people who had taken possession of the rooms barred the doors from the inside, so that no latecomers could enter. We knocked on several doors, but without success. At one door we finally decided to persist. Eventually the door was opened a crack and a man peered out cautiously. Seeing us, he swung the door open and exclaimed, "Aber Frau Janzen, was tun Sie denn hier?!" (Well, Mrs. Janzen, what are you doing here?!) It was Mr. Schellenberg, a teacher from Chortitza. He let us in and found a place for us. The crowded room was warm, and my *Braunes Büchlein* contains the entry, "Eine gute Nacht gehabt." (Had a good night.) The next morning we took a train to Bamberg, the larger city from where a railway branchline was shown on the map to lead to Schlüsselfeld, the town where Tante Mariechen and family lived, according to the address on our only letter from her.

Bamberg: city on several hills, city of many churches including the famous Gothic cathedral, the archbishop's palace, the glorious

Rosengarten (rose garden), and many monuments of history. All this I discovered on later visits, but then I knew nothing about it. The most important place for refugees was always the railway station. We inquired about the train for Schlüsselfeld, but—alas!—there was no such train. In this early post-war period, rail service had only partially been restored. We were told that every second day a milk truck drove out in the general direction of our goal and, if there was room, some passengers were allowed to sit on the milk cans in the back and ride along. The truck would leave around noon in two days. That meant sitting in the station's waiting room for two nights and a day. Meanwhile the *Bahnhofsmision* ([Christian] Railroad Station Mission) would feed us.

Mother was very tired by now and was content just to sit by our few belongings and wait. Waiting was part of refugee life. I, on the other hand, was ready to explore at least some of the city, as I had done elsewhere during earlier stopovers on our refugee trek. The next day, not knowing the city, I wandered aimlessly through the streets, simply observing what I saw; no map, no tourist guide; just spontaneous impressions on a 13-year-old boy's mind. But the euphoria of having escaped was still there.

This is when I fell in love with Bavaria, or more precisely, with Franken (Franconia), the northern part of Bavaria. Although I talked with no one, as far as I remember, the people seemed more open than the reserved North Germans. Perhaps someone greeted me even then with the common greeting of those parts, "Grüss Gott!" (literally, Greet God! although probably an abbreviation for "Grüss dich Gott!" [May God greet you!]) Everyone used it, the same way "Guten Tag!" (Good Day!) was used in northern Germany. But to me, after years of Communist atheism, it sounded warm and pious (in the best sense of that word). The impression of Christian devotion was confirmed for me by crucifixes and statues of saints and, of course, by the many ornate churches—Bamberg and much of Bavaria was staunchly Catholic.

I passed a school yard alive with children and observed their play. Soon I noticed with surprise that the boys did not fight. Could that be? Small of stature, I had always had to work at holding my own in a competitive boys' world, where status was largely determined by wrestling and sports. I did find out later that these things were not absent from Franconian schools, but my general impression of less belligerence was subsequently confirmed by my experience.

Snow began to fall gently as I walked past store windows that were—as everywhere in Germany in those years—rather empty, but the bakeries had some baking on display, and other windows showed a few goods for sale. And, wonder of wonders, there were no queues! It was almost the middle of December, and probably Christmas decorations were already in evidence. The snow continued to fall, transforming the scenes into a Christmas-like atmosphere. Various church bells rang. As I made my way back to the station, I was filled with joy; not only now the joy of having escaped, but also the joy of having arrived. I wanted to be here in Franken.

We spent another night in the railway station. During the following forenoon, we managed to catch a ride on the milk truck. It did not go all the way to Schlüßelfeld, but only to Burgebrach, some 12 kilometres north-east of Schlüßelfeld. When we arrived there, the weather had turned cold, and an icy rain driven by a strong wind stung our faces as with needles. There was no choice, however; we had to continue on foot. Loaded with our backpacks and hand luggage, we trudged along a paved road winding its way through hills and forests.

Two events stand out in my memory. Once we stopped at a roadside inn and asked whether we could warm ourselves a little. We had no ration cards to buy any food, but the inn keepers allowed us to stay and, on their own initiative, served us a meal preceded by a plate of hot soup. The soup was thin and watery and the food was simple, but for us it was a wonderful treat on that cold and icy afternoon. As we moved on, a lonely car came driving along the otherwise deserted road. The driver stopped and offered us a ride for part of the way. It was another act of kindness that could not have been more welcome. We took courage and walked the rest of the way.

When we arrived in Schlüßelfeld, night was setting in. We entered the first *Gasthaus* (inn) we encountered and explained to the woman in charge that we were refugees from the Russian Zone and were looking for a family by the name of Froese living in this town. She knew that there had been such a family, but thought that the Froeses had left some time ago. She called some other women, and they confirmed this news. The women also knew that Germans from Russia had only recently been rounded up by the American occupation forces and handed over to the Russians, although they thought that this might no longer be the practice. Someone knew that Marie Froese (Tante Mariechen) and her

family had moved to the village of Wasserberndorf, approximately eight kilometres away, to take up a teaching position.

We were devastated. Not only were the Froeses not here, but even here in the American Zone we were perhaps in danger of being sent back to Russia. No, the women said, there was no public transportation to Wasserberndorf, but early in the afternoon of the following day a milk truck would go there, and we might be able to ride along. The women were clearly sympathetic to our plight, but what could they do?

What should we do now? The room was cozy and warm, one of those wood-paneled rustic German inns with wooden benches lining the walls with the tables and chairs in front of them creating comfortable eating nooks. There were no other customers. After a few helpless minutes of deliberating, we asked whether we could spend the night sleeping on the wooden benches in that room.

The women consulted with each other quietly. Then they said: No, they would make real beds for us, and we could stay with them for supper, breakfast, and the noon meal (which was the main meal) until the milk truck would come. They provided nice warm beds for us in a separate room, with feather ticks for blankets, as was the custom. They served us what for us were wonderful meals, even though we had no



Wasserberndorf village school (1992)

ration cards. For the noon meal we got a Bavarian specialty, quite unfamiliar to us, but delicious: macaroni with blueberry sauce. Of course, we talked, but I have forgotten the content. Many people had been hospitable to us in many places, but this story I have never been able to tell in all the years since then without tears coming to my eyes, something very unusual for me.

On the next day, we covered the last leg of our journey, again by milk truck. In Wasserberndorf it stopped in the village centre, close to a public water pump and kitty-corner from the village school. As we got off the truck, a woman carrying two water pails came walking to the pump. When she saw us, she put down the pails, came

running to us and embraced Mother, and then me. It was Tante Lena, Tante Mariechen's older sister who, together with their elderly mother,



Tante Mariechen (right), Mother, and I as long as it might take us to find a more permanent place. It was an unforgettable "homecoming!"

Tante Froese, made up Tante Mariechen's family. She led us to the school, part of which also served as the teacherage, where we met Tante Froese and Tante Mariechen. We were received most cordially and invited to join the family for

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18

Wasserberndorf

My time of living with the Froeses in Wasserberndorf was brief. We arrived on December 14, 1945, and on January 16 I left for the *Kreisstadt* (county town) Scheinfeld some 18 kilometres away to attend school. During the following months I came “home” to Wasserberndorf every weekend, since Mother still lived there, until she followed me to Scheinfeld in spring. Of course, we exchanged visits with the Froeses after Mother’s move, too, until both they and we immigrated to Canada in the fall of 1948.

In retrospect, I can hardly believe that my full residence in Wasserberndorf lasted for only a little over a month because in my memory it stands out as a distinct and significant phase of my life, and generally a very positive one. The great new reality was that we had actually escaped. At first the American occupation forces had indeed extradited refugees from Russia like us to the Russians, as the women in the Schlüsselfeld inn had told us. The Froeses had also been summoned at that time to meet with others in Scheinfeld to be “repatriated.” In the *Kreisverwaltung* (county administration), however, the *Landrat* (chief county administrator), Baron von und zu Franckenstein, had advised them to return and “lie low,” thus saving them from being handed over to the Russians. Soon thereafter the Americans had stopped these extraditions. For us Wasserberndorf meant the first stretch of life without fear in this respect.

Life in Wasserberndorf also meant sufficient food. Tante Mariechen, by now a well-liked teacher in the village, quickly secured a residence permit and the necessary ration cards for us. Also, she received various gifts of eggs, meat, and other farm products from the farmers whose children she taught. We enjoyed these extras with our generous hosts

whose apartment and meals we shared. All this did not mean that we lived with abundance, but we never went hungry, either.

I remember especially the good hot oatmeal porridge that was part of our daily fare, as well as the excellent Bavarian rye bread. Often it fell to me to walk either the three kilometres to Aschbach, the larger village to the east, or the four kilometres to Geiselwind, the larger village to the west, to buy a round loaf of this crusty bread, which measured about 40 centimetres in diameter. I carried it home like a treasure.

During the few weeks before and after the Christmas holidays I sat in on Tante Mariechen's instruction. It was a one-room village school for all grades. I have no distinct memories of what we learned in class. Since I had attended high school, I was probably well ahead of my age group, but this time in school left no unpleasant memories. We assumed that it would be a transitional time, but there were no specific plans for my future. I for one was not inclined to think of the future; I was happy where I was and, if asked what I wanted to become, I tentatively mentioned "practical" occupations like gardening or carpentry. I think I may have been in a state of subconscious physical and mental exhaustion, and I wished nothing more than to settle down for a while.

Wasserberndorf also brought a new church context. In contrast to our irregular though meaningful contacts with poorly attended Lutheran churches in northern Germany, we found ourselves in an environment where churches—both Catholic and Lutheran—were active and played a major role in communal life. In the years immediately following the defeat of Germany and the collapse of all political and many social structures, it was the church that became one of the main rallying points for many. Questions of collective guilt were discussed, new initiatives were taken, and a general religious revival swept much of Germany. In Scheinfeld we would experience more of this, but even in Wasserberndorf the church became a vital part of our life.

Wasserberndorf, a small Protestant village, had no church of its own, but was divided by some ancient tradition between the parish of Aschbach and the parish of Füttersee, the latter situated a little north off the road to Geiselwind. Geiselwind was Catholic, which was readily recognizable by the colourful houses around the market place and the crucifixes and Madonna-statues so prominent in Catholic parts of Bavaria.

A little north of the road to Aschbach and up a fairly steep hill, lay the chapel of Hohn am Berg (Hohn by the hill), beautifully situated

within a hilltop cemetery and offering a view far over the valley of the Reiche Ebrach, a brook running along the valley extending from west of Füttersee towards Schlüsselfeld and beyond. Typically, the west-east valleys with their respective brooks here in the Steigerwald (a range of hills in this part of Franken) were the agricultural areas dotted with villages, while the hilly ranges between them were heavily forested.

The Froeses and we seldom, if ever, attended services in Füttersee. The reason was the minister, a strictly pietistic but gruff and—for us at least—not very attractive man. Instead, we preferred Aschbach, with its cultured and welcoming minister, and occasionally the chapel of Hohn am Berg, in spite of the steep uphill walk that getting there required. When we visited the Froeses in Burghaslach or the Hiersacks in Gleissenberg, we sometimes attended the churches in those places as well. Even though church services were naturally held on Sunday mornings, my memory of the Aschbach church always recalls it at night, its lights beckoning the worshippers approaching in the darkness outside, and its warmth receiving us in the sanctity of its modestly ornate interior.

As was true for all of Germany, church attendance then was strictly for the purpose of worship and not for socializing. There were no greeters at the door, unless it was the minister; no need to know the other worshippers' names (which the local people knew anyway, of course); no potluck suppers and such activities. When we later saw an American movie which showed a kitchen and eating area in the basement of a church, we were scandalized by such desecration.

Church, then, was not the centre of social life. The native villagers of small Wasserberndorf were friendly to us and extended their "Grüss Gott!" when we met them, but they were so different from us in their customs, dialect, history, traditions, and education that we could not expect to enter easily into their social context. Our socializing had to take other forms. In the village itself, that left us with the Froeses and one composite family displaced from bombed-out Würzburg.

This family consisted of Frau Traut, with her daughter Ellen, about 14 years of age, and her son (Udo?), several years younger. With them in their little apartment shack, crudely constructed of cement blocks, lived Frau Traut's sister-in-law, Frau Schleich, with her 11-year-old daughter Helga. The husbands of these women had been high-ranking officers in the German army and were now prisoners of war. General Traut had held command of various army units and was eventually taken prisoner

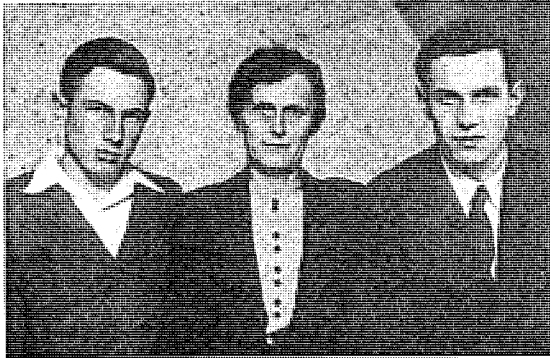
by the Russians towards the end of the war. Somehow he had incurred the displeasure of Hitler, upon which Frau Traut had been arrested immediately and had spent some time in a prison in Würzburg. She recalled how the city was bombarded by the Allies and the prison bars rattled. Oberst (Colonel) Schleich had also become a prisoner of war, but in the West, I think. When he had interceded in the case of maltreatment of one of his soldiers, a soldier of the occupation forces had slapped his face. That was such a disgrace that he committed suicide. The news of this reached the family while we were in Wasserberndorf.

The two women were well educated, and they and their children spoke High German rather than *Fränkisch* (the Franconian dialect). The Froeses and my mother found contact with them easy and pleasant, even though their life situation was all but happy. I went along for occasional visits. I do not remember playing with the children, but somehow we got along even though the only boy was much younger than I. Once or twice when I was really lonely, my mother suggested that I should visit these children and, although I was shy, I actually did so. But what to say? For me, a boy of 13, it would hardly do to admit that I had come to see Ellen and Helga, so I had to ask for Udo who was so much younger. Udo came outside and we stood around awkwardly, not knowing what to say or do. I don't know whether or not the parents helped us out of this embarrassment. When the adults were around, however, associating with the children was easier since no one of us had come specifically to visit a specific person.

One particular night stands out in my memory. The Froeses, we, and the Trauts and Schleichs had attended a church event in Aschbach during the Christmas season, probably a *Krippenspiel* (nativity play). Uplifted by the Christmas season, the event, the brightly lit church, and the company of friends we walked the three kilometres home through the dark night, but under a clear, starry sky. We children got ahead of the adults, and the distance between them and us increased as we went. The darkness may have reduced our inhibitions, and we began to talk. The content was probably trivial; we simply enjoyed each other's company, became exhilarated, and felt happy in a dark but mysteriously promising world of Christmas and stars and each other. That Ellen and I were in our puberty years and Helga not far behind was hardly in our thoughts, and it didn't matter on this night that they were girls and I a boy. It was simply good to be together, and even now I remember that walk with fondness. Our ways soon parted when their families moved back to

Würzburg and I headed for school in Scheinfeld, and I have never heard of them again.

Our other social contacts were of a very different nature. The Froeses from Chortitzta had moved to Schlüsselfeld-Thüingfeld together, but when schools were reopened after the end of the war, Tante Mariechen with her mother, Tante Froese, and her sister, Tante Lena, had moved to Wasserberndorf. Tante Lyda with Edgar, and later joined by her older son, Gerd, who had returned from a prisoner-of-war camp, moved to the



Edgar, Tante Lyda, Gerd Froese (left to right)

school in Burghaslach. This was a large village seven kilometres south-east of Wasserberndorf. Some three kilometres east of Burghaslach, another teacher from Chortitzta, Frau Hiersack, had received a teaching position and had moved there with her husband and their teenage daughter, Elfi. Naturally, the two Froese families, the Hiersacks, and Mother and I had much in common and were happy to be so close to each other.

We met with one or the other or all of these families at various times and in various homes. To get from place to place we had to walk, which was no problem when only a few kilometres were to be covered. Even when we lived in Scheinfeld, Mother and I walked the approximately 20 kilometres to Wasserberndorf more than once, although the milk truck became the more frequent mode of transportation. Since it did not go all the way to Wasserberndorf, however, there still remained some seven kilometres to be covered on foot.

The walk from Wasserberndorf to Burghaslach took us first along a narrow country road across a forested ridge. It was beautiful and quiet in winter when snow-covered. From time to time one saw a manger with hay put out for the deer. On one occasion, coming from Scheinfeld that time, Mother and I watched a whole group of deer in a clearing, a beautifully picturesque sight. The second half of the way led east through the valley of the Freihaslacher Bach, past meadows and two little villages. On this stretch, we often saw a shepherd with his flock, his dog, and his

hand-drawn two-wheeled wooden cart for sleeping—a phenomenon probably extending back through centuries.

Of the meetings with our Chortitza friends, the most prominent in my memory is our joint Christmas celebration in Burghaslach the first Christmas, only ten days after our arrival. It was a festive occasion. Tante Lyda knew how to give a small refugee apartment—two or three rooms—an attractive and homey atmosphere with very limited means. A picture here, some evergreen branches there, and it didn't take long till the room looked festive. We must have had a Christmas tree, living as we did in a region of forests all around us. Perhaps we had an advent wreath, as was the custom in Franken. And we could exchange many experiences, for each family had made its separate escape to the West.

This time we, Mother and I, were the newcomers, and we were received most warmly. We also attended the Burghaslach Lutheran Church. The minister there was at the same time the *Dekan* (Dean, or chief minister) for the region, and the Froeses appreciated Dekan Heckel. Once during these days we went to the church to see the performance of a nativity play in which Gerd, who had made good contact with the local church young people, played a role.

I should also say that I was often rather lonely. Then I would sometimes go hiking in the wintery woods alone, observe the trees and shrubs, the frozen village pond, the brook rushing under the ice, and if lucky, even some deer. Ever since our stay in Konitz, I loved the German forests. With the help of some textbooks discovered in Tante Mariechen's school, I also learned about the trees, plants, and animals of the region.

Tante Lena, who had once taught high school biology, would sometimes be of help in this, even though she was generally a quiet and reserved person. Sadly, she developed cancer, or possibly had it already without my knowledge. A few months later we visited her in the hospital in Erlangen shortly before she died on May 15, 1946. She was buried in the cemetery beside the chapel of Hohn am Berg. In the year 1992 Mary and I visited her grave there, still well maintained by an older local woman.

My time in Wasserberndorf, though distinct and rich in my memory, was short in duration. One evening early in January, Edgar and Gerd came to visit with a definite purpose. In Scheinfeld, they told us, a new Oberschule was to be opened, and Edgar wished to attend. He did not want to go alone, however, and therefore he and Gerd had come to

persuade me to join him. I had no desire at that time to do anything other than live peacefully and securely in Wasserberndorf and not to think much beyond that. Edgar, however, was determined to study, even if he would become *ein Schornsteinfeger mit Abitur* (a chimney sweep with senior matriculation), as he used to say.

It took some effort to convince me, even though Mother was agreed and the others also encouraged me. Finally I gave in, but only on the condition that I could return if I didn't like it. Time to enrol was short, so Mother and I walked back to Burghaslach with Gerd and Edgar that same evening. Next morning, Mother, Edgar, and I took the milk truck to Scheinfeld, where Edgar and I enrolled in the new school which was to open in a few days. But where would we live? We went to the town hall and inquired in the proper office. There we were told to attend the first day of classes, then come back to this office and a place would be found for us. Thus one of the most important and track-setting decisions of my life had been made. It was not made with great enthusiasm on my part, however, and in my *Braunes Büchlein* I wrote: "Heute ist der letzte Schultag für mich [in Wasserberndorf]. Ich gehe nicht gerne weg. Es ging mir hier gut. Doch wir müssen ja immer weiter. Wer weiss wohin?" (Today is my last day of school [in Wasserberndorf]. I am not leaving happily. I liked it here. But of course we always have to move on. Who knows where [yet]?)

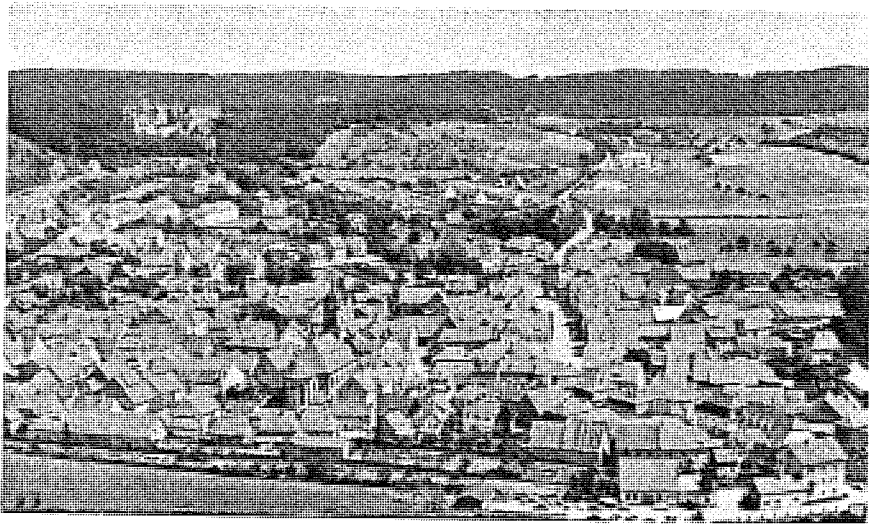
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Arrival in Scheinfeld

On January 16, 1946, Edgar and I arrived in Scheinfeld to attend our first school day in the newly founded Oberschule. Scheinfeld then was a small town of somewhat over 2000 inhabitants, but with a long history. It is first mentioned in a document from the year 795 A.D., and it received full *Stadtrecht* (town rights) as early as 1415 A.D. Immediately north of the town rises *Schloss Schwarzenberg* (Schwarzenberg Castle), the *Stammsitz* (ancestral seat) of the prominent noble family by the same name.

All of this was unknown to two refugee boys at that time, however. We had been parachuted, as it were, by the events of history into this Steigerwald region and culture with its forested hills and fertile valleys,



Scheinfeld with Schloss Schwarzenberg (upper left)

its long history, its picturesque towns and villages, and its distinctive dialect. We looked around with curiosity and some concern, thinking only of the present and of our own immediate needs.

Foremost among these needs was finding a place to stay. After school, we immediately proceeded to the town hall, as instructed on our earlier visit. There we were entrusted to the charge of *der Schandil* (the Schandil, the latter being his surname), the town crier. It was his duty to go to the town's major street corners, ring a substantial brass bell with his only hand—he had somehow lost the other arm, the likely reason why he was not a prisoner of war now—to gather as many people as possible, and then to read out the latest proclamation of the town authorities or the American occupation administration. I never found out whether this was an uninterrupted tradition from ancient times, or whether the tradition had been revived at this time when other official media of communication had broken down.

Herr Schandil, as I should call him, was now dispatched, with us in tow, to find accommodation for us. Like other West German towns, Scheinfeld had been inundated with refugees from bombed-out cities and from the east. Every home owner had to take in a certain number of them, depending on space available. Herr Schandil had a list of homes that had not yet received their quota of refugees. He knocked on the window of a house in a narrow street. A woman opened, but when asked to house two newly arrived refugee teenagers, she emitted such a stream of complaints and protests that Herr Schandil gave up and walked on. There was a call at another home, but we were turned away there as well. On the third try, we were met by Frau Mitterweger, a tall, dark-haired woman of younger middle age. She kindly agreed to provide room and board, and with that, our basic needs were met for the next approximately two months, as it turned out.

Frau Mitterweger is one of the many people I met in those years whom I remember with gratitude. I do not know why she took us in willingly and without protest. Her house was by no means spacious, and she had her own three children: the twins, Matthäus and Michael, approximately 12 years old, and a somewhat younger daughter. Herr Mitterweger was a prisoner of war somewhere; he returned only after we had moved to different quarters.

Edgar and I slept in a small room reached via a larger bedroom shared by Frau Mitterweger and her daughter. There was a living room, but since most rooms were unheated, the six of us spent much of our

time in the rather small and warm kitchen. Some time before we went to bed, an oval-shaped brass container, a sort of brass hot water bottle, was filled with hot water and placed into each bed in the unheated bedrooms. This provided a small warm spot under the shivering cold feather ticks that covered us.



Schwarzenberg School

The food, for which we naturally contributed our ration cards, was simple but adequate under the circumstances. Since the Mitterwegers, like the majority of native Scheinfelders, were Catholics, Friday was a meatless day. We always looked forward to it because then Frau Mitterweger would make something special, like pancakes with canned fruit—much to be preferred to the usual *Pellkartoffeln* (potatoes cooked in

their skins) or noodles with turnips or cabbage and, if available, some meat sauce with diminutive pieces of meat.

School went well for me, and my *Braunes Büchlein* bears the terse entry: “In der Schule geht es recht gut.” (School is fairly good.) The Oberschule Scheinfeld was at first not located in Scheinfeld itself, but in a former grade-school building just north of Schloss Schwarzenberg, about one kilometre north of town. Our daily walk to school took us through some narrow streets of the inner town, then along the wider Schwarzenberger Strasse, a street lined with large linden trees and stately mansions, and finally, by way of a shortcut, uphill through the woods around the *Schloss*. I recall the Schwarzenberger Strasse as a broad and impressive avenue, beautiful in summer but also when glistening in hoarfrost or covered with snow. When I revisited it decades later, I was surprised that everything seemed much smaller and humbler. My earlier impressions must have



Schloss Schwarzenberg

been stamped strongly by my youthful perspective and by the new hope and optimism with which I began a new life in the West.

The school opened with six grades, and Edgar and I were in Grade 2, the equivalent of Grade 6 if counting from Grade 1. High school study in Germany, then as now, was built on four years of grade school education. Generally, the pupil had to pass an examination to be admitted to high school, but I had been admitted by way of Klasse O in Konitz already.

Classes were held only in the mornings, Monday to Saturday, but with a considerable amount of homework right from the start. For example, Frau Dr. Sievers, our teacher of German, repeatedly assigned the parsing of every word in a printed paragraph. This meant that we had to give full grammatical information for every word, for instance: *schreibt* (in a sentence like “Er schreibt einen Brief.”)—verb, 3rd person singular, masculine, indicative, active, predicate of the sentence. One paragraph contained frightfully many words! Through such gruelling exercises, however, I received a foundation in grammar that stood me in good stead throughout my life.

There did remain enough time to explore the town and the surrounding forested hills. The hills immediately to the north of Scheinfeld which jutted out like fat fingers into the valley of the Scheine, a small stream flowing east along the southern edge of town, were—from west to east—the Braunsberg, the Schwarzenberg, the Denkmalsberg, and the Schafberg. The Braunsberg received its name from the prominent villa of Bürgermeister (Mayor) Braun atop its southern slope. On top of the Schwarzenberg (or Schlossberg) stood the castle of the same name. Atop the southern slope of the Denkmalsberg stood a *Denkmal*, a monumental memorial to the soldiers who had died in the First World War. It consisted of a massive pedestal carrying a huge eagle, both in grey stone. The Schafberg (Sheep Hill) must have had (or still had) some association with sheep raising.

All these hills were finger-like extensions of a higher region, much of it forested, called Schwarzenberger Wald (Schwarzenberg Forest). One of its highest elevations (421 metres) immediately north of the Braunsberg was the Schneckenberg (Snail Hill), named after a knoll the top of which could be reached by a winding path (a snail house, as it were) and offered a view of the wide Scheine valley.

The forests consisted of a mixture of deciduous trees and evergreens. Among them were beeches, oaks, firs, larches, and pines. They offered shade and protection for a rich flora as well as for birds and animals.

Among the latter were rabbits, foxes, deer, and wild boars. We boys criss-crossed the woods on our various hikes and school outings. Eventually we could identify most of the animals, birds, insects, trees, herbs, flowers, mushrooms, and other features of nature. In acquiring this knowledge we were greatly motivated and helped by Pater Arnulf, a Franciscan monk from the nearby *Kloster Schwarzenberg* (Schwarzenberg Monastery), who was also our Biology teacher in school.



Udo Goetz

I am getting ahead of my story. During my first several months in Scheinfeld my explorations of the surroundings were limited. Edgar was less interested in nature than I, and some of my later comrades were still unknown to me. Udo Goetz, though two years younger than I, was in our grade and became one of my earliest friends in Scheinfeld. His family had been bombed out in Nürnberg and lived first in the village of Krassolzheim, some 10 kilometres southwest of Scheinfeld, and later in Nenzenheim, a short distance northwest of

Krassolzheim. Eventually I came to know and appreciate his parents and siblings. His sister Elke, two years younger than Udo, later also attended our school in Scheinfeld. She was a nice girl, and I liked her. On a few occasions I also met Guenther, their younger brother.

Udo and I met for the first time while Edgar and I lived with the Mitterwegers. On one sunny and mild winter afternoon, when we had finished our homework, Edgar and I practiced walking in the yard on stilts. That is how Udo, who was passing by, could see us in spite of the high fence. He had come to borrow a school



Udo's family

book. I offered him mine, and we talked for a while. From then on a friendship developed between us that lasted throughout my Scheinfeld stay and far beyond; it faded only gradually many years after I had

immigrated to Canada. Udo and I shared a love for nature, undertook long hikes together, went swimming and sledding, and much more. We also made an excursion to Udo's home city Nürnberg together.

In spite of the company of Edgar, Udo, and other fellow students, there were times when I felt lonely. It was a longing for something hard



Stadtkirche with *Pfarrhaus* (right)

to describe. One evening I walked through the dark streets and came to the *Stadtkirche*. The windows were bright with light, and solemn music came from inside. I lingered and listened. If I could only be inside, be part of the worship going on. The Mitterweger twins were altar boys, I knew, and I envied them. My life, so full of prosaic events and necessities brought about by war and refugee existence, craved for the holy, the other, God.

An important part of this early time in Scheinfeld, while Mother still lived with the Froeses, was my weekly trip "home" to Wasserberndorf.

Although it was only a distance of 18 kilometres away, getting there had its difficulties. The milk truck took me via Oberscheinfeld and Prühl to the Haager Höhe, a hill near the village of Haag, about two-thirds of the way to my destination. There it turned east to Appenfelden, while I had to walk through high forests to the village of Haag in the valley below, and then over another forested ridge to Wasserberndorf. Since the milk truck left Scheinfeld on Saturday afternoon and stopped in various places, it could be dusk by the time I reached Haag, and quite dark when I made my way across the final ridge to Wasserberndorf. Not only was it a strenuous walk; there were dogs in the villages and at the lonely mills or estates in the valleys. I was more afraid of these dogs than of danger from humans.

It was always a great joy and relief to enter the warm home of the Froeses in Tante Mariechen's old school house, and it seemed worth all

the efforts to spend a day “at home.” I do not remember ever staying at the Mitterwegers for a weekend. I would make my way back on Monday morning via Burghaslach, probably due to the schedule of the milk truck from there. Edgar accompanied me on these return trips, having made his way home to Burghaslach separately. This pattern of weekend travel ended around the middle of March with Mother’s move to Scheinfeld, a move that brought about a new phase in my Scheinfeld years.

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Mother Moves to Scheinfeld

Mother followed me from Wasserberndorf to Scheinfeld two months after Edgar and I had arrived there. Together with Edgar, we were able to occupy two small attic rooms in a diminutive house belonging to an elderly couple, the Klocks. Herr Klock was a shepherd in the old tradition. During the summer he lived in a shepherd's cart for weeks at a time, tending the sheep of some wealthy land owner. From time to time he came home for a break, but only for a few days, so that we saw very



The Klocks' house

little of him. Frau Klock, a small, kindly woman, looked after the house and garden. Mother's move ended my weekly trips to Wasserberndorf, of course, and we got there or to Burghaslach only for the occasional visit, usually in connection with a holiday.

Our stay at the Klocks' was also to be rather brief.

After less than three months, probably towards the end of May, we moved on to the Catholic rectory, where Mother would help in the household and where we would spend the remainder of our time in Scheinfeld. Nevertheless, the time at the Klocks' has retained some distinctness in my memory, just like the earlier short periods in Wasserberndorf and at Frau Mitterweger's.

It was springtime, and the weather was sunny and warm. Despite all my appreciation for Frau Mitterweger, Mother's care and cooking were

more to my liking. I had settled into school routine, and my grades were good; the report card I received before the Easter holidays showed mostly grades of "1," equivalent to our "A." Only in English and Drawing did I get a "2," equivalent to "B." In spite of my somewhat lower grade, I wrote in my *Braunes Büchlein* that I was finally catching on to English. In keeping with a long-standing interest, however, Geography was my favourite subject.

The morale at the Oberschule was excellent, and it remained so throughout my Scheinfeld years. The teacher-student relationship was comradely with none of that rigid authoritarianism of which one reads in English as well as German literature; as for example, in Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*. My *Braunes Büchlein* records an Easter plan that expresses our attitude to our teachers better than many words: We would surprise each teacher with a gift of two Easter eggs. It must be remembered that eggs, like everything else, were available only in very small quantities on the basis of ration cards.

Soon Mother and I had established a church connection. Scheinfeld itself was predominantly Catholic. There was no Protestant church there at that time, so that the Protestants (mostly Lutherans) had to go to the village of Schnodsenbach, two-and-a-half kilometres to the west, to worship in the Lutheran church. Mother and I walked to church there almost every Sunday, and I enrolled in confirmation classes, as I had done in Ludwigslust. We were accustomed to Lutheran services by then. The pastor, Pfarrer Friedrich Löblein, was welcoming and accommodating, although he was not a very impressive preacher. Mother found the unison singing inferior to Mennonite four-part harmony as she remembered it, but I had no such memories nor was I musically sensitive.

My longing for things spiritual had not diminished, and I went to church and to confirmation classes on my own initiative without any prodding from my mother. Protestant religious instruction in school was also given by Pfarrer Löblein. It left no great impression on me, but I was ready to learn what was offered. Both in school and in confirmation classes our learning included memorizing some of the great hymns of the church. A number of them are firmly anchored in my memory even as I write this, and I have drawn much comfort and inspiration from them. In confirmation class we also memorized Luther's *Small Catechism*.

At this time I began to think of baptism and confirmation, wondering about my readiness, my Mennonite background and its role

in my decisions within this Lutheran context, and the nature of the Christian faith generally. I had experienced my earlier and still persistent longing for the holy as the discovery of a surprising reality that drew me to itself. Now it began to stand in tension with times of doubt and struggle. The attraction of the spiritual reality was not diminished; rather the opposite. But my awakening rational capacities and the Enlightenment-shaped nature of our high school education, even if presented by a number of impressive Christian teachers, besides others, made inner struggles unavoidable and often very intense.

My years in Scheinfeld were a time of much reading in addition to that required by our studies. For a while I kept a record in my *Braunes Büchlein* of books read. Karl May, perhaps the adventure story writer most widely read by German boys, held the record with ten fat volumes. But I read other things as well. Significant for my development were two explicitly Christian authors of boys' stories, Franz Weiser and Jon Swensson. The former wrote stories taking place in the Alpine regions, while the latter told his "Nonni and Manni" (two boys) stories set in Iceland. The world traveller Swen Hedin is also represented on my list with a few volumes, as is the Scandinavian epic writer Trygve Gulbrandsen. Of course, there were others.

Two significant events fall into this early Scheinfeld period. First, Edgar and I were advanced in mid-semester from Grade 2 (now Grade 6) to Grade 3 (Grade 7). It was a surprise decision by the teachers, presumably based on the quality of our work. Edgar was happy about this, while I was somewhat less enthusiastic, although I did feel honoured. Since the Grade 3 students had studied Latin for a few months already when we joined them, we had to do considerable make-up work, and I note in my *Braunes Büchlein*: "Viel zu lernen. In der Schule recht schwer." (Lots to study. School is quite difficult.) However, soon both Edgar and I did well, and through this advancement we caught up with our fellow students in age by one year, making up for time lost because both of us had entered Grade 1 in the Ukraine at the late age of eight, as was the rule there.

The second important event was the death of Tante Lena Froese. She died of cancer on May 15 in the hospital in Erlangen. Mother and I had visited her there a little earlier. Her funeral service and burial took place in the church and cemetery of Hohn am Berg near Wasserberndorf, a lovely place on a hilltop. Whenever I later read or recited Ludwig

Uhland's famous poem, "Droben stehet die Kapelle" (Up on high there stands the chapel), I would think of Hohn am Berg.

In the midst of all these serious pursuits and happenings in my life, there was also time for enjoyment and fun. The fellow students in our new grade were congenial and the teachers comradely. Catching up on Latin was difficult only for a brief time; after that I enjoyed it, and have always considered my seven or so years of studying that language to have been one of my better educational investments.

The pleasant and warm spring was an invitation to excursions into nature, either with school classes or with one or two friends. One occasion that stands out was a *Wanderung* (hike) with Udo Goetz on May 1, 1946. We set out around noon. While the forested hills north of Scheinfeld were close to town and became the main area of our roamings, we went south this time. The road over a low elevation with a small forest took us the about three-and-a-half kilometres to Markt Bibart, the large village with the railroad station that served Scheinfeld, and through which passed the major highway from Nürnberg to Würzburg. A little further south, a large forested area began. There we happened to meet Friedrich Rauscher, a classmate from Markt Bibart, whom we liked and gladly accepted as a companion on this outing. Udo took the lead from there because we were now taking his accustomed way home to Krassolzheim.

Soon the terrain rose fairly steeply until we got to a forest of large silver-grey beech trees. In my *Schwarzes Heft*, a collection of reminiscences written during my early and lonely years in Canada, I nostalgically describe it as "einen der schoensten und mir liebsten Orte in der deutschen Natur" (one of the most beautiful nature spots in Germany, and to me one of the dearest). This is a totally subjective characterization born of homesickness; most Germans would not consider this beech forest at all special. My notation shows both my love for the Steigerwald forests and my state of inner well-being in Scheinfeld and its surroundings. I cut "my sign," a capital "J," followed by an elevated longer line like a printed "l" and two shorter perpendicular lines—I do not know when or why I devised this "logo"—into the bark of a large beech tree with the date underneath it.

Since this was the beginning of the *Hohe Strasse* (high road, meaning a marked hiking path here), which led to various points of interest, like the *Iffigheimer Turm* (Iffigheim Tower), an observation tower with a view far into the Main River valley; the Frankenberg, with an old castle;

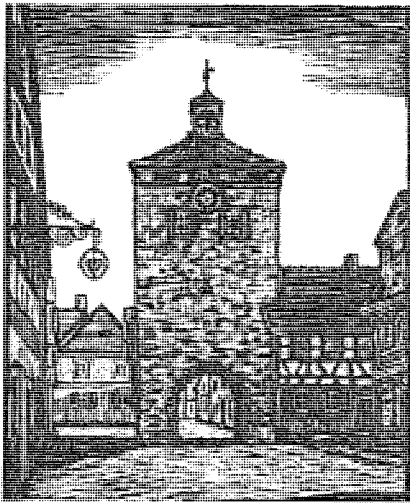
and the Hohenlandsberg, the highest elevation in the Steigerwald. I had many later occasions to pass by this spot, and each time I carved the date beneath my sign into the bark of the beech tree. On this day in May we followed the Hohe Strasse for some distance, and then returned home. As I describe all this, I am aware that a reader must think, "What was so special about this outing?" Objectively, nothing, especially when I compare it with the many much more interesting and adventurous *Wanderungen* that we made in subsequent years. It is an emotional high point in my memory, however, and as such I am recording it here as a significant experience during my early stay in Scheinfeld.

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The Pfarrhaus (Rectory)

Scheinfeld, like so many older German towns, had a central square, the *Marktplatz* (market square), faced on its west side by the *Rathaus* (town hall) and the *Landratsamt* (county administration office). From the *Marktplatz*, the broad *Hauptstrasse* (Main Street) extended north to the *Stadttor* (town gate), and then further on through a newer section of town with the name *Schwarzenberger Strasse* (Schwarzenberg Street). The *Stadttor* was the only remnant of the fortification wall that had once



Woodcut: Old town gate, by Elly Jüngling (used by permission)

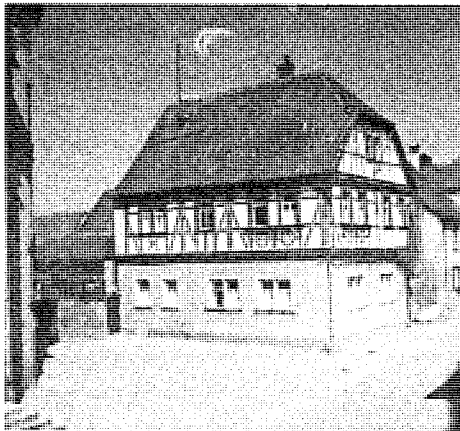
surrounded the town in a more or less circular pattern, which could still be recognized in the layout of certain narrow streets. In a southerly direction from the *Marktplatz*, the *Würzburger Strasse* (Würzburg Street) led on to the village of Markt Bibart, where it crossed the highway connecting Nürnberg and Würzburg and reached the railroad station serving Scheinfeld.

The *Kirchstrasse* (Church Street), the town's third major street, left the *Marktplatz* in a westerly direction and followed the valley of the Scheine to the village of Oberscheinfeld and other country points. Newer parts of town extended to the northwest of the circular layout of the old town. Following the *Kirchstrasse* a block or so to the west, one reached the impressive

Baroque Stadtkirche on the south side, flanked by the elementary school building and the Catholic *Pfarrhaus* (rectory) on its east and west side, respectively. It was this *Pfarrhaus* that would become our home for the remainder of our time in Scheinfeld.

The reason for our move from the Klocks to the *Pfarrhaus* was Mother's need for employment. I do not remember where we got the money for our daily needs from the time we escaped from the Russian Zone until now. Was there some refugee allowance? Did Mother have savings from her work as a teacher? Did Tante Mariechen help us? The fact was that money was generally not a great problem at that time. The German Reichsmark, the currency of the Hitler era, continued in circulation, but was rather devalued. Most people, as far as I know, had enough money to buy the limited foods and goods available on ration cards. Nevertheless, there had to be some income. Somehow Mother had made the acquaintance of a Protestant woman, Frau Fuchs, who had worked as household help in the *Pfarrhaus*. When she was to move elsewhere, she suggested that Mother apply for her job and introduced her to the priest, *Pfarrer* (Pastor) Dr. Georg Nickl. Mother was accepted, and we moved again, this time from the tiny shepherd's cottage in the narrow Bogenstrasse to the prominent *Pfarrhaus* beside the Stadtkirche. I had never lived in so impressive a building!

Our move must have taken place in late May or early June. It opened



The *Pfarrhaus* (rectory)

a new world for us, the world of Catholic church life and piety. The *Pfarrhaus* was a stately two-and-a-half-storey building of the *Fachwerkhaus* (half-timbered house) type, built around 1570 A.D. and altered or renovated from time to time. The first floor accommodated the kitchen, scene of many of Mother's duties; a large and finely furnished living room used only on special occasions; and a smaller room for various purposes. A wide and curving

stairway led to the second floor, traversed by a wide, carpeted central hall. On its north side lay Dr. Nickl's study and his adjacent bedroom. Across the hall was the large bedroom shared by Frau Pflaum, Dr. Nickl's

sister, and her son, Michael, who was in my class at school. A smaller bedroom was occupied by Wilfried Wirsching from Iphofen, also a



Stadtpfarrer Dr. Georg Nickl

student in our class. A narrower stairway led to the third storey under the roof. From its landing one door opened into our room, another into a room occupied by different refugees during our time there, and a third one into an attic space.

More important for our life than these physical arrangements were the occupants of the Pfarrhaus. First of all there was the *Stadtpfarrer* (town priest), Dr. Georg Nickl. He was a middle-aged, refined, and highly educated (two doctorates) gentleman. Usually he wore his black cassock which reached to the ankles and was very becoming for his slim figure. Everything he did was done with dignity, but unpretentiously. Often he would walk up and down the garden path reading his breviary. His dedication to his calling as well as his personal integrity were exemplary, and the people loved him. For us, he was a gracious and never condescending authority figure in the best sense of the word. He respected us as Protestants, but was glad that we attended our own church faithfully. On the day of my baptism he gave me an artistically lettered photo album with exquisite pictures that he himself had taken of Scheinfeld, the church, and the surrounding countryside; a greatly treasured possession for me even now.



Frau Pflaum and Michael

Frau Pflaum, Dr. Nickl's widowed sister, looked after the household. She was a deeply pious woman, well versed in matters of Catholic life and church customs, but somewhat conservative in outlook. Sometimes Mother found it a little confining to have to do everything in the kitchen and household according to a precise traditional routine. Frau Pflaum was friendly and well-meaning, however, and on the whole we got on well with her.

Frau Pflaum's son Michael was my age and in my class. I had come to know him before our move already, and we soon became good friends, sometimes even allies in mischief. Very intelligent and ready for adventure and exploration, whether externally or in the realm of the mind, he lived somewhat constrained by his mother's conservatism. She expected "good" behaviour of him at all times; "good" in a sense that boys in their middle teenage years tend to challenge in overt or covert ways. He seemed glad, therefore, when my mother encouraged us boys to get outside, go on hikes, or associate with other friends, and often interceded for him with his mother in such matters.

Wilfried Wirsching, also in our class, received room and board in the



Michael, I and Wilfried Wirsching

Pfarrhaus in order to be able to attend the Oberschule. His family owned a prominent winery in Iphofen, a town some 18 kilometres away in the direction of Würzburg. He was a year older than Michael and I and, on that account as well as by personal disposition, somewhat

ahead of us in his development. Due to his maturity, our mothers held him up to us as a role model, which made him the target of our teasing and sometimes our practical jokes. Nonetheless, he was a good comrade.

For the first while, Edgar also lived in the Pfarrhaus with us, but one room proved too small for the three of us, and he soon found accommodation in the house of Herr Riemer, a carpenter, just around the corner from the Pfarrhaus. He kept in close touch with us three boys in the Pfarrhaus, however, and joined us in many activities.

The room across the landing from ours was occupied for the major part of our time in the Pfarrhaus by Frl. Ruth Lades, a young woman attached to the *Geographisches Institut* (Geographical Institute). During our time as neighbours we witnessed the courtship between her and Dr.

Rolf Schmidt, a geographer from the same Institute, Mother being a confidante of Frl. Lades.

Church and school determined the household routine. Dr. Nickl celebrated early morning mass in the church every day. At certain times he had office hours or made house calls. Sometimes a jolly young monk from the Franciscan Kloster Schwarzenberg, Pater Agathon Kandler, assisted him. We boys had to be mindful not to be noisy or otherwise disturb the priestly duties, especially when there were visitors. Of course, we had our own school routine. Frau Pflaum and Mother cooked, cleaned, and generally looked after the household. Mother worked “split shifts,” as we would say now, making our own meals and looking after our other needs in her off-hours.

Sundays were observed as special days. The Catholic population was called to masses by the bells of the adjacent church. Mother and I walked to the Lutheran service in Schnodsenbach. After returning, Mother joined Frau Pflaum in the kitchen to help with the preparation of the regular Sunday meal, *Knödel* (dumplings). These were made either of raw or cooked potatoes, but the preparation of both types was labour-intensive, and Mother sometimes chafed under the effort that was apparently obligatory for each Sunday. (Even now there is hardly a meal that tastes as Bavarian to me as *Knödel*.) A regular feature of Sunday afternoons was counting the collection money, done in the Pfarrhaus kitchen by members of the household (not Dr. Nickl, however) and a few parishioners. We boys would often go on hikes in the woods.

Highlights of the year were the church festivals with their smaller or more elaborate ceremonies and festivities. We came to know Catholic piety at close range. There were several household ceremonies. Of course, meals were preceded, but also followed (which was new to us), by prayer, the participants standing for both. Before a fresh loaf of bread—usually large and round—was cut, the sign of the cross was traced on it with the knife. Catholic household members and visitors also made the sign of the cross when entering or leaving the house, after they had dipped a finger into a little container with consecrated water hanging beside each of the main doors.

On January 6, Epiphany, the household members would go in a small procession to each outside door, and Dr. Nickl would print with chalk the numerals of the year, plus the traditional initials of the biblical wisemen spliced into the middle, for example, “19-K+M+B-47,” after the previous year’s markings had been erased. The initials stood for “Kaspar,

Melchior, Balthasar,” the traditional names of the wisemen. They were bracketed by the year’s numerals, here 1947.

Lent, the Passion season, and Easter were marked by various and elaborate celebrations. *Fronleichnam* (old German for “body of the Lord,” 11 days after Pentecost) was also one of the several special occasions. People would hang church flags from the windows. Sometimes a long procession, led by the priest(s) with a statue of Jesus or Mary carried by several men, wound its way through the streets. From Good Friday to Easter morning the ringing of the church bells was replaced by a rattling sound created by turning a cog wheel with a wooden board fastened against it. Joy and harmony were thus transformed into cacophony. The main altar was covered by a black shroud. Some young people kept a night vigil from Saturday to Easter Sunday morning, when the bells would ring out joyously again.

White Sunday, the Sunday after Easter, was the Sunday of Confirmation and First Communion for children. The boys wore their Sunday best, and the young girls in white dresses looked particularly angelic. The ceremony itself was, at least in some years, conducted by the bishop; for Scheinfeld, by the Archbishop of Bamberg. That was an occasion for special preparations in the Pfarrhaus, and Mother in the kitchen was busier than usual. Frau Pflaum was meticulous and somewhat stressed and worried lest anything should not be in perfect traditional order.

I do not remember how Pentecost was observed, but Thanksgiving Day stands out in my memory. For it, a metal frame in the form of a crown with a cross on top provided the skeleton for a large and beautifully arranged crown of flowers. This stood as the centrepiece among a display of fruits, vegetables, sheaves of grain, and other produce in front of the high altar of the church.

Our favourite festive time of the church year was, of course, the Christmas season, which we experienced twice during our stay in the Pfarrhaus (in 1946 and 1947). Advent was very important. The Advent wreath with four candles, suspended from the ceiling, was found in every house as well as in public buildings. In the Oberschule, students made wreaths for their own classrooms. This was also the time for setting up a crèche in many a home, including the Pfarrhaus. These manger scenes varied in size, number of people and animals, and artistic quality. The one in the Stadtkirche took up a sizeable niche on the east side. It displayed a whole countryside, not only with Mary and Joseph with the

baby Jesus, as well as the shepherds and the wisemen with their animals, but also a variety of other characters. In both Protestant and Catholic settings, nativity plays were performed, and the familiar Christmas hymns were heard in many places. (Unlike the present day, however, they were not blasting at us from loudspeakers).

Schools also had their festivities, but I do not recall specifically how we celebrated in the Oberschule. It goes without saying that the Advent season was also a time of making gifts—there was virtually nothing to be bought—of baking with the limited ingredients available that had been saved for some time, and of other preparations for the feast.

Christmas Eve was the highlight. Mother and I were included in this festive event of the Pfarrhaus. First, however, we participated in the Protestant Christmas service at Schnodsenbach. After the two-and-a-half kilometre walk home through the starry night, we had our own little gift-giving ceremony in our third-storey room. Then we joined the others downstairs. This was one of the few occasions when the fine parlour was heated and used. A small but beautiful nativity scene had been set up by Michael and me earlier already. A large Christmas tree shone with radiant beauty when the many wax candles were lit. We stood before it and admired its hallowed glow for a while. Then we sang several of the familiar Christmas carols, accompanied by Michael on the piano. After Michael had also read the biblical Christmas story, Dr. Nickl led in prayer. A sense of beauty, holiness, and reverence pervaded the room.

From this worshipful part we moved to the long centre table, where the modest gifts lay, humbly wrapped in whatever packaging was available. Once my gift, consisting of some longish, rolled up sheets of paper, turned out to be a random collection of various geographical maps. *Weihnachtsmann* (Santa Claus), or his human representatives, knew well my passion for geography and had managed to gather these treasures for me! Gift after gift was unwrapped and admired. Then the table was cleared, and Frau Pflaum and Mother carried in delicious Christmas baking and a bowl filled with hot punch. A pleasant time of fellowship, conversation, and storytelling followed as we enjoyed the special goodies. The evening came to an end when the church bells and organ music called us to the midnight *Christmette* (midnight Christmas Mass) in the adjoining Stadtkirche.

For Mother and me, Christmas also included a get-together with our friends from Chortitza: the Froeses in Wasserberndorf and Burghaslach, and the Hiersacks in Gleissenberg. These meetings stand out in my

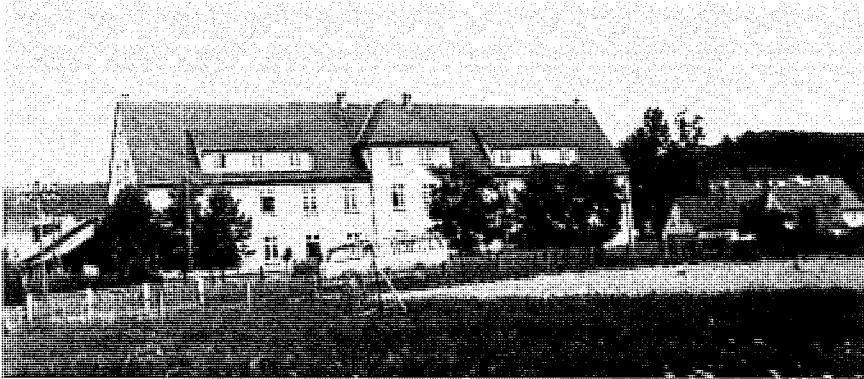
memory as good and festive, although in some ways different from the Catholic traditions of the Pfarrhaus. For Mother and me, who were furthest away from the others, getting together meant long walks of 15 to 18 kilometres, partly through snowy forests, although the milk truck may have carried us part of the way. Traversing these distances to the villages where our friends lived could be difficult and tiring, but it also took us through beautiful wintery landscapes which left imprints of snow-covered evergreens or silent clearings with picturesque groups of deer on my memory. Despite the frugal circumstances and external hardships, I felt secure and at home during these post-war refugee years, both among our old friends from Russia and our new hosts in Franken, Protestant and Catholic.

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22

Our School

My reason for coming to Scheinfeld was to attend the new Oberschule, which had been founded there to accommodate local and regional students for whom it was difficult in the post-war era to attend the older secondary schools which were located farther away and, in many cases, in heavily bombed larger cities. Both Edgar and I soon achieved good academic standing and were advanced from Grade 2 to Grade 3 in mid-year. We enjoyed the pioneering spirit and the comradely student-teacher relationships. In this chapter I will say a bit about the circumstances, the content, and the teachers that shaped our learning and our school life. Although I will still depend on my *Braunes Büchlein* for information, especially about my personal perspectives and feelings, I will rely also on other sources for reconstructing my story. Of particular importance for the development of the school is the Festschrift, *Gymnasium Scheinfeld 50 Jahre, 1946-1996*, published in



Oberschule Scheinfeld

connection with the school's fiftieth anniversary and containing many reminiscences of former teachers and students.

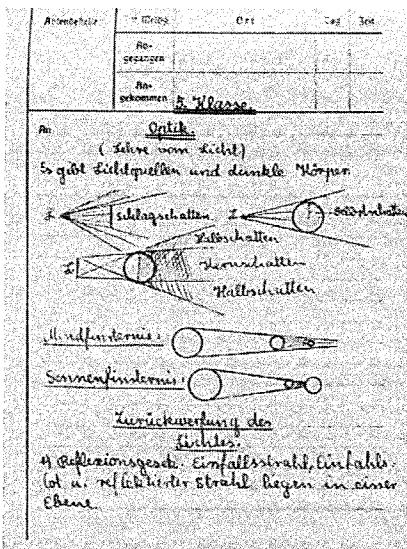
First, the setting and the circumstances. The school moved from its initial temporary quarters in the Schwarzenberg primary school building, where it had first opened its doors on January 16, 1946, to a larger structure on the north side of the town on April 14 of the same year. There was nothing beautiful or attractive about this plain, rectangular, yellowish-brown two-and-a-half-storey building that had earlier served the *Arbeitsdienst* (a para-militarily structured workforce of the Hitler-era). The classrooms were frugal and bare. There were no lounges, labs, library, or facilities for music, sports, art, and drama. Nor was there equipment of any sort beyond the barest necessities, such as students' desks, a teacher's desk, and a blackboard.

More restrictive was the virtual absence of textbooks and writing materials. I still have in my possession some 35 "notebooks" from my Scheinfeld student days, but what a patchwork they are. Most are home-made, consisting of an odd assortment of covers of all colours, sizes, and derivations, into which are stitched remnants of re-used papers salvaged from attics and storage rooms where old business ledgers, pre-printed but unused formulas, and the like, could sometimes be found. In some of the notebooks, for example, the word *Feldpost* (military mail) appears in bold print on every page. Another consists of pre-printed pages from a military order pad, while a third is lined in the manner of a business ledger. As long as there was some free space to write on, it was a treasure. Some of my notebooks were actually designed as school notebooks, but printed on low-quality grey paper. They are evidence of beginning economic recovery, but they were hard to come by. A few others in my collection are of good quality and spiral-bound. They came from the United States and are an indication that we were beginning to receive gift parcels from Mother's Onkel Kolja (Uncle Kolja [short for Nicholas]) in Pennsylvania.

My school notes that fill the pages are written in ink or pencil, depending on what was available. They are well formulated, however, for they represent for the most part what our teachers, in the absence of textbooks, had dictated to us or written on the blackboard. That is probably also the reason I still have them. They were for me not the nostalgic memorabilia they are now, but my written intellectual repertoire.

Noteworthy are also my rather neatly executed drawings, be they of leaves and grasses, of body parts, of Corinthian columns, of maps, of the movement of planets, of geometrical figures, or of Physics or Chemistry instruments and experiments. They bear witness to the fact that there were no atlases, textbooks, reference works, and the like where we could look up illustrations; what we had was in our notebooks, copied from nature or from the teachers' drawings. Experiments in Physics and Chemistry also had to be sketched and described to us by our teachers rather than demonstrated in labs. Most teachers had been able, it seemed, to rescue a few treasured books in their fields, or could be provided with copies somehow. One of my fellow students remembers that the only slide rule in the school belonged to the principal, who was also the Mathematics teacher; this was enough to show the upper grade students what a slide rule was like, and possibly to let them handle the "sacred" object at least once. Our revered Biology teacher, Pater Arnulf Kremer, had a somewhat easier task, for his exhibits grew, flew, or crawled in fields and forests, and on many a day he brought some to class.

Strange things transpire under such circumstances. The only textbook I preserved—and I do not recall owning any other—is a thin



School scribbler page (note re-used paper)

introduction to shorthand. Where it came from I do not know, but I remember how shorthand-enthusiasm swept through the whole school in my second year. I suppose we learned shorthand because it facilitated the voluminous note-taking which was made necessary by the lack of textbooks. Also important at our age, however, was the fact that it had something of the character of a secret code about it, even though fellow students knew it as well. In my *Braunes Büchlein*, for example, certain statements are in shorthand, which made them less immediately readable for parents and others.

What about the range of subject matter? Our Oberschule was a high school combining emphases on mathematics-science and on languages-history-art. German-language teaching was central, of course, with stress on grammar, but also on memorizing poetry, including such long ballads of Schiller as *Der Taucher*, *Die Bürgschaft*, and even the long *Die Glocke*, of which I can still recite certain parts. English study began in Grade 1 (Grade 5); I had started it in Konitz already. Latin followed in Grade 3 (7), and French would have begun for me in Grade 6 (10) if I had not left for Canada after Grade 5 (9). Both English and Latin required much memorizing of grammatical paradigms and of long vocabulary lists, a knowledge that then had to be applied to considerable amounts of translation as homework. I do not recall what we read in English classes, but before we left for Canada I had read my first complete English book, R. L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. The longer work we read in Latin that stands out in my mind is Caesar's *De Bello Gallico* (About the Gallic War), but we translated many other texts.

In Physics and Chemistry our work was thorough, but hampered by the absence of any laboratories and equipment for demonstration and experimentation. History was of course less affected by such deficiencies. We focussed largely on ancient history, including ancient Greek and Roman mythology, but avoided modern periods and left entirely untouched whatever might have any associations with Germany's recent past and current events. Geography and Biology, subjects of special interest to me, were politically less touchy and could therefore be treated without restrictions.

The same was true of Mathematics, of course, but—alas!—this was my weakest area. Here my irregular schooling—I had attended six different schools, and these with interruptions, by the time I entered Grade 2 (Grade 6) in Scheinfeld—made itself felt particularly strongly. Further, our kind but elderly and tired teacher, Herr Kollick, himself a refugee, was emotionally in no condition to coach an ill-prepared and mathematically not particularly gifted or interested student through the intricacies of his field. Once, when I was trying unsuccessfully to copy a home assignment onto the blackboard, he snatched my notebook from me and thrust it to the floor. My friend Wilfried Wirsching patiently explained many a homework problem to me, and he deserves much credit for the fact that my final grade in Mathematics did not totally ruin my otherwise good standing.

Two subject areas that deserve special mention are Art and Religion. In the former, we had the good fortune to have an accomplished artist as our teacher, Frau Elly Jüngling, called “die Elly” by way of friendly student parlance—most of our teachers had nicknames. She had studied art in München, but had returned to her hometown, Scheinfeld, after the war. Here she belonged to a prominent family; her father had been mayor of the town. Only much later did I learn that she had been quite instrumental in establishing our Oberschule. If we had the fortune to have her as a teacher, she was not equally fortunate in having us as students. Not only were most of us at an age where the history of classical art, the distinction between Dorian, Ionian, and Corinthian columns, or the fine points of perspective and the balancing of light and shadow did not stand in the foreground of our interests; we were also full of (non-malicious) mischief. For example, one day when Frau Jüngling left the classroom for a few minutes we painted the gourd and bottle—the exhibit we were to paint as a “still life”—with bright colours, obscuring any colour or light patterns that we ought to have captured on paper. It was not the only incident after which we had to send a delegation to ask her pardon for, unlike other teachers like Pater Arnulf, she lacked a sense of humour, though not an abundance of dedication and goodwill. In retrospect, many of us came to appreciate her dedication and her excellence; and in our living room in Winnipeg two of her exquisite woodcuts of Scheinfeld scenes gratefully preserve her memory.

Religion for Catholic students was taught by Dr. Nickl and other clerics, while Pfarrer Löblein, our Lutheran minister from Schnodsenbach, taught us Protestants. Pfarrer Löblein, with whom I got on well enough in Confirmation class and otherwise, was not an inspiring teacher, and the classes did not leave a deep impression on me. However, we had to memorize a number of hymns that have stayed with me as precious treasures throughout my life and, when I look into my Religion notebooks now, I am surprised at how much we did cover in the fields of Bible and Church History.

I have already referred to and partially characterized a number of our teachers in relation to the subjects they taught. In that small school of perhaps 200-300 students our teachers were more than instructors in their respective fields. We encountered them in various extra-curricular settings as well, and most of them became role models or mentors for us. In spite of occasional “run-ins” like those with Herr Kollick or Frau Jüngling, I never felt that any of the teachers were “against” me, but

rather that they, individually and as a team, were concerned about us and our welfare.

Of course, every student had his or her own favourite teacher(s). For me, the most influential personalities among them were Frau (then we said *Fräulein*, that is, Miss) Dr. Marianne Sievers and Pater Arnulf Kremer. Frau Dr. Sievers (nicknamed *die Hummel* [bumble bee]), was



Frau Dr. Sievers

our drill-master in German grammar and memorization, but also much more. Her thoroughness and knowledge demanded respect, yet the interest she took in each student outweighed any sense of harshness. It was she, for example, who arranged that Frl. Dr. Matthiesen, a friend of hers employed in the Geographisches Institut would not only tutor me in English when I was advanced from Grade 2 to Grade 3 in mid-year, but would also pay my school tuition (amounting to 20 Reichsmark a month).

Frau Dr. Sievers' kindness was never to be confused with softness, however. Some of her remarks to students in class express this well. I still remember her saying to one dejected girl who, with tear-stained and ink-smudged face, was staring at the abundance of red markings on a just-returned exercise or test paper: "Ja, Emmy [not her real name], weinen Sie nur über ihre Sünden!" (Yes, Emmy, go ahead and weep over your sins!) To another student she remarked after a poor performance: "Petra [also not her real name], tauchen Sie unter wo die Scheine am tiefsten ist!" (Petra, plunge into the Scheine where it is deepest!) One had to remember that the Scheine was nowhere deep enough to immerse oneself much further than to one's knees to realize that Frau Dr. Sievers' apparently callous suggestion of suicide contained more humour and grace than threat.

Although Protestants and Catholics mingled harmoniously in our school, the Protestant minority of students found a special mentor in Frau Dr. Sievers. She had some theological education in addition to her special field of German. Prominent in my memory is a mediaeval nativity play she practiced with a group of us. It was to reflect mediaeval times and therefore included a chief devil and several subordinates. I was one of the latter, with horns and tail, to the embarrassment of my mother. I think this is the only role I ever had in a play! The practices were exacting, in keeping with Frau Dr. Sievers's thoroughness, but they were also fun, and we were led to understand the message. We performed the play in Ezelheim, the home village and church of Hans Bibelriether ("Hoppy"), one of our classmates. I think we also performed it in Schnodsenbach. After the evening performance in Ezelheim we walked the 13 kilometres home in darkness, enjoying the comradeship created by the joint endeavour.

Pater Arnulf (Kremer) was a Franciscan monk from the nearby Kloster Schwarzenberg. Tall, in his long monastic habit, balding with a



Pater Arnulf Kremer with
student

friendly round and reddish face, he was a beloved personality. He was always patient, and we all—at least we boys—felt that he could understand us, including our pranks. He taught Biology in and out of class. He knew every tree, flower, bird, and mushroom, and inspired us to get to know our natural environment thoroughly. Often he came to class with a handful of branches, grasses, or flowers. Before turning to the subject of the day, he held up one exhibit after another, and someone in the class would call out its name. If no one could identify it, he provided the answer. It was a special privilege if a group of us could accompany him on

his way to the monastery—a short stretch through the woods—and listen to his commentary on flora and fauna. His instruction in Biology was

thorough, both with reference to nature as well as to the human body. As a medic during the war, he possessed what seemed to me a vast medical knowledge as well, which enriched his teaching. He was a beloved role model, mentor, spiritual counsellor, and comrade.

Although these teachers stand out in their influence on me, I appreciated the others in various ways. Principal Erwin Hladik was a most competent administrator and teacher. Dr. Franz Mathy, totally bald, emaciated, and clad in a reworked soldier's uniform, made Latin an interesting and significant subject for me, although not for everyone. He also gave devoted supervision to the small dormitory housed "under the roof" of the school building. Later, after I had left, he was Principal of the school for many years. Dr. Gustav Pohl, though my relationship to him remained somewhat distant, taught my favourite subject, Geography. Fr. Emma Hohn, our young English teacher, did not enjoy that immediate respect commanded by the evident competence of our seasoned teachers and was sometimes the target of reasonable as well as prankish criticism, especially by us boys. Nevertheless, her classes helped to prepare me for taking up studies in Canada with a fairly good foundation in English.

Not part of the school curriculum itself, but significant in my education, were private lessons in Greek, which were offered by Pater Pirmin Sefrin in the Kloster Schwarzenberg. It was Michael's initiative to arrange these and to persuade Wilfried, another student and me to join him. We went to the monastery once a week for some months. Pater Pirmin, learned and systematic, introduced us to the basics of classical Greek, a language that would become important in my theological education later. He was so methodical, however, that the hour in his monastic cell became rather boring, especially when the birds chirped their invitation for us to come out and enjoy the adjacent forest. Eventually we responded to his habit of calling us up in invariably the same order to translate one sentence at a time by translating only every fourth sentence of our assigned homework.

In conclusion I can say that the Oberschule Scheinfeld, through its competent teachers, provided me with a thorough education. When I came to Canada and immediately continued my schooling, I was taken into Grade 11, rather than Grade 10 where I should have been placed on the basis of nine grades completed. Nevertheless, I soon earned high grades in most subjects. But the Oberschule gave me more than an

education; through its comradely spirit and its dedicated teachers it did much to shape my development in those crucial teenage years.

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23

Faith Struggles, Baptism, and Confirmation

My portrayal of the Oberschule Scheinfeld may have left the impression of an idealized period, shaped by sweet retrospective nostalgia. Although it is a realistic picture, it is one that does not embrace the whole of my Scheinfeld experience. One most important strand of my development that extended through that whole time was my struggle with faith issues. “Struggle” is not meant to suggest something only negative, like “difficulty,” but rather an engagement of great intensity with high points and low points. While issues of religious faith have been treated to some extent in the context of the earlier periods of my life, my Scheinfeld years became crucially track-setting for my further faith, life, and work.

Although many factors must have contributed to my faith struggles at this time, a few can easily be discerned. First, I was in my mid-teenage years (age 13-16). Many beliefs, views, and attitudes, that had developed more or less unreflectedly, if not unconsciously, now came under the scrutiny of my maturing capacity for reasoning. Second, our preoccupation in earlier years with daily needs in the struggle for survival and escape had given way to a more peaceful and secure, albeit frugal, existence. Mere survival no longer took up most of our energies. Third, the more church- and faith-oriented life of Southern Germany, as compared to the poorly attended churches and the greater secularization of the North, formed a milieu that stimulated engagement in faith issues. The Catholic-Protestant tension, pervaded however by a spirit of mutual acceptance that had developed under the pressure of the basically anti-Christian Hitler ideology and the shared suffering brought by war and

defeat, gave added vibrancy to religious questions. Fourth, the total collapse of the German state had left a vacuum of authority and values, both for those who had identified with its nationalistic aspirations and for those who breathed freer because of their collapse. This generated a widespread search for what might offer sustainable values and order; and the major institution that had retained some degree of credibility and authority was the church, both Protestant and Catholic. Finally, I had a circle of intelligent and articulate friends who were always ready to discuss and debate such issues as moved our minds.

During the Soviet era of my childhood I had lived without church services; religious instruction in Sunday school or school; participation in Christian choirs, youth groups, or church camps; and all those other components that significantly shape the faith of most Western Christians. Instead, I experienced a total suppression of all aspects of religion, a vigorous atheist-materialist propaganda, and severe persecution that robbed me of my father and affected my family and the families of friends in many other ways. Nevertheless, without being clearly conscious of it, I grew up with a long and rich Christian-Mennonite heritage. This was conveyed to me most overtly through Bible stories taught by Mother and Grandmother, and through the secret observance of Christian festivals, especially Christmas and Easter. More subtly, it imbued the character of the people most closely associated with us and perceived as trustworthy: our relatives, friends like the Froeses, and above all, my mother.

Mother, of course, was the one direct representative and embodiment of my Mennonite-Christian heritage who was with me throughout our flights from Chortitza to Scheinfeld. Father “was there,” in a sense, through Mother’s stories and reminiscences of him, from which he emerged as a person of unquestionable integrity and goodness. And since he was not present in person, there was no occasion for rebelling against him or setting myself off from him to establish my independence during my teenage years.

Although Mother was of first and central importance in transmitting my ancestral faith heritage to me, she was not given to imposing a heavy-handed religious upbringing on me. While I was never in doubt of her faith and devotion, she did not often use religious turns of phrase in her speech or express strong pious emotions. Some practices were taken for granted, like grace before meals and prayer at bedtime, and sometimes some Bible reading, but these were never long or effusive. She did not

urge me or “push” me to attend church; on the contrary, it was my own desire and longing that prompted me to seek out churches in our various refugee contexts. Nor was she given to highlight denominational teachings or characteristics, yet I came to know at some point—I don’t know when—that we were not Lutherans or Catholics, but Mennonites. She repeatedly expressed her respect for the Russian Orthodox church, its priests, and its practices in the course of telling me stories from her childhood involving her Ukrainian nursemaid and other Ukrainian-Russian people.

Only on rare occasions did Mother urge me overtly to consider or remember some Christian truth, as one time—in Scheinfeld already—when I was feeling particularly bad or guilty about something no doubt fairly trivial. Then, as I well remember, she encouraged me briefly but seriously to believe that, if we are sorry, God forgives all our sins. On the whole, Mother, though articulate when necessary, rather lived than preached her faith. This was probably a major factor in nurturing my receptivity for faith, together with some low-key teaching and encouragement, without evoking in me a sense of opposition or even rebellion. All this, however, was not so much a deliberate pedagogical approach on her part, as an almost subconscious and instinctive wisdom.

In retrospect I believe that the impetus for overt and intense struggle with questions of faith came for me in the form of a clash between positive experiences with rational doubts. On the positive side, there was the general appeal of the ubiquity and hospitality of churches and Christians that I encountered in my earlier life as well as in Scheinfeld, together with the integrity that I sensed in many persons of faith, from Chortitza to Scheinfeld. Prominent among those in Scheinfeld were Dr. Nickl and some of my teachers already described. Also there was my own inner hunger that I characterized earlier as a longing for the holy. These important givens or this “thesis” in my life—if I may momentarily use Hegelian terms without implying commitment to his philosophy—encountered the impact of an “antithesis” in the form of my rational thinking powers which developed in the context of the science-oriented worldview of the time. Could there be a God if one could not prove it (in Enlightenment terms, as I would say now)? Could the Bible stories be “true” (understood by me then as “strictly factual”), if they were full of miracles? These and other elements of the “science-religion debate” caused disturbing inner upheavals for me. The powerful struggle going on within me—though not always with equal intensity—provided

considerable intellectual stimulation, but also brought painful anguish for prolonged periods.

I was not alone in this. Several of my gifted and intelligent friends and I debated questions of religion from various angles. Some had perhaps not experienced the impact of Christian personalities as consciously as I, or had greater need than I to question or oppose authority figures, or had less of that mysterious hunger for the holy. We were certainly not all on the same wavelength, which made our discussions and debates the more vibrant.

The big questions concerning the existence of God and the reliability of the Bible were not identical to, but intersected at various points with, denominational controversies. Who was right on this or that point of doctrine, the Catholics or the Protestants? On this level, too, we had vigorous debates. For me, there were the added questions raised by my Mennonite heritage: Were the Catholics and Protestants right in insisting that only those who were baptized would be saved? What if I should die unbaptized? And what about the Mennonite pacifist position? Had we not been saved from the Soviet system by the German army occupying Russia, and had we not fled from the Russian Zone to the protection of the American army in the West? Could one really practice a pacifist life responsibly?

It is quite impossible for me to remember and detail all my inner struggles, nor would it serve any purpose. Further, while I have recounted in part the impact of various personalities and circumstances upon my faith development, as it appears to me in retrospect, I do not mean to suggest that sociological and psychological dynamics are adequate to explain that development. Others my age with externally similar experiences, whether in Scheinfeld or elsewhere, have followed different courses with respect to their faith, or lack of it, than I. Ultimately, religious faith springs from mysterious sources; it is surrounded, when everything has been analyzed, by a residue of the unexplainable. For the believer, it is a part of the leading of God.

Eventually I did gain some clarity and make some very important decisions. The first was to be baptized. But where, and by whom? Our present church home was the Lutheran church at Schnodsenbach, where I was already attending Confirmation classes. The person to baptize me in that context would be Pfarrer Löblein. But would that make me a Lutheran? Would I thereby cut myself off from my Mennonite heritage? I welcomed Mother's suggestion that she write to Professor Benjamin

Unruh in Karlsruhe regarding this matter. He had visited us in the refugee camp in Konitz and was generally known as a prominent and respected Mennonite leader in Germany. His reply was supportive of my baptism in the Lutheran context, but I do not remember any more just how he saw the impact of this on my Mennonite connection.

Pfarrer Löblein was quite willing to baptize me without assuming that this implied my becoming a Lutheran. He suggested—in the denominationally tolerant spirit of the war and post-war years—that I could also participate in Confirmation since I had already taken the instruction classes. Wherever the prescribed formulae read “Evangelical-Lutheran,” he would omit the “Lutheran,” so that I could be included without prejudice to my denominational association. And that is how it was done.

I was baptized by Pfarrer Löblein in the rectory at Schnodsenbach on March 9, 1947, being a few months short of 15 years of age. With me, two girls (twins, I think) somewhat younger than I were also baptized. They were unknown to me, and I had no further contact with them. Besides Pfarrer Löblein and his wife, the only other persons present were Mother, Tante Mariechen, and probably the grandmother of the two girls. My baptismal verse was 2 Peter 3:18. It was a simple but solemn ceremony. Was it adult or child baptism? It was certainly baptism on the confession of my faith, at my request, after long and serious consideration. Of course, there were many aspects of the faith to which I was committing myself that I knew very imperfectly, but do we ever



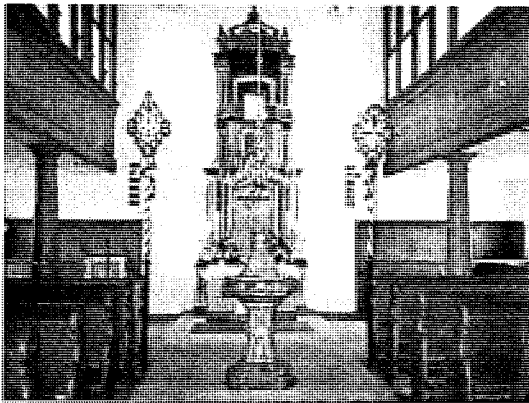
Pfarrhaus Schnodsenbach, where I was baptized

reach the point where we make this—or any other—important decision with full understanding of all factors involved? I have ever since considered this step to have been right for me at that time, and I have never regretted it.

We must have celebrated in some form, at least with Tante Mariechen and in the Pfarrhaus. Our fellow residents there were happy with me, in spite of our denominational differences. As mentioned already, Dr. Nickl gave me a photo album with a dedication in beautiful calligraphy, white on

black, followed by photos of Scheinfeld scenes that he himself had taken with a fine artistic eye. It was a most thoughtful and valuable gift, especially in a time when few had photo cameras or supplies. It is still one of my most cherished memorabilia.

My Confirmation in Schnodsenbach followed on April 13. Confirmation for Protestants, like First Communion for Catholics, was recognized publicly as a major event in the life of young people and was celebrated in church and family. My *Braunes Büchlein* records that I had received new shoes on a *Bezugsschein* (a special official permit to purchase something not provided in our ration cards). Wilfried made a special trip from Iphofen on the Saturday before my Confirmation day; he brought me a potted *Pantoffelblume* (lady's slipper plant), a flower that has been special for me ever since then. Early on Confirmation Sunday, Froeses came in a borrowed or rented horse-drawn cart; and Herr Eigenthaler, a cattle trader who lived a few houses down the street from us, agreed to put up their horse in his stable, since I was a *Konfirmand* (Confirmation candidate).



Schnodsenbach Lutheran Church

The Confirmation service took place, of course, in the Schnodsenbach Lutheran Church. The girls wore black dresses, and we boys wore our Sunday best, but I do not remember what that was. The church was decorated with greenery. We partook of the Lord's Supper for the first time, having made a general confession of sins to the

Pfarrer the evening before. My Confirmation verse was Galatians 2:20. At home we must have celebrated with a meal, joined by the Froeses and possibly some others. The fact that I have forgotten many of the externals is at least partly due to the seriousness with which I experienced the essentials. This was indeed a solemn day for me, a day that, together with my recent baptism, gave me "citizenship" in the Christian church. Since I had received my formal religious instruction in a Lutheran context and had not yet been exposed to the frequent North American Mennonite

emphasis on baptism and church membership as—above all—expressions of human decisions, I experienced them predominantly as unmerited grace received. My *Braunes Büchlein* contains the terse concluding observation “War sehr schön.” (Was very beautiful.)

What about my fellow *Konfirmanden*? I had taken over a year of instruction with them in the school building at Schnodsenbach. Often Karl Schletz, a classmate in the Oberschule, took me along on the bar of his bicycle; at other times I walked the two-and-a-half kilometre stretch. We memorized Luther’s *Small Catechism* together with Luther’s explanations, as well as hymns, biblical information, and probably more. I vaguely remember a few names of other *Konfirmanden*, but none of them were from the circle of my closer Scheinfeld friends, nor did we constitute a group with any close ties. Nevertheless, my *Braunes Büchlein* reminds me that I looked forward to our Confirmation class outing to the Iffigheimer Turm, some 15 kilometres away, an observation tower that offered a wide vista towards the Main River Valley, and that we had good weather and an enjoyable day.

In July of that year I joined three other Protestant boys on a trip to a week-long church-sponsored retreat at Jägersbrunn, a modest country retreat centre between the Starnberger See and the Ammersee, south of München. There we became part of a larger group of some 50 boys, mostly from Nürnberg. We had Bible study every day, based on the beginning chapters of the Gospel of John, and discussion periods on various subjects. One of the latter, which was led by a theology student, the co-leader of the camp, dealt with various questions regarding sex, conception, birth, and related topics. It was tactfully conducted but direct and open, and it confirmed or disconfirmed various aspects of my accumulated knowledge of the subject which I had gained mostly from other boys.

During that week I also read the little book *Jesus of Nazareth* by Otto Dibelius. He was the Lutheran bishop of Berlin and one of the prominent church leaders of the post-war era in Germany. For me this was probably the first comprehensive and coherent, though relatively short, presentation of Jesus as compared to piecemeal Bible stories. It made a positive impression on me and furthered my faith development. (A few years later I heard Bischof Dibelius preach in St. Peter’s Lutheran Church in Kitchener, Ontario.) During this retreat there was also time for swimming in a little lake and for excursions, one of them to the impressive Benedictine *Kloster Andechs* (Monastery of Andechs), located

on a hill close to the Ammersee. On that outing some of us rented a boat and rowed it out onto the lake, but the boat had a leak, and we were kept busy bailing out water. Still, it was a memorable adventure.

From Jägersbrunn I travelled by train to Oberammergau, where I met Michael, Wilfried, and Wilfried's older brother Franz. We stayed with friends of the Wirsching brothers for a week. Although this visit does not specifically relate to the topic of this chapter, that is, to my faith development, it is joined in my memories to the Jägersbrunn retreat. In my childhood, Mother and I had visited my maternal grandmother and other relatives in the Caucasus, where I had seen high mountains but only from a distance. Here in Oberammergau I found myself in the Alps and had my first experience of being surrounded by mountains.

Since I arrived a day before my friends, I had some time to explore the town and vicinity by myself. This included a hike south along the Ammer River to the beautifully situated and impressive Baroque Benedictine monastery of Ettal. On the way back, mountain shadows fell over the valley, and I felt the mountains closing in oppressively upon me. On a later day, my friends and I climbed the Kofel (1341 metres high), a



Heavily damaged Frauenkirche, München

mountain just west of Oberammergau. While ascending along narrow footpaths beside precipitous slopes towards a rocky peak was not exactly my favourite adventure, it did give me the satisfaction of achievement, and the view from the top was breath-taking. Since the day was clear and sunny, we could see a sea of snow-capped Alpine peaks.

Of course this was not a decade-year, so the famous Oberammergau passion play was not being performed. Nevertheless, the many wood-carving shops, the play theatre, and other features made me aware of the centuries of devotion that had put their stamp on this little town. On our return trip we four boys had some time to look around in München, a heavily bombed city of ruins at that time. I remember especially the burned-out walls and towers of the roofless *Frauenkirche* (Church of Our Lady). (On my several visits decades later, I could only marvel at the wonder of reconstruction when I recalled the devastated sites I remembered.)

Faith development is hard to imagine without church music. That held true even for me. While I was deficient in musicality and could not carry a tune, I did find certain types of music appealing and meaningful. To these belonged many *Volkslieder* (folk songs) that I liked, even though I could not sing them correctly. Among my favourites were “Kein schöner Land in dieser Zeit,” “Nun ade, du mein lieb Heimatland,” “Im schönsten Wiesengrunde,” and many others.

More important, music was part of the Christian life. In Religion class in school and in Confirmation instruction we learned hymns of the Reformation tradition. They were rich in Christian content, and I valued them. In later life they became a spiritual treasure for me. When sung by the villagers in the Schnodsenbach church, they lost some of their appeal; yet I considered it my duty to sing (*brumm?*) along. The Gregorian chants in the Catholic church, on the other hand, were well sung and reinforced the general sense of holiness which I felt there. Many songs that belong to the festivals of the church year were favourites of mine. There were the Christmas carols I knew from childhood, like “Stille Nacht,” “O, du fröhliche,” “Der Christbaum ist der schönste Baum,” and “Lobt Gott, ihr Christen, allzugleich.” The Bavarian-Catholic context provided some I had not known previously, a favourite among them being “In dulci jubilo, nun singet und seid froh,” and so on in alternating Latin and German phrases.

Youth meetings and other occasions acquainted me with less staid and catchier religious songs than those of the churchly hymn tradition.

First among my favourites was “Schönster Herr Jesu.” Others included “Näher, mein Gott, zu dir,” “Stern, auf den ich schaue,” “Nur mit Jesus will ich Pilger wandern,” and “Weiss ich den Weg auch nicht.” These I would sing to myself, but only if there was no one to hear me. As I think about this, but also as I read some of the entries in my *Braunes Büchlein*, I recognize that there was an underlying emotional side to my faith, even though I was generally regarded by my friends, teachers, and others as rather intellectually oriented (which I also was) and not given to expressing feelings and sentimentalities. In fact, I made some conscious efforts to appear “cool,” to put it in modern jargon. The public image of rationality and intellectuality has accompanied me throughout my life, while my emotional side has often remained hidden. Sometimes I chafed under this one-sided image, but could not help conveying it.

In sum, the track-setting impact of my Scheinfeld years was inextricably connected with my faith development and the resulting decisions. Those years also left me with other legacies of great importance for my later life, such as a solid foundation for language study and a sense of rootedness in German culture, but everything else received a depth dimension through my faith commitment (and its testing) without which I can not imagine the further course of my life.

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24

Friends and Relatives Near and Far

My life in Scheinfeld was not limited to school, church, and the Pfarrhaus family. Besides our friends from Russia (the Froeses and Hiersacks), Mother (and I with her) had various other social contacts. Some of these resulted from my school attendance and our church life, and a number of others included persons associated with the Geographical Institute. As time went on, we also established contact with relatives in the United States and Canada and with the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC).

Mother, though by no means an outgoing person, was friendly and intelligent, and wherever we went on our refugee trek, persons felt attracted to her in closer or looser bonds of friendship. Frau Schepler in Techentín was an example of this during our Mecklenburg stay. In Wasserberndorf, there was the Traut and Schleich family. In Scheinfeld, it also did not take long for such friendships to develop. Our relationship to Frau Dr. Sievers, my teacher, was prominent among these. Even though we lived in one attic room, she visited us repeatedly and had good conversations with Mother, often over a cup of coffee—a rare delicacy then—once we began to get food packages from our North American relatives. Through her I was put in contact with Frl. Dr. Matthiesen of the Geographical Institute, who gave me English lessons and paid for my tuition. She and her elderly mother came from the Baltic countries, which provided some common ground between them and Mother. *Baltendeutsche* (Germans living in or coming from the Baltic countries) had much in common with Mennonites of the Ukraine, including their flight from Soviet occupation.

Most important among our several friends and acquaintances associated with the Geographical Institute were Frl. Ruth Lades and Dr.

Rolf D. Schmidt. Ruth Lades was the young single woman who lived in a third-storey room opposite ours in the Pfarrhaus, where Dr. Rolf Schmidt paid her frequent courting visits. Mother was their confidante, and after they were married and had their first son, they asked Mother to be his long-distance godmother—we were in Canada by then. There were many conversations between them and Mother, and I was sometimes present during their visits. One time Dr. Schmidt borrowed for us a copy of my great-grandfather P. M. Friesen's *Alt-evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft in Russland (1789-1910)* from the Geographical Institute's library. Our own copy had been a family heirloom, but had been lent to the author and teacher Rudolf Otto Wiemer when he taught teachers' courses in Chortitza. Some time



Wedding of Dr. Rolf and Frau Ruth Schmidt

during our Scheinfeld stay he paid the Froeses and us a visit and returned the book to us, telling us how his wife had carried this heavy volume in her knapsack when she fled from the Russian Zone to the West. I remember especially one evening with Dr. Schmidt and Frl. Lades. They had come to meet Mother and me at the Markt Bibart railway station when we returned from a trip. Together we walked the four kilometres to Scheinfeld at night, and Dr. Schmidt explained many of the stellar constellations in the dark sky to me. His range of knowledge seemed inexhaustible.

Even after Mother had followed me to Scheinfeld, we continued our close association with our friends from Chortitza, the two Froese families in Wasserberndorf and Burghaslach, respectively, and the Hiersacks in Gleissenberg. Visits between us usually meant walking for several hours, although the milk trucks continued to offer transportation on certain

stretches. Such visits sometimes included excursions together, two of which stand out in my memory. The first took us to the village of Pommersfelden to see the exquisite Schloss Weissenstein, the onetime summer residence of the prince bishops of Bamberg. Located in humble rural surroundings, it is a world-class Baroque palace filled with works of art and surrounded by artistically designed gardens. As a young teenager I did not know the history and the art forms, but I could not miss the wonders before my eyes.

The second memorable outing was a nature hike to the Friedrichsberg west of Geiselwind, where the Steigerwald drops off towards the broad Main River valley. This peak offers a beautiful panorama of lush fields dotted with red-roofed towns and villages with prominent church steeples. I do not remember who of our friends was in our group, but I recall the beauty of the woods and our happy company as we sang folk songs and spiritual songs, among them my favourite, "Schoenster Herr Jesu." It was the feast of Pentecost in 1947, as my *Braunes Büchlein* reminds me.

It might seem from such accounts that we had settled down comfortably in Scheinfeld and our new Franconian milieu. Indeed, we had done so, at least for a time. The war was over. We had escaped from the Soviets. Our new surroundings and friends were welcoming, and our physical existence was free from hunger and great immediate want. Nevertheless, we were refugees, "sojourners," whose stay could hardly be permanent.

Our past was with us and not forgotten. In the midst of my Scheinfeld notations in my *Braunes Büchlein*, immediately following a record of my final grades of the summer of 1946, appears a (totally artless) pencil sketch of how I remembered the street in Pyatigorsk in the Caucasus, where Mother and I had visited my maternal grandmother and my uncles and aunt when I was four years old. Mount Elbrus rises in the background, together with a notation of its height of 5600 metres. Thus my thoughts must have travelled into the past at least at some times. Elsewhere appears the sentence, "Ich denke gern an Konitz zurück" (I fondly remember Konitz), and further on I note that I had written letters to my friend Erwin Paul and to Pastor Haack, both in Ludwigslust. (Neither replied, possibly due to political caution.) Thus places and people from my refugee past were vivid in my mind. And then suddenly: "Wo ist Papa?" (Where is Papa?) The uncertainty of the future also shines through in various places in my booklet, as in the brief

entry of Christmas Eve, 1946: “Wo werden wir nächstes Jahr Weihnachten feiern?” (Where will we celebrate Christmas next year?)

Fairly early in our Scheinfeld time, however, a new perspective began to unfold. In the early summer of 1946 already the addresses of two relatives in North America appear in my *Braunes Büchlein*: those of Mother’s Onkel Kolja (her uncle Nicholas Dick) in Wernersville, Pennsylvania, United States; and of Father’s Onkel Jasch (his uncle Jakob H. Janzen) in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. Mother’s cousin Oscar Hamm, Lockwood, Saskatchewan, Canada, would surface in our life a little later. These and their families were the relatives that were to become most important in our emigration story. I have no idea how contact between us and these relatives was established. One guess is that Mother was informed of Onkel Jasch’s address by his friend, Prof. Benjamin Unruh, with whom Mother had also exchanged some letters.

On July 26, 1946, I note in my *Braunes Büchlein* that Onkel Kolja is taking steps to make possible our immigration to the United States. I add: “Möchte es gelingen! Europa ist ein politischer Hexenkessel, der mir nicht gefällt.” (May it be successful! Europe is a political witch’s cauldron that I don’t like.) The reference is to the pervasive fear in Germany at the time that the Soviet war machine would keep rolling and occupy Europe right up to the Atlantic. My wish to leave Germany for North America was motivated solely by this fear of a Third World War and of a Soviet takeover of Europe, and never by a dislike for Germany.

On April 15, I write: “Wir bekommen oft Pakete.” (We often receive parcels.) This meant packages with food and other good things, mostly from Onkel Kolja and his wife, Tante Anna, but also from Onkel Jasch and his wife, Tante Liese; from Onkel Oscar Hamm and his wife Ruth; and sporadically from other friends of our families who had emigrated from Russia to North America earlier. We even received some parcels from Mennonites unknown to us, who wanted to help refugees and had somehow obtained our address. None of our relatives were wealthy, and their parcels to us represented sacrifice on their part.

Although Onkel Kolja was Mother’s uncle, he was not much older than she. He had been separated from his extended family through events during the Communist Revolution and had made his way to the United States on his own. There he married Tante Anna and they adopted two sisters, Mary and Linda. Onkel Kolja was overjoyed to hear of Mother’s and my escape, and he spared no effort to help us and to get us to join him and his family in Pennsylvania. His and Tante Anna’s

parcels were not only the most numerous, but also especially thoughtful as to their content. Besides foodstuffs like fat, sugar, coffee, cocoa, chocolate—all real treasures for us—they contained such items as sewing thread, vaseline, bandaids, notebooks, safety pins, and a host of other items not essential to survival, but certainly most welcome, since all of these were difficult to obtain in post-war Germany. Onkel Kolja's and Tante Anna's thoughtfulness and generosity exceeded all our expectations and changed our quality of life in ever so many ways. In a culture of affluence it is hard to imagine the impact of such aid. Over half a century later, as I write this, I am overcome with emotion and gratitude to Onkel Kolja and Tante Anna, together with our other relatives and benefactors.

It was probably through Onkel Kolja that we established contact with our only relative in Germany, Mother's younger cousin Karin Dueck from Altonau. She, together with her little daughter Heidi, visited us once. Later, in Canada, we kept up contact with her as well as with Heidi and her family.

And then, on October 4, 1947, my *Braunes Büchlein* records: "Nachricht von Papa (indirekt)!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Er lebt! Ist frei! Auch Tante Ira und Walterlein!" (News of Papa [indirect]!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! He is alive! Is free! Also Tante Ira and Walterlein!) As I wrote earlier, Tante Ira was my father's sister, and Walterlein her son, my age. He and I had been raised together by Mother and our grandparents while Tante Ira was in concentration camp. When she returned after five years, she had to move away from Chortitza. She took her son and her parents along to Melitopol where I had last seen them in the summer of 1941. While we came under German occupation, they were exiled to Kazakhstan, where they endured terrible hardships. On January 22, 1948, I state in a further entry that this news has been confirmed from a different source. It came from Russia via someone in North America, but I have not been able to discover who conveyed it.

Somehow—was it also through Prof. Unruh or through our North American relatives?—we established contact with the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). We were placed on the lists of prospective emigrants. On January 13-15, 1948, Mother and I travelled by train to the MCC office in Stuttgart to discuss our possibilities of emigration with the two American MCC workers in charge of that office, Marie Brunk and Magdalen Friesen. They were very pleasant young women. Miss Brunk was wearing the traditional "Old Mennonite" headcovering,

something we had never seen but immediately admired. They informed us of the state of the emigration plans that MCC was pursuing, and we submitted our personal data in order to be included in these plans. We stayed overnight in the MCC's refugee camp *Maubacher Höhe* in the nearby city of Backnang. The camp was a typical set of army barracks, filled with bunk beds partitioned off by blankets to give some privacy to families, just as we had experienced in Konitz.

In Backnang, for the first time since Konitz, we met a community of fellow Mennonites from Russia again, among them some we knew personally. One incident stands out in my mind. Mother and I were given one bunk bed, and I of course occupied the upper bunk. While I was lying in bed already, some activities and conversations were still going on around the common table just beside our bunk. As people got ready to go to bed, one woman asked in Low German: "Saul etj noch Nippawota hole?" (Shall I fetch Dniepr-water yet?) Water from the Dniepr, the great river in far-away Ukraine! And we were in Southwest Germany! But I knew immediately what she meant. In Chortitza and surroundings we had had three kinds of water: *Brunnenwasser* (water from a well as each yard had it); *Regenwasser* (rain water, gathered in barrels under the eaves troughs); and *Dnieprwasser* (water from the tap, which was drawn from the Dniepr by the water supply system). The woman meant water from the tap, but used this homey idiom that I had not heard for years. We were certainly among our own people again!

However, emigration seemed only a far-off and vague possibility. The United States, where Onkel Kolja so much wanted us to join him, were closed to immigrants from Europe; and Canada was just beginning to open its doors to a select few. For the time being we returned to Scheinfeld and continued our normal activities.

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Last Months in Scheinfeld

After our visit to Stuttgart and Backnang on January 13-15, 1948, emigration became an ever greater reality. Onkel Kolja actively pursued the possibility of our coming to the United States, but immigration there seemed fraught with special difficulties. Eventually Onkel Oscar Hamm, Mother's cousin in Saskatchewan, Canada, began looking for a sponsor for us; that is, a person financially able to sign papers stating that we would not become a financial liability to the government for a certain period of time. Onkel Oscar himself, the owner of a small grocery store in the little town of Lockwood, was not in a position to sponsor us, but Menno Ewert, his brother-in-law in neighbouring Drake, a brother of Tante Ruth and a prosperous farmer, was ready to do this kind deed for us.

Thus two immigration applications were activated, one to the United States and one to Canada. Meanwhile we also undertook some preparatory steps, among them getting inoculated against typhoid. We were informed by the MCC office that it would be necessary for us to spend some time in Backnang prior to approval for immigration. Living there, we would be ready on short notice to appear before the Canadian consul in the IRO (International Refugee Organization) offices in the neighbouring city of Ludwigsburg if we should be called up. When the Froeses, including Edgar, left for Backnang on March 18—albeit prematurely as it turned out—it seemed as if our departure from Scheinfeld would happen in only a matter of time.

Meanwhile we were still very much in Scheinfeld, leading a sort of dual existence. According to my *Braunes Büchlein*, these last months were full of important events, among them some of my most memorable hiking outings and other trips with friends. However, my longest trip of

this time I made on my own. It was to see the Rhine River, for me a symbol of German nature, history, and culture. I did not want to leave Germany without having seen the Rhine!

Among my shorter trips of this period was a bus tour to Erlangen, together with a group of young people from our area, to attend a convention, the *Landestreffen des Evangelischen Jungmännerwerkes Bayern* (approximately, Provincial Meeting of the Evangelical Young Men's Society of Bavaria) on the Easter weekend of March 27-29. The convention was large and festive. Bishop Meiser of the Lutheran Church of Bavaria preached at the Easter morning service in the overcrowded Neustaedter Kirche, but I had to leave before the conclusion of the service because I began to feel faint in the balcony of the crowded church. There were several other speakers well known in church work then, but only names to me today. The topics reflected the post-war era, as for example: "Was tun wir für die Heimkehrer?" (What are we doing for the returning prisoners of war?) The whole event breathed the spirit of awakening that characterized the church in Germany in those years.

The visit to Schloss Weissenstein near Pommersfelden, recounted earlier, also falls into this period; we were there on March 31, 1948. A little later, on April 18, Michael, Edgar, and I made a trip by train to Rothenburg ob der Tauber. We inspected the old fortifications consisting of the walls and towers surrounding the old town; ironically these, which had been preserved intact for centuries, had suffered considerably from recent Allied bombing. We took a guided tour of the St. Jakobskirche with its famous *Riemenschneideraltar* (wood-carved altar by the famous artist Tilman Riemenschneider) and later returned to this church for an evening service. We climbed the many stairs to the top of the *Rathausturm* (the spirelike tower of the town hall) and enjoyed the wonderful view. We also visited a museum and walked through the quaint cobble-stoned streets of the town, itself a museum. It was a most interesting day. On many later visits I would remember this boyhood adventure.

Hills and forests surrounded Scheinfeld and offered ample scope for hiking and the enjoyment of nature. We boys walked long distances through the woods on many occasions, often along marked hiking trails, not to mention shorter outings in the vicinity. One longer hike stands out in my memory. On May 6, Michael, Edgar, and I set out in a northerly direction, equipped for the venture that lay ahead. We had even managed to procure a tent, although I believe Michael had assured

his rather protective mother, Frau Pflaum, that it would be used only in emergencies. Predictably, these arose each evening as night approached.

We reached our first destination, Geiselwind, on foot, perhaps catching a ride on the milk truck for part of the way. Setting out from there, our first destination was the village of Grossbirkach with its church dating back to around 1000 A.D. We climbed into the steeple to see the ancient Germanic *runes* (letter signs). Then we proceeded to Ebrach, an ancient and attractive Steigerwald town with an impressive Gothic church. The attached monastery buildings, alas, had been turned into a penitentiary. At night we tented, an experience my *Braunes Büchlein* tersely records as “Wundervoll!” (Wonderful!) My memory supplies some details. We began rather late to find a place in the woods to pitch our tent, deciding eventually on a small clearing. By then it was dark, but we had no water. We listened for a brook and soon thought we heard one *rauschen* (murmuring; rushing); or was it the *rauschen* (rustling) of the leaves? At that time I did not know how the Romantic poets loved the word *rauschen*, the verb for the sound of the inner forest, virtually identical whether produced by water or leaves. We did indeed locate a brook eventually and got our supply of water. Whenever I taught Romantic literature in later years, I told my students of that night experience of *rauschen* long ago.

The next day, we proceeded further north to the Murleinsnest, one of the highest elevations in the Steigerwald. Arriving there in the afternoon, we decided to pitch our tent near a decaying picnic hut. Edgar and Michael were eager to go on to the Zabelstein, another high point in these ranges. It would take several hours, and my feet ached. So we decided that I should pitch the tent and stay with our things, while Michael and Edgar made the extra hike. As it turned out, the Zabelstein was further away than expected. I pitched the tent and waited. It began to rain, and I sought refuge in our little tent. As I lay there, the huge rain drops clattered right onto me, it seemed, although of course the tent protected me. After a while, however, the water began to seep in at ground level. What to do? When the rain abated somewhat, I transferred the tent and our belongings to the old hut for a little more protection. It began to get dark, and I became worried. Had my friends got lost? Would they find their way back? It did not help that some hikers walking by earlier had told me that a work team of penitentiary inmates, accompanied by guards with dogs, was camping out in the vicinity. From

time to time I began to call. Finally I heard my companions call my name in return. I replied, and soon they arrived.

Our night was very short. To reach the railroad station of Gerolzhofen in the Main Valley, we had to start out around 2:00 a.m. There was no road to follow, and it was pitch dark. Our only guide was the slope of the hilly range. As long as we descended, we were heading for the Main Valley. It was so dark that we held hands so we would not lose each other. Often we stumbled, bumped against a tree, or stepped on a dry branch which made a cracking sound. Would the convicts or their guard dogs hear us? Eventually a church clock struck the hour; a most welcome sound! We must be approaching a village. Soon there were fields, and we could recognize a church steeple against the sky, still dark and starless, but not as dark as in the woods. Tired and unkempt, we reached the station of Gerolzhofen in time for the early morning train. We had to change trains in Kitzingen, get off in Markt Bibart, and walk four kilometres to Scheinfeld. Not only would we miss school that Monday morning, but at least Michael might well expect some repercussions at home. I do not remember how we were received; perhaps his and my mother were just glad that we were back safely. For us, it remained a memorable adventure.

The next trip recorded in my *Braunes Büchlein* was very different. On Sunday, May 18, Udo Goetz took me along to Nürnberg to show me his home city. We spent some time in the *Germanisches Museum* (Germanic Museum), visited the *Burg* (castle) which had been heavily damaged by bombs during the war, and took the street car to the zoo on the outskirts. Nürnberg had suffered extreme devastation during the bombing raids, and much of the inner city lay in ruins. Since I had lived through years of war and destruction, however, I took the ravaged sites for granted and was not very deeply affected by them. The day stands out for me as a pleasant outing with a good friend.

I have saved my most memorable trip for the end of this chapter, even though it took place on March 21-22 already. I wanted to see the Rhine before leaving Germany. I am grateful that Mother, much as she loved me, trusted my good sense and was not overly protective. Even though reaching the Rhine meant a fairly lengthy trip alone, she did not object. Dr. Nickl wrote me a letter on official church stationery which bore the church stamp, and commended me as a respectable young person, asking "whom it may concern" to give me every possible assistance, if necessary. It proved unnecessary, but we lived in unsettled

times, and the letter was good to have. He also wrote me a note wishing me well, concluding in Latin: "Angelus Raphael committitur tecum in via!" (approximately, May the Angel Raphael accompany you on the way!) I think the note also contained a gift of money.

With my knapsack on my back, I walked to Markt Bibart and took the train to Frankfurt am Main. During a stopover in Würzburg, I walked through parts of this city, which I had never yet visited even though it was located relatively close to Scheinfeld. Unexplainably, the devastation there left me genuinely shocked, unlike what I had felt at the no doubt equally severely bombed Nürnberg. On my several visits to Würzburg in later years I have found it hard to believe that the beautiful and fully rebuilt city was the same place I had seen as a heap of rubble.

In Frankfurt I had planned to see some of the city, but what do you do in the absence of tourist information and maps? As I aimlessly walked the streets in the vicinity of the station for a while, I saw much destruction again. There as in other cities I visited, I kept a street car ticket as a souvenir since postcards or the like were usually unavailable. After a little while I decided to travel on to Mannheim, where I would finally reach the Rhine.

Mannheim was not the ideal place to admire the Rhine; on the contrary, one could hardly see it to less advantage than there, where it flows sluggishly and wide through a flatland, flanked by the industries of this city and of Ludwigshafen on the other side. But I had little choice in the matter. The interesting stretch of Rhine scenery known to tourists, with vineyards, castles, the Lorelei Rock, and beautiful little towns or impressive cathedrals, lay in the French Zone. To travel there would have required who knows what kind of permission papers, while Mannheim in the American Zone, like Scheinfeld, was easily accessible.

So I headed for Mannheim. I arrived after dark and therefore decided to sit out the night in the station waiting room, a makeshift barrack, since the station building had been bombed out. After eating something, I tried to sleep, resting my head on my arms folded over my knapsack. A police control interrupted my attempt, but did not cause me any difficulty. A young woman with apparently less adequate identification was not so lucky. Around 2:00 a.m., however, all were told to leave the room, since this was the time for it to be cleaned. Thus I transferred to a park bench outside, where I did nap for a while and got at least some rest. But I woke up early, and decided to take a walk around in the inner city area close to the station. If Würzburg and Frankfurt

were severely bomb-damaged, the area of Mannheim I explored was a total wasteland. For many city blocks hardly any buildings were intact, and I met no people at all. I do not know whether Mannheim was more badly damaged than other cities, or whether I simply happened to go through the worst-hit area, but my lonely walk left me with an almost eerie feeling.

By then it was daytime, and I could head for the Rhine, the goal of my trip. There I stood and watched the bleak scene described above. I don't remember my emotions, but my *Braunes Büchlein* carries a terse entry that must be indicative of my disappointment: "Den Rhein gesehen. Ziemlich breit." (Saw the Rhine. Quite wide.)

Close to where I stood, a wooden walkway led to a signal-man's hut jutting out into the river. I am not sure whether I walked there and talked to the man on duty, or whether he saw me and came to inquire what I wanted. In any case, I explained my reason for being there, and the man invited me to come out to his hut and watch from there. He also served me some coffee (*Ersatz*, that is, "substitute," of course) and a brown bun. For those times of scarcity, this was a generous act, and when I think of hospitality, I remember this friendly stranger who showed empathy and kindness to a young boy who had the romantic wish to see the Rhine before leaving Germany.

When I returned to the station, I was approached by a man who tried to persuade me to go and see the city with him, adding some things I did not quite understand. Another kind stranger? In retrospect I recognize his approach as a homosexual proposition, but then I knew nothing of such practice. I was intelligent enough, however, to have some suspicion; or should I credit the Angel Raphael for averting a potentially hazardous situation? However that be, I persisted firmly in my refusal and walked away.

In the station I was told that the train to Heidelberg, my next destination, was standing ready at its platform, even though it would not leave for some time. I could go and sit in it, an official told me. Tired after my disturbed night, I found a seat in an empty train car, put down my head on my knapsack, and promptly fell asleep. I do not know how long I slept, but when the train started with a jolt, I awoke and looked around. Where was I? In a dream? In a world out of a children's story book? Was this reality or a vision? All around me the car was full of black people, "Negroes," as we said then. They were black American soldiers. I had seen some black drivers of American army trucks speed along the

major highway through Markt Bibart, but as far as I remember, I had never come close to, or spoken to any of them. “Negroes” belonged into the story world, into faraway places in Africa! I was neither afraid nor prejudiced; I just marvelled at the apparent unreality of my situation.

I no longer remember whether I spoke to my fellow travellers, or they to me. The trip to Heidelberg was short. And finally there my journey took a turn for the better. Heidelberg had not been bombed during the war. Some say that this was because so many Americans had studied there in pre-war times that a decision to bomb it would have been politically inadvisable. I have not researched this matter. I had a good day in that city nestled in the Neckar Valley. I walked through the beautiful and undamaged streets and across the bridges spanning the Neckar River. I took the cog-wheel train to the old castle, halfway up a mountain slope, and participated in a guided tour. Surprisingly, there were some postcards for sale, even if they were of very poor quality. I bought a few as souvenirs, but habitually also saved a streetcar ticket. Then I continued by cog-wheel car up to the *Königsstuhl* (king’s chair), from where one had a wonderful view of the Neckar Valley and the city below. I think there was a restaurant at the top. All in all, it was a very enjoyable day.

The uneventful return trip took me via Neckarelz and Lauda to Würzburg from where I retraced my route to Markt Bibart and Scheinfeld. Although the Rhine had not fulfilled my expectations, I was not disappointed. I had seen a number of cities and much beautiful countryside, and I had had adventures, something quite important to a teenage boy.

Some time in May we received the notification that we should come to Backnang. We left many of our belongings in Scheinfeld for the time being when we made the trip on May 26. My emotions must have been mixed. We were refugees in Scheinfeld and knew that our stay would probably not last too long. We were afraid of an expected Third World War, and for some time we had conditioned ourselves to emigrate. Some sense of unreality was probably there as well because America—as we called both Canada and the United States then—was like a faraway dreamland for me, rather than a clear concept. For Mother, there was the anticipation of rejoining the Mennonite community and meeting old friends and relatives. However we felt, we set out on the first lap of our emigration. Before leaving Germany, Mother would revisit Scheinfeld

once more, and I twice. For her that would be the last visit there, and for me the last visit for 27 years.

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26

Backnang, Ludwigsburg, and Departure

Our next few months were spent in the Mennonite refugee camp *Maubacher Höhe* (Maubach Heights) in Backnang, a city with a population of approximately 15,000 at the time, located 30 kilometres northeast of Stuttgart. The city lay in a valley, but extended up the slopes of the hills on each side. The name of the camp was also the name of one of these higher outskirts. To reach it from the railroad station, one had to walk uphill for several city blocks.

The camp itself was made up of half-a-dozen typical army barracks situated on a slope overlooking a football field. If one entered it through the main gate and proceeded along the street, one eventually reached the last and biggest barrack, the one to which we were assigned. The camp kitchen was at the far end of this building, while the main living part was subdivided into two halves, each accommodating some 50 people.

The camp furniture was typical of what we had come to know in the



MCC camp Backnang

refugee camp in Konitz, including the bunk beds with straw-filled mattresses. Again each family shielded its bed or beds with grey army blankets or other curtains to obtain some privacy. In contrast to Konitz, there were no bedbugs. Of course Mother and I had one bunk bed and about a

metre of space between ours and the next bunk bed. This little cubicle was partitioned off by blankets and curtains. To be sure, the privacy thus gained existed only for the occupant of the lower bunk, in our case, Mother. Mine was the upper bunk from where I could wave "Good night!" to the occupants of the other upper bunks—some 25-30 of them—before lying down to sleep. No privacy here. Next to our bunk was a large table for common use with some chairs and a little surrounding space. In different parts of the large room were a few other such common areas.

The camp was operated by the Mennonite Central Committee, the joint relief agency of North American Mennonites. One small barrack was the office which was occupied by the office administrators, Marie Brunk and Magdalen Friesen, the two nice young women we had already met earlier in Stuttgart, together with a staff of helpers from among the refugees. Another barrack served as a sort of sick ward or small hospital.



American MCC workers Magdalen Friesen (left) and Marie Brunk (right)

Our meals were prepared in a common kitchen, supplied with food by MCC. The food was frugal but nourishing.

All the people living together in these close quarters were Mennonites from Russia. For some, this had been home for a longer time already, perhaps since the establishment of the camp soon after the end of the war. Others had come more recently, as we had, to be close at hand for the processing of their emigration papers. All were waiting for their visas to Canada or to Paraguay. Among them were a number of people we knew from Chortitza.

We spent a pleasantly sunny summer—from the end of May to early October—in Backnang, with stints in Ludwigsburg when our emigration procedures required it. A wet fall or a cold winter in camp would surely have left me with more negative impressions. A further positive factor was the fellowship. I did

not have my close Scheinfeld friends, but we did know some people from Chortitza; and it is impossible to be altogether lonely in a crowded camp full of people of similar background. Loneliness had accompanied my life ever since Mother and I stayed back by ourselves in Chortitza when my grandparents, Tante Ira, and Walterlein had had to leave us to move to Melitopol. Scheinfeld had been an interlude of good companionship in school and with my inner circle of close friends. Having intensely experienced long stretches of loneliness, I did not mind the lack of privacy, the crowded barracks, the sound of conversation, or even a baby's crying; only the *Ziehharmonika* (accordion)—apparently the bane of every refugee camp—was a real nuisance. Mother found the lack of privacy harder to bear.

In spite of the positive aspects, camp life could be less than enjoyable. The first entry in my *Braunes Büchlein* upon our arrival in Backnang bears the entry: "Viele Langeweile. Primitives Leben." (Much boredom. Primitive life.) A month later I note again that life was boring. This, however, must have improved with time, for I remember various pleasant activities and outings.

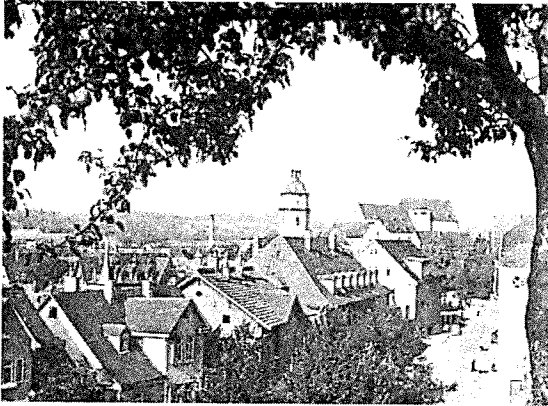
Activities in camp were diverse. One entry in my *Braunes Büchlein* states that "the boys" played a game in the woods. I do not recall who these boys were, with the exception of Jascha (Jakob) Harder. He came from Chortitza where we had attended the same school during the time of German occupation. His sister, Herta, had been in my grade, while Jascha was a year or so younger. We had not been special friends before, but here in camp I associated with them to some extent, and we had some good walks and conversations. Together with their mother they lived in another barrack. The Froeses also spent some of the early summer with us in this camp, but returned to Burghaslach and Wasserberndorf in late August or early September, when it became evident that their emigration proceedings were making slower progress than ours.

For a while I spent many hours sitting at the table beside our cubicle and constructing a toy truck out of tin from tin cans. Such cans, which had been discarded by American soldiers or—as in our case here—by the MCC kitchen, were treasured in those postwar years. People made coffee mugs and all kinds of other things for daily use from them. Why not a toy? My only instruments were a pair of heavy scissors that served as tin snips, a nail to punch holes, a piece of iron or a stone to substitute for a proper hammer, and possibly pliers, although I do not recall owning

these. Under these circumstances, the truck turned out quite well, if I may say so. It was about 25 centimetres in length, had a front hood for the motor (but, of course, no motor), a cab with doors and steering wheel, a box, and wheels on wire axles that allowed it to roll and be steered. I was quite proud. I do not recall what became of it; probably I gave it to one of the children when we left.

Later in summer, I spent considerable time with two young men in their improvised photo-developing studio. Photography was important for refugees because everyone corresponded with relatives in North America and wanted to send photos to them. Probably we also developed passport photos. I was an inexperienced junior assistant in this venture, but learned how to develop films, make enlargements, and dry the finished photos. It was fascinating to see a picture emerge on the exposed paper soaking in a tray filled with a chemical solution.

The city of Backnang and surroundings held some attractions. The natural setting was hilly, but not as beautiful and interesting, at least in



Partial view of Backnang

my opinion, as the Steigerwald. Mother and I took walks in a forest which was within easy walking distance from the camp, but we also visited the old downtown section. The central church was situated on an elevated spot overlooking some of the city. It was pretty in its setting of chestnut trees. We didn't attend

any services there, but one evening we heard an organ concert. There was a picturesque half-timbered city hall. On the whole, however, I was not particularly attracted to Backnang, perhaps because I contrasted it negatively with Scheinfeld, which I missed. The leather factories or tanneries that made up the city's major industry did not improve its appearance.

One day Edgar and I hiked to the castle of Reichenberg near the village of Oppenweiler several kilometres from the city. A somewhat further trip took Mother and me to Stuttgart. Like most German cities, it

was heavily bombed, but we did admire its beautiful situation, nestled in a valley and extending up the surrounding hillsides. Since I had been interested in railroads throughout my early life, I was most impressed by the imposing *Hauptbahnhof* (main railroad station).

Also memorable was an outing to the little town of Marbach, the birthplace of the famous author and poet Friedrich Schiller. It is situated on the Neckar River, some 15 kilometres west of Backnang. Edgar, his older brother Gerd, and I walked there and back. We saw the quaint little *Schillerhaus*, the house where Schiller was born, and visited the more modern *Schiller-Museum*. In the latter we saw some of the poet's original writings displayed in glass cases. In Scheinfeld we had memorized many of Schiller's long ballads under the tutelage of Frau Dr. Sievers and, while I knew little else about the poet, seeing some of his original writings conveyed to me a certain sense of significance, if not awe.

Our Mennonite community in Backnang confronted me with Mennonite forms and expressions of faith. I had grown up in the atheist Soviet Union. Only during the brief two-year period of German occupation had Mennonites (and others) been able to reopen their churches and practise their faith publicly. This had not made a deep impression on me. During our refugee years in Germany, we had attended Lutheran churches. Now we had entered a Mennonite world, not only in the social, but also in the religious sense. For Mother, this was a reentering, although in some ways the experiences there were far removed from what she had known in the Ukraine.

Sunday worship services were held regularly in the *Leba-Lager* (Leba camp), a downtown branch of the MCC refugee camp located in a factory building. A former factory hall full of unsightly pipes and ducts was the only available large place for meetings and was therefore used for worship as well as other gatherings. Under Mennonite Brethren influence, I think, the singing consisted to a large extent of pietistic songs, many of them English in origin. (This is an analysis in retrospect, of course; I knew neither Pietism nor the history of the Mennonite Brethren at that time.) These songs expressed a warm and heartfelt personal piety for which I had some appreciation, but they lacked the depth of content, the majesty, and the sense of holiness of Lutheran chorales. The musical accompaniment—yes, *Ziehharmonika* even here!—did not help. The preaching was personal, simple, and with direct appeal to the listener.

Sometimes the only resident refugee minister, a Mr. Cornelius Penner, had the sermon. At other times visiting ministers from North America preached, some of them MCC workers, such as Mr. Peter Dyck; some were representatives of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, such as Rev. J.J. Thiessen, or of the Mennonite Brethren Conference, such as Rev. Cornelius Wall. Once a Rev. Legiehn held evening lectures on the book of Revelation; he outlined systematically (from what I now know to be a “dispensationalist” perspective) just what the order of the “endtime events” would be. In my *Braunes Büchlein* I describe this scheme as *sehr interessant* (very interesting), and I copied it faithfully. Two baptismal services were held during our stay there, one *kirchlich* (after the manner of the “mainline” body of Mennonite churches in Russia, by sprinkling) and the other *brüdergemeindlich* (after the manner of the Mennonite Brethren, by immersion). Many young and younger middle-aged people were baptized, since there had been little opportunity for this in the hostile Stalinist era or the turbulent war years. These were impressive occasions.

It is hard for me to judge in retrospect what impact this encounter with Mennonite expressions of faith and worship had on me. I had not joined the Lutheran Church, aware that my roots were Mennonite, even though I knew little about them. All sincere expressions of the Christian faith attracted me, and the direct, personal, and somewhat “folksy” way of Mennonite preaching had its appeal. The uninviting setting could be tolerated as part of a transitional refugee camp situation. It is probably fitting to say that I was receptive to the appeal of new styles and approaches, but neither ready nor forced to make them my own. I was participant and observer at the same time.

Thus far I have merely depicted the day-to-day events of our life in a refugee camp. The deeper dynamic that characterized our existence and that of the other camp residents was something else. We were there for a purpose: to emigrate. As a sick person anxiously watches the rise and fall of temperature or blood pressure, we watched the fluctuating status of our emigration prospects and procedures.

These long-anticipated proceedings had now begun in earnest. Emigration means leaving. While the fear of a Soviet takeover in case of a Third World War, together with a sense of adventure—after all, I was a boy of 16—had made me look forward to the New World, coming to Backnang had meant, first of all, leaving Scheinfeld. “Ich habe Heimweh

nach Scheinfeld” (I am homesick for Scheinfeld), states my *Braunes Büchlein* early on in our Backnang stay, and a similar entry follows later.

My longing for Scheinfeld is borne out by the fact that, in spite of the distance, I returned there for two visits. The first return trip, made by train, took place on June 11-16, only about two weeks after our move to Backnang. The entry on this trip in my *Braunes Büchlein* is very short; it notes only that I enjoyed my visit and that I saw some of the city of Ansbach on my way back. The occasion for this trip may have been a school event, perhaps commencement, as one humorous incident might suggest. I was sitting with my friends in the Scheinfeld sports gymnasium that also served as an auditorium for various public events. The room was quite full, but there was an empty seat at the aisle, two or three seats away from mine. Frau Dr. Sievers came in, sat down there, and began to chat with the students next to her, recalling the same event a year earlier. Then, turning in my direction, she reminisced: “Damals war der Janzen noch da und sass dort!” (At that time Janzen was still here and sat over there!) She turned and pointed at me. As she saw me, she looked momentarily as if a ghost had appeared. After a few stunned moments of silence, she exclaimed: “Da sitzt er ja!” (Well, there he sits!) We all laughed, of course, and I explained my presence. It may have been during this visit that my school class sang for me the well-known folksong, “Wem Gott will rechte Gunst erweisen, den schickt er in die weite Welt. . . .” (in prose translation, The person to whom God wants to show real favour he sends out into the big wide world. . . .)

My second and last return to Scheinfeld before emigrating to Canada was different and more eventful. It took place in the middle of July. A half-ton truck belonging to MCC had to drive to Nürnberg, and I seized the opportunity to ride along in the back. From Nürnberg I took the train to Markt Bibart. In Scheinfeld I packed the rest of our belongings, formally signed out from the Oberschule, and said my good-byes to all our friends. The latter included a visit, on foot, to Burghaslach and Gleissenberg to say farewell to the Froeses and Hiersacks. It must have been a rather sad and nostalgic last visit.

I returned to Nürnberg by train; then took a street car to the outskirts and the highway to Stuttgart, which passed through Backnang. I positioned myself beside the highway and hitchhiked. It was my first attempt at hitchhiking, and a little risky at that because very few German civilians owned a car, and American soldiers were not likely to give me a ride. It did not take long, however, before a car stopped to pick me up.

The driver was a salesman. What followed was another of those experiences of hospitality that form some of the brightest memories of my refugee years. The driver's destination took him close to Backnang, so we spent several hours travelling together. Our conversation must have included my sharing some of my background and the nature of my trip. When we reached Schwäbisch Hall, my host turned into town and invited me to join him for a meal in a restaurant. I would need no ration card coupons or money, he told me. After the meal, we covered the remaining distance to the point where he had to turn off in a different direction. However, before leaving me, he flagged down another car and asked the young couple in it whether they could take me along to Backnang. They consented; my trip came to a happy conclusion, and it left me with a grateful memory. Perhaps it also provided the encouragement for much hitchhiking once I was in Canada.

For July 16, the entry in my *Braunes Büchlein* states: "Unsere Nummern nach Kanada sind angekommen." (Our numbers for Canada have arrived.) To "get a number" did not mean admission to Canada yet, but it did indicate that we were on the list to see the Canadian consul on a reasonably close if unpredictable date. It was certainly a major step on the way to emigration, and we were glad for it.

Going back in time a little, I want to characterize a few of the anxieties, hopes, deliberations, difficulties, and decisions that filled the waiting time for us and for most other camp residents. As far as I know, emigration to Canada after the war had begun only in spring of 1948. German citizens had not yet been considered by Canada at all. We had been naturalized (without either our initiative or our resistance) in West Prussia shortly after coming out of the Ukraine. The Russians did not recognize our German citizenship, but demanded that people like we be returned to the Soviet Union as traitors who had illegitimately left the country.

As I mentioned earlier, at first the Western Allies did hand over such persons but they stopped this practice after a few months. However, they also did not consider us to be German citizens, but Russian citizens instead. People whose citizenship status was uncertain—and there were multitudes of them in post-war Europe—were commonly referred to as "Displaced Persons," or "DPs" for short. This eventually became a pejorative designation, both for the German population that experienced some post-war vengefulness or simply lawless behaviour from this

unstable element, and for Canadians who received them as immigrants, as I will explain later. In these circumstances, MCC tried to negotiate with the Canadian government a special status for Mennonite refugees from the Soviet Union.

We waited anxiously for every bit of news as to the progress of these efforts. Every visiting MCC leader, such as C. F. Classen, Peter and Elfriede Dyck, and others, held a briefing meeting that was attended by everyone who could possibly come. Sometimes there was something new to report; at other times such guests could merely try to bolster the hope of the refugees, even though progress was slow.

For a while, one attempt to secure special status for us was based on an argument which—as I learned only much later—had originated in the Ukraine early in the century to gain exemption for Mennonites from some harsh Czarist laws against Germans living in Russia. It was the argument that we were not really Germans, but Dutch. I don't know how Mennonite refugees generally reacted to this view while we were in Backnang. For Mother and me, however—and I am sure for many others who had been helped by Germany to escape from the Stalinist regime and had been received very graciously in a country that itself was defeated and lay in ruins—this amounted not only to an untruth, but a kind of betrayal of a people (not a regime!) to whom we owed much gratitude.

One time Mother returned from an interview with an MCC leader totally dejected and sad. Early in the conversation with this man, whom she had greatly respected and appreciated, she had used the words, *wir Russlanddeutschen* (we Germans from Russia) in self-identification. He had stopped her short and asked in a reprimanding tone: “Wie, sind sie denn keine Mennonitin? Dann ist es kein Wunder dass unsere Leute durchfallen.” (How is this; aren't you a Mennonite? Then it is no wonder that our people don't pass [the immigration screening].)

I clearly recall Mother's distress and dejection, and also the reasons for these, as she told them to me briefly then. Only recently, however, have I found the copy of a letter from her to my father's uncle, Jacob H. Janzen (Onkel Jasch), in Waterloo, Ontario, dated July 11, 1948, in which she recounts this experience, her reply to the MCC worker, and her feelings in greater detail. Since she does not use quotation marks consistently in this copy, I do not know exactly what she actually replied and what were her subsequent private thoughts. I summarize here her main statements and/or thoughts.

Mother: “I told him that of course I was a Mennonite; that I had not weighed my choice of words carefully, not sensing the need to do so; that, after all, Mennonites are a faith community and not a recognized nationality, even though centuries of migration had given us a certain ethnic distinctness. In Russia we used the German language in church and school; our leading men studied in Germany; we subscribed to German books, because we did not have much literature of our own . . .”.

The MCC worker: “Perhaps you think and feel German? I for my part speak German and read German books, but I don’t feel German. Our people could more likely be considered to be Dutch.”

Mother: “Yes, I said; [but] of course we know too little about Holland to be able to judge and to determine that our customs, our language, and our character are more Dutch [than German]. We were certainly never National Socialists [Nazis]. . . . I cannot feel Dutch [however], since I do not know Holland. I cannot yet feel Canadian, although I can understand that it is more easily possible there to become a part of the people than [was possible] in the Russian situation. But my mother taught me to pray in German, I read the Bible in the German language, we sing in German. . . . I am Mennonite, but then German, with Dutch in our background (literally, *holländischen Einschlags*).”

This is the gist of that conversation. While it sounds like a give-and-take argument, it was rather the desperate plea of a woman who had suffered countless hardships, many on the basis of her (Mennonite) faith; whose husband had been sent to concentration camp as a Mennonite minister; and whose Mennonite identity was now being questioned in a context where she thought she was finally secure and among her own. She was unwilling to compromise her integrity for external advantage, even if that meant jeopardizing our chance of emigration. The whole dialogue, however, was polite, and Mother’s appreciation in her letter for the man’s efforts on our behalf remains evident. The MCC representative and Mother simply came from two different worlds of experience and perspective, and it was not easy to harmonize these. In the end, we did not immigrate to Canada as Dutch people; our documents state that our former citizenship was Russian, which was formally true, if our German naturalization was discounted.

I tell this incident in so much detail, albeit still abbreviated, since it shows what is often not realized; namely, that we refugees then were not simply sheep yearning for the greener grass of the promised land. There were many inner struggles and ethical questions that surrounded the

emigration experience and a refugee camp like Backnang—there were other MCC camps also—was a place of struggle to make the right decisions in major life-changing matters.

Let me illustrate this point from two other areas of experience. One was lived out beside us on the other side of the common table. There a woman in her thirties with her two young sons had her cubicle. The boys were nine and seven years old, and I sometimes played with them as with younger brothers. The father had been taken from them in Russia, as had most Mennonite men; I am not sure whether he was known to be dead or presumed to be. This mother had no relatives in Canada who could sponsor her and her boys, but she very much wished to emigrate, mostly for the sake of her sons' future. In Canada there was a single middle-aged farmer who wanted to help some refugees. He was told of this family. How could he help them if they were not relatives? He could marry the mother, he was told. He consented, and the offer was conveyed to our neighbour.

She did not know the man at all, but here were her boys for whose future she wanted to provide. Should she or should she not accept the offer? She was in a deep dilemma, and Mother was often her confidante. Finally she decided to marry this stranger. The family left for Canada within a reasonably short time. Did this woman do the right thing? Nine years later I happened to meet this family in Canada. The farmer told me, with tears in his eyes, how God had blessed him through this union. The two boys seemed to feel at home and to be happy. Although I have never heard from the mother how she felt about her decision in retrospect, it appears that the risk she had taken had led to a positive situation.

For Mother, the question of leaving Father behind when emigrating to Canada must have weighed heavily, but I do not recall her speaking about it. The fact is that the Iron Curtain—the term was not current then yet, but we lived with the reality all the time—seemed so impenetrable and permanent, that any thoughts of being reunited in this life with those on the other side seemed utterly unrealistic. To stay in Europe in the hope of change could not be a serious consideration.

Another kind of decision was faced by many prospective emigrants all around us. What if you had no one in Canada to vouch for you, or what if you did not pass the medical examination (often because of “a shadow on the lung,” a pre-tubercular state), or what if you were unacceptable to Canada for some other reason? Should some family

members go and others stay behind in the hope of following later? Should the family go to Paraguay, a country with fewer restrictions? The path there was easier, but it meant settling in the Chaco wilderness or another primitive pioneering situation. Many families consisted of women and children with no man to clear the bush or break the soil. Some decided to go anyway, while others preferred to wait in uncertainty. At one point, when our processing for Canada was at a standstill, I would not have been altogether averse to Paraguay, but on this point Mother was adamant. She had done hard labour in a Soviet *kolchos* (collective farm), and she would not venture out into a hot country to make a backbreaking start at cultivating the wilderness.

Thus the questions and uncertainties, the waiting and the decisions continued from day to day, from week to week. For us, however, the new reality was that our numbers had come. There were still some hurdles to overcome; above all, the medical examination. At a preliminary checkup, some shadows had been found on my lungs, too. Would we pass? It was during this time that I had bouts of despondency in the matter. They consisted of feelings reminiscent of the time when Techentin, the village where we had settled after fleeing from West Prussia, had been taken over by the Russians. We seemed destined to be caught by the Russians after all, I had felt then, and such feelings once more depressed me now. Mother, who was given to times of depression—though they were not as severe as they had been in Russia—was less pessimistic now and tried her best to cheer me up when these feelings struck. At other times I felt the fascination of a new country and continent and the lure of adventure, while Mother—as she confessed to Onkel Jasch in a letter I found only recently—was often afraid of Canada, even though she wished to join her Mennonite people there.

In order to be ready to see the Canadian consul when called, we had to move temporarily from Backnang to an IRO (International Refugee Organization) camp in the nearby city of Ludwigsburg. Actually, we spent several shorter time periods there, each time hoping that it would be our turn to see the Canadian doctor and the consul. Sometimes they would not come at the predicted times, however, and we would return to Backnang after a week or two of waiting in vain. At other times they came, but left again before it was our turn to see them.

In contrast to the MCC camp in Backnang, the Ludwigsburg camp was filled with a totally heterogeneous crowd of DPs from different Eastern European countries. Many of them had been forcibly brought to

Germany to work in factories, or they had been prisoners of war in Germany but did not want to return to Russia or other Eastern countries, or they had fled with the Germans to escape from the Russian advance. To prevent these fellow camp residents' hostile sentiments towards Mennonites, we were encouraged not to speak German in public, but to turn to Low German instead, since that might be taken for Dutch. While Mother had refused to see ourselves as being Dutch rather than German, she had no objection to this temporary practical accommodation. Thus when we were among others in the Ludwigsburg camp, Mother and I spoke Low German. At first that felt a little strange since neither of us had spoken it at home. In Mother's home, her parents had used Low German with each other, but High German with the children. My parents had always spoken High German with each other and with me, as was the case in many teachers' families. But we knew Low German from hearing it and, after some initial awkwardness we managed quite well to converse in it with each other.

The times in Ludwigsburg were not without rewards. The camp lay on the outskirts close to the Neckar River. Mother and I often walked there to enjoy the pleasant countryside with the peaceful river flowing between hills, woods, and little villages. The city itself was impressive and interesting. The main attraction was the beautiful *Schloss* (palace), which we always passed on our way to and from the railway station. Once we had the opportunity to take a guided tour through its ornate interior. In the manner of Baroque palaces, the *Schloss* was surrounded by beautiful ornamental gardens issuing into a large park.

Eventually, on September 15, our turn to pass the final hurdles came. After a medical examination by the Canadian doctor, we were called in to see the consul. He was a kindly older gentleman who greeted us in a friendly manner. I don't recall whether he asked any questions; if so, they were brief and somehow not threatening. He wished us a good future in Canada, suggesting that the decision that we could go there had already been made. Probably he signed some papers or gave us some document, but I do not remember that. In a few minutes we were out of his office; the long-awaited crucial meeting had been so brief and easy that it was hard to believe we had really "made it" now. My *Braunes Büchlein* records: "Der Herr sei gelobt! Am 15. [September] waren wir in Ludwigsburg und haben das Visum erhalten." (The Lord be praised! On the 15th [of September] we were in Ludwigsburg and got our visa.)

We returned to Backnang to wait for travel arrangements to be made by the MCC office. Externally, life continued as before but our mood was very different. After the uncertainty of the earlier months, we could relax now and await the next moves. During this time we experienced the beginning of the German *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle). A currency reform was implemented. The Reichsmark was transformed into the Deutsche Mark at a ratio of 10:1; in other words, RM 100.00 was now DM 10.00. Of course, it was much more complex than that. If I remember rightly, everyone received DM 40.00 as an initial payout. And, lo and behold, the stores were suddenly full of goods, and the new money had actual buying power! For us this was no longer of great significance, but of course the economic recovery of West Germany from ruins to riches has been a remarkable historical phenomenon.



Parting scene, station Ludwigsburg (I in middle front, hands folded across back)

At times, I must have been nostalgic, or at least reflective. We were setting out on a long journey again. My *Braunes Büchlein* records that Jascha Harder and I sat together for some time on October 1 and reminisced. Five years earlier to the day we had left Russia on the long train journey to Konitz, and now we were about to set out again.

On October 7, we moved to Ludwigsburg for the last time. On October 11, we were taken by truck to the railway station and assigned

our places in a long train that would take us and many other emigrants to the seaport. There was a farewell gathering on the station platform. Tante Mariechen had come out to say goodbye to us. Some speeches were made, and bouquets of flowers were given to Miss Brunk and Miss Friesen, our well-liked MCC workers. I have a clear photograph of this scene, with the train in the background, bearing the chalk inscription



In refugee camp Bremen-Grohn, at age 16

“Good-bye, Europe!” I am standing at the front in the photo, my back to the camera, watching the proceedings from a slight distance. (Several decades later I attended the session of a sub-group of the Canadian Learned Societies Convention at Queens University, Kingston, Ontario. A film on various religious groups in Canada was shown,

including the Mennonites. Suddenly the picture just described appeared on the screen. Before I realized it, I had shouted, “That’s me!” All eyes turned on me. The presenter stopped the film and rewound it to the picture in question, and I had to recount some of my story to the 30 or 40 participants!)

The train pulled out of the station at 4:00 p.m., people waving from the cars and from the platform. We traversed Germany from South to North. With my usual geographical interest, I recorded all the main stations along the way: Bietigheim, Mühlacker, Bruchsal, Heidelberg-Hbf., Darmstadt, Frankfurt-Süd, Hanau-Hbf., Fulda, Bebra, Göttingen, Hannover-Linden, Bremen-Hbf., Bremen-Vegesack. It was as if Germany rolled by before my eyes as we moved on to a new future.

From Bremen-Vegesack we were taken by trucks to—yes, another camp: Bremen-Grohn. There we had another waiting period of almost two weeks. The arrangement was the usual: large rooms, bunk beds partitioned off by blankets, and so on. The surroundings were interesting, however. We were within walking distance of the Weser River, quite wide at this point, and we walked there from time to time to

watch the river and its ship traffic. On October 18, we took public transportation to downtown Bremen. We visited the *Dom* (cathedral) and saw the beautiful city hall with the famous statue of “Roland, der *Riese*” (Roland, the Giant), with shield and sword in front of it. We also noted the wartime devastation evident everywhere. While taking the streetcar back to camp, we heard people speak Low German very much like our Mennonite *Plattdeutsch*.

Finally, on the morning of October 20, we were taken by truck to the station Bremen-Vegesack, and from there by train to Bremerhaven, the seaport. There I had my first glimpse of the ocean. Docked at a long pier lay our ship, the *Marine Tiger*. We embarked around noon. As I walked across the narrow bridge from land to ship, I said a last silent prayer and felt all the drama of leaving Europe—forever, I thought then—for a new continent and a new life.

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# Part IV

Early Years in Canada  
(October 1948–May 1956)

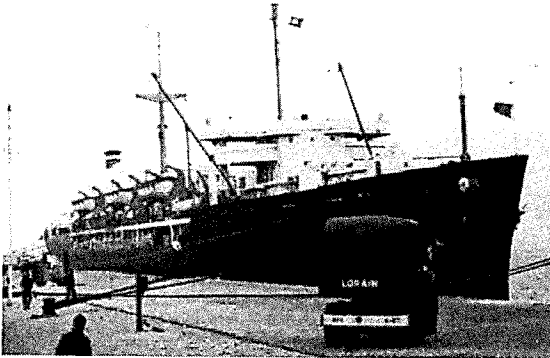


# 27

## *Crossing the Atlantic*

The *Marine Tiger* became our home for ten days, October 20-30, 1948. It was a relatively small ship for ocean service that had served as a troop transport vessel during the war. Now it would carry some 300 immigrants from Bremerhaven to Halifax.

Men and women were accommodated separately, the women in small cabins and the men in larger dormitories. I spent as little time in my dormitory as possible. One reason was that there were places of



The Marine Tiger

greater interest on the ship; the other, that the location in the heaving bow was rather conducive to seasickness. To my great surprise, I was never seasick throughout the voyage. Good as that may sound, it was not without its dark side because I was often death-

ly afraid when the ship heaved high on a wave during stormy days and then plunged into a valley. Those who were seasick, on the other hand, did not care about anything, since death hardly seemed worse than what they were enduring already. Not being seasick did not mean that I always felt well. In my *Braunes Büchlein* I record that I had only an apple for supper one day and missed supper altogether on another. Mother was seasick at times, but not very severely.

We left Bremerhaven at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. I stood on deck leaning against the railing, and watched the coastline disappear. I must

have stood there long into the dark hours of the evening. The gentle swaying of the ship gave me a pleasant sensation. Then, tired and relaxed, I went to my bunk and fell asleep immediately. We passed through the English Channel, and in the evening of the second day we saw the White Cliffs of Dover to our right and one faraway light to our left, presumably Calais. That was our last sight of Europe, and it filled me with nostalgia.

Each new day began with breakfast. The meals were highlights throughout the trip. A waiter or steward walked through the ship and called us to each meal by playing a little tune on a xylophone. It was always a much anticipated and promising signal that broke the monotony of slow-moving time. In the dining room, each table, set nicely with a white table cloth, seated about ten people. A friendly black waiter in a white coat stood ready to serve us.

The meals were a new experience for me, and probably for most of the passengers, at least for the younger ones who had no “good old days” to remember. There were no ration card coupons to hand over, and, wonder of wonders, no rations to limit what we could eat. Although I had eaten in restaurants before, the menus had always been in keeping with war and postwar frugality. What one chose was determined by what was available and for what one had ration card coupons. Now the waiter asked me what I wanted. “Well, what can I have?” “Anything on the menu; what would you like?” What a question! “Everything!” I think some people laughed, but the waiter began to serve me one item after another, going down the menu. It wasn’t a very long menu, but I couldn’t eat my way right down to the end. Gradually I learned how to handle such a life of plenty.

I do not recall much about the food itself. Seen from my present peacetime middle-class perspective, it may not have been especially fine dining; we were certainly not on a holiday cruise ship. But to me, everything was marvellous. “Das Essen ist grossartig!” (The food is wonderful!), reads one of the first voyage entries in my *Braunes Büchlein*. I felt especially privileged—I might say, “grand”—when we had grapefruit halves for breakfast. Now I was like one of those rich colonial farmers we had read about in my first English textbook in Konitz.

Only once was I disappointed. The menu listed olives. I knew the name of that fruit from the Bible and from storybooks, but not from experience. To me the name itself, with its round opening “O” and the following liquid “l” (in German), had always suggested something big

and lush and juicy. Where were the olives? Obviously not here, I thought. A mistake on the menu? I asked the waiter after the meal. Yes, he said, there had been olives, and he described them. What a disappointment that those little, green, salty things were that wonderful southern fruit I had imagined. But that was my only culinary disappointment throughout the trip.

Not everything was as impressive as the food. During the long and uneventful days we were often very bored. We had nothing to do but to sit on deck benches and look out over the sea, at least when the weather permitted. Our ship offered none of the tourist comforts of ocean liners that movies and magazines portray. It had not occurred to us to bring interesting reading, for we did not know what awaited us. For one day, my *Braunes Büchlein* notes that the main theme of conversation among the passengers was, "Have you been sick already?" The meals were certainly the highlights of the day. This does not mean that there was nothing of interest to watch. The October weather was changeable. When the sea was calm, it glistened beautifully blue or green and smooth. Schools of dolphins or porpoises sometimes followed the ship, their sleek bodies breaking the surface and diving back in a smooth flat arch. Sunsets could be spectacular. One evening another ship passed us at some distance, all lit up. "Es sah aus wie ein Gespensterschiff" (It looked like a ghost ship), I noted.

Our course was charted daily on a posted map. Given my interest in geography, I followed our route closely, noting that we came within ten miles of the Azores Islands, the most southerly place on earth I had reached so far. It was also interesting that the clock was set back one hour each day.

Sunny and calm weather and stormy times kept alternating, sometimes during the same day. The sea churned up by strong winds was interesting but frightening. At times ropes were spanned across the decks to hold on to while walking. At other times passengers were not allowed on deck at all. The ship would heave high and drop down again with alarming vehemence. One's stomach felt as if in an elevator ascending or descending at great speed. Without any sea experience, I had no way of evaluating the situation. Were we in great danger, as so many stories of seafaring and shipwreck describe so vividly, or was this routine ocean travel? Once I note in my *Braunes Büchlein* that I had almost been thrown from my bed by the ship's rolling sideways motion. There were many times I prayed fervently that I might be allowed to step

onto solid land again. The ship personnel conveyed ambivalent messages. Some crew members told us that this was nothing out of the ordinary, but we knew that they wanted to reassure us. Others admitted that the storm was really quite bad. After all, this was the Atlantic in late October, and our ship was small.

On October 30, I got up at 5:00 a.m. When I went up on deck, I saw lights on the shore. "Die Neue Welt!" (The New World!), I wrote in my *Braunes Büchlein*. The countryside we saw as we approached the harbour was beautiful. At 8:00 a.m. we landed in Halifax. Passing through customs and immigration must have taken place without complications, for I record them only very briefly. We were in Canada!

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# 28

## *From Halifax to Waterloo*

Halifax offered us our first impressions of Canada. More correctly, it did so for me, since Mother stayed with our belongings at the railroad station next to the harbour, while I ventured out with Fred Klassen, who was a few years older than I, to explore a little. My impressions were quite positive. There were tree-lined boulevards with modest houses and some stores. A few churches with high spires, much as in Germany, presented familiar sights. I was surprised by the great number of churches. This, of course, was due to the many different denominations, but I did not know that then. In Germany even a town of some size might have only one Catholic and one Protestant (Lutheran or Reformed) church. Street cars moved along as in European cities. Store windows displayed their many wares, something we were not accustomed to but had expected. My companion wanted to go into a Dominion Store to buy a film. Having done so, he had some difficulty getting out again; I could observe him through the glass front of the store trying to open the door by which he had entered. We were not used to entering a store by one door and exiting by another. Thus the little surprises and adjustments began.

Our train was to leave around supper time, and we were told that it would take us almost two days to get to Waterloo, Ontario. That was where Onkel Jasch, my father's uncle, and his wife, Tante Liese, lived. We planned to visit there for a few weeks, and then to proceed to Drake, Saskatchewan, where our sponsor, Menno Ewert, lived and where our larger baggage items had been addressed and sent. Mother's cousin, Onkel Oscar Hamm and his family, lived in neighbouring Lockwood, where we were to be hosted for the first while. It would all turn out differently, but we did not know that.

We were told that we would have to buy food for the journey. Since I had taken four years of high school English, while Mother did not know that language at all, it was I who had to go shopping. This marked the beginning of a partial readjustment of our roles. Until then, Mother had looked after the major part of our daily needs, even though she often consulted me. Now, this changed to some extent. She was still the adult in the family, of course, who carried the main responsibility for our livelihood and our affairs. Yet because I knew some English, I had to assume a good deal of those matters which required interaction with our English-speaking environment. That meant translating for Mother and



Onkel Oscar and Tante Ruth  
Hamm

performing tasks that Mother might have assumed in Germany.

On this first day, it was I who set out to shop for food for our journey. A store was conveniently located in the station. What would I buy? It was natural for me to think first of bread, our staple food until then. Since my school English had not yet been tested in real-life situations, I was not very confident. Fortunately, the store arrangement made it easy to see what was for sale, making it unnecessary to ask. Everything was displayed openly, and one could select one's choices and proceed to the cashier to pay. In Europe at that time, one asked a salesperson who would then fetch or measure out the desired item from behind a counter.

But where was the bread? I checked all the displays in the relatively small store, and apparently there was none. It did not occur to me that the parcels wrapped in wax paper and marked "Weston" were loaves of bread. There was milk, however, and there was an abundance of apples. I picked up some bottles of milk, but for the apples I had to turn to a clerk. How many did I want, the clerk asked. Well, how did they sell them? By the pound? By the apple? I summoned all my courage and said something like, "Apples for one dollar, please." The clerk understood.

But this was Nova Scotia, apple country, and in the fall season. For my one dollar, the clerk filled a big paper shopping bag with handles (also new to me) brim full with apples. I was amazed, but too tongue-tied to negotiate for a smaller amount. So I came to Mother in the railroad station loaded with milk and apples. She was a little surprised, but she understood my dilemma. We decided that milk and apples—as much of each as we wanted—would be a pretty good diet. Probably we later also bought some other food on the train.

I did come to know those wax-paper-wrapped parcels soon enough, and they became my yardstick for the value of our new currency. After all, for years our main worry with respect to food had been the question: Will we have enough bread? One loaf of bread cost 15 cents back then. Whenever I needed to assess the cost or value of something, I translated the monetary cost into loaves of bread. When I earned 55 cents per hour, for example, on one of my early summer jobs, it meant almost four loaves of bread to me. And we worked ten hours a day. Was I ever rich!

Our train left around 6 o'clock in the evening; it was getting dark already. When day dawned again, we were thrilled by the beauty of the countryside. Lakes, hills, valleys, and apparently endless woods extended before us. But where were the towns and villages? Little huts could be seen here and there, and sometimes we passed through a small station without stopping. So much space, and so few people! It was important to me, interested in geography as I was, that our trip took us through a part of the state of Maine. In Brownville we stopped for a few minutes, and I got off to stand on the platform, on United States soil. Now I could say that I had been in the United States!

In many places we passed we heard what we assumed to be church bells ringing, even if a bit unimpressively. That seemed strange, since it wasn't Sunday. Only after some time did we realize our misunderstanding. The ringing of the bell came from our own locomotive far ahead of our car. Its bell chimed whenever we drove through a railway crossing. The joke was on us, and it was not the last such occasion. Ever new situations confront immigrants who interpret them in terms of their past experience, inadequate as that may be for understanding the new that meets them. In Montreal I saw my first skyscraper. Since Europe did not have any high-rises then, or at least none that I had seen, for me these buildings were an important mark of the New World. It was evening, however, and we did not stop long, so that I saw little of Montreal.



Onkel Jasch (Jacob H.  
Janzen)

By the next morning, we were in Toronto where we had to change trains. There in the impressive Union Station we were met by a delegation of Mennonites, representatives of MCC or the Board of Colonization. They had come to welcome the newcomers on our train, for Mother and I were not the only ones. This was a nice and assuring surprise. They helped Mother and me to find our train for the short trip to Galt (now a part of Cambridge) where Onkel Jasch and Tante Liese were to meet us. Would they be there?

Yes, there they stood on the platform. Of course, I did not know them, but Mother recognized Onkel Jasch immediately, even after decades of separation. They greeted us warmly and drove us—in their own car!—to their home at 164 Erb Street West in Waterloo. This would be our first home in Canada. It was November 1, 1948, and I was 16 years of age, ready to begin a new life.

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# 29

## *Our Janzen Relatives in Ontario*

Jacob H. and Liese (Onkel Jasch and Tante Liese) Janzen lived in a modest two-storey house of dark red brick, built in a style that could be seen everywhere in the twin cities of Kitchener-Waterloo. An addition away from the street had been built onto the main floor shortly before our arrival. It contained a study, a bedroom, and a bathroom for Onkel Jasch and Tante Liese. Since neither of them was in good health—Onkel Jasch suffered from heart disease—this arrangement had been made so

they could have their living space on the main floor and did not have to climb stairs.

With them lived their middle-aged and unmarried daughter Liesel (Eliesabeth). She was a nurse with the Victorian Order of Nurses (VON), doing public health nursing in the twin cities and also caring for her aging parents. Her room was upstairs, and since her parents had moved to the addition, that left two other upstairs rooms for Mother and me.



164 Erb St. West, Waterloo  
(our new home)

In addition to Liesel, several other Janzen children, and thus first cousins of my father, lived in the twin cities. Onkel Heinz, the oldest, resided in Kitchener with his large family. He was a mechanic and operated his own small auto repair

shop. His wife had died just before our arrival, so that her funeral became the first occasion for me to enter the Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church (or George Street Mennonite Church), where I would become a member several years later. Onkel Heinz was very kind to us, but his large family and his full working days limited our contacts.



Mother (left) and Tante  
Liesel Janzen

Onkel Hardy (Sieghard), the second youngest of the Janzen children, and his wife, Tante Anna, with their three children (Paul 9, Linda 7, and Helene, 1 1/2), soon became the relatives to whom I related most closely. Throughout my Waterloo years their home came closest to offering me the experience of the secure home and family life that I had missed so much ever since Tante Ira and Walter, together with my grandparents, had moved to Melitopol.

Tante Marta, the youngest of the Janzen children, and her husband, Onkel Stan (Shafer), had married only recently and were establishing their own family. Like the others, they were very welcoming toward us.

Tante Schura (Alexandra) and her husband, Onkel George (Neufeld) and their three boys (Richard, Philip, and Jamie) lived on their fruit farm in Virgil close to Niagara-on-the-Lake. (They graciously allowed me to stay with them during my first summer in Canada.)

Besides these closer relatives, we were invited to various other Mennonite families my mother still knew from Russia; some of them lived in the twin cities and others in nearby places. When I asked Mother how we were related, she was often rather vague, saying something like, "We are distantly related somehow



Onkel Hardy and Tante Anna  
Janzen

through the Schroeders (or the Dycks, or whoever).” Since none of these families were known to me and since a boy my age tends not to be fascinated by genealogies, I usually did not pursue the matter. Instead, I enjoyed the good meals and the car rides to and from their homes.



Tante Marta (Janzen) and  
Onkel Stan Shafer, with Grant

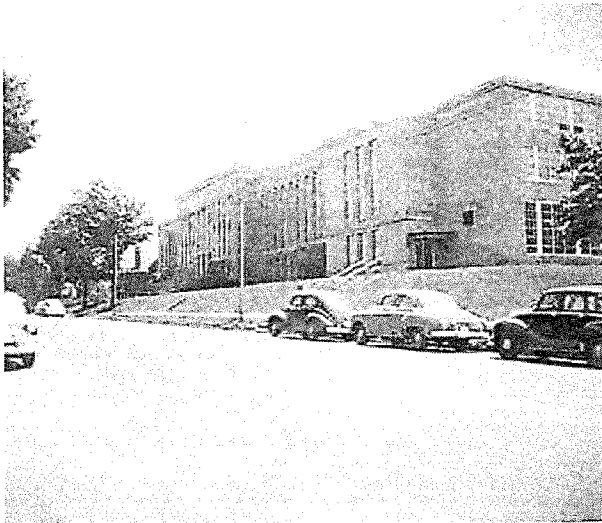
The meals were always a good part of such visits. It did not take me long to get used to most of the foods we had seldom enjoyed during my lifetime. Once I was asked by our hostess how many potatoes I would eat for dinner. It seemed like a strange question, and I had to deliberate for a moment. “Five,” I replied. There was a gasp of astonishment and disbelief from those present and, when the meal began, everyone watched me eat. Of course, I had assumed that potatoes would constitute the meal, perhaps with a bit of butter or gravy. I had not counted on meat and vegetables and pie and who knows what else, not to mention the size of the potatoes. In spite of my valiant attempt to live up to my word, I managed only four potatoes, which was enough, however, to have the event retold and laughed about at various later get-togethers. It would not be the last occasion to draw attention to the fact that we were in a different culture and that in countless ways we stood out as newcomers.

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# 30

## *Attending School in Canada*

Only about two weeks after our arrival I made my way to the Kitchener-Waterloo Collegiate on King Street in Kitchener, but close to the boundary between the twin cities. To attend school again had not been my initial desire when coming to Canada. I was 16 years of age, and this was a land where jobs seemed available and where earned money had real value. What Mother could do without knowing the language was not yet clear, and besides, we owed \$466 to Onkel Kolja for our voyage. Not that he would press us for quick repayment, but for us the idea of debt was new and uncomfortable. For years we had owned very little, but we had never gone into debt. However, I was persuaded to take



Kitchener-Waterloo Collegiate

up studies, both by our Janzen relatives and by Mother, the former pointing out the advantage of finishing high school. So I went to the school to enrol.

Onkel Jasch had telephoned the principal to introduce me and announce my coming. It was somewhat frightening to ascend the wide stairway to the



imposing building. Mr. Ziegler, the tall, grey-haired and well-dressed principal, received me in his office. He was dignified but friendly. Could I speak English, he asked. Yes, I answered, for I had completed five grades of high school English in Germany, albeit in the compressed time of only four years. Perhaps not quite convinced by my reply, Mr. Ziegler suggested that it might be best to call the German teacher. Mrs. McDonald appeared in a few minutes. She also asked me, this time in German, whether I could speak English, and I answered in the affirmative again. From then on the conversation proceeded in English.

It was obvious that I was the first post-war immigrant applying to the school, and both principal and teacher were at a loss as to what to do with me. After some hesitation and deliberation, Mrs. McDonald suggested that it might be best if I would come along to her home room, a Grade 11 class. No one had asked me for a transcript. Thus, in a few minutes, I had skipped a grade; I should rightly have been placed into Grade 10 since I had completed only Grade 9 in Scheinfeld.

The school, with its approximately 1200 students, seemed vast, much larger than any I had attended thus far. When we entered the classroom—for class was in session when Mrs. McDonald had been called away on my account—she called a student to the front and introduced him to me as Bill Huras. She told him that he would be my guide for the next while. That I would need a guide became evident to me as soon as the bell rang. The orderly classroom broke up into chaos, everyone scrambling to make it to the next class which was held in a different room along the far-flung wings and hallways.

This was the first major difference I observed between the Russian and German schools I had attended and my new school in Canada. In the former, each class had its home room to which the different teachers came to teach their respective subjects. Here, the teachers had their home rooms and the students moved, a situation that made for much hurrying through often crowded hallways.

This was not the only difference. Most of our instruction in Germany had taken place in the morning with substantial assignments to be done at home. Here we started later in the morning, but were in school throughout the afternoon as well. Homework, on the other hand, seemed light and could often be completed in “spares,” a new concept for me. Another external difference I noticed almost immediately was the fluorescent lighting which was switched on even during bright daylight. This artificial light, together with the constant humming that

accompanied it, gave me headaches for a while. Gradually I also noticed more subtle differences. One of these was the almost total absence of any oral exams; virtually all evaluation of our work was based on written tests and papers.

More important than these differences was the fact that school offered the context for my first significant encounter with Canadian people. Our Janzen relatives and other Mennonites we met in church, all of them immigrants speaking German, were still somehow connected to our past. Of course, I was also meeting sales clerks in stores, bus drivers, and others in brief and public encounters. They were generally friendly and accommodating, especially as far as my limited English was concerned. It was not until I attended school, however, that I was introduced to the mentality of the people in my new homeland. Or was it too early to call it thus?



William (Bill) Huras

Bill Huras fulfilled his assigned role as my guide conscientiously and very helpfully. We would remain fellow students and school friends throughout high school, college, and into theological study in the local Lutheran Seminary. Generally, my fellow students approached me with a certain benevolent and accepting curiosity. The Second World War had ended only three years earlier, and here was a person from that other side of the

Atlantic, a world they knew only as the faraway theatre of war where bombs exploded, people were killed, and evil regimes had to be dethroned by the crusaders for Western democracy. They asked questions, but seldom at any depth level. How could they? Sometimes I tried to talk about some of my earlier experiences, but soon I consciously decided not to speak of my past unless someone seriously inquired about it. That did not happen very often.

How different and quaint my external appearance seemed to my fellow students remained unknown to me until years later, when I learned that all the 1200 students of that time had known who I was. How could they not? With my German cap, my odd assortment of second-hand clothing received as refugee camp handouts (like

knickerbocker pants), and my general appearance that totally defied every trend or style, I could be identified as a misfit at first glance. The truth was that I was not only insensitive to trends and styles; I did not know that such existed at all. Throughout my life so far, my clothing and that of everyone around me was simply what happened to be available. With what I later recognized as true Canadian tolerance and reticence, no one, as far as I remember, made any fun of me or expressed any criticism.

Of course I also observed my fellow students' appearance and found certain things a little surprising, to say the least. Why were the girls so pale and apparently undernourished, when so much food was available and cheap? I had no notion of Hollywood-inspired slimness and streamlined beauty. A pretty girl looked well-fed and rosy-cheeked, in my opinion, and not pale and starved. And then there were their dresses. Long and flared skirts were fashionable then, and they looked good to me, but what a waste of cloth! The boys appeared more normal to me as to both looks and clothing. This was before the more striking male fashions emerged a few years later with black pants narrow at the ankle, shoes clanking with metal, a chain hanging from belt to pocket in a long loop, and hair greased back into duck-tail shape.

The accepting tolerance towards my fashion-defying appearance extended to my language proficiency. Both at school and elsewhere people were quick to commend me for my "good English." Sometimes correcting me would have been more helpful, but this tolerant acceptance certainly made adjustment to school much easier. Students repeatedly remarked that I spoke a rather formal English. How could I do otherwise? In English classes in Germany no one had taught me that a "buck" meant a dollar, and that "two bits" or a "quarter" referred to 25 cents. Bill Huras patiently explained such mysteries to me when I asked.

The teachers were also accommodating rather than demanding. For a few months they made concessions or did not grade my work at all, but by the end of Grade 11 I wrote the regular examinations and passed with acceptable grades in all subjects. In some, like Latin and of course German, I was well ahead of the rest. Struggling with *Hamlet* in my first year of study in Canada, however, left me with a permanent lack of enthusiasm for Shakespeare, even though I do acknowledge his greatness.

Sometimes this accepting tolerance made me free enough to venture forth with views that differed from what was generally accepted. Comics,

for instance. Everyone read the comics and found them hilarious, all except me. In one English essay, by this time in Grade 12, I expressed my view. Comparing them with ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, I characterized them as primitive picture language (a great injustice to hieroglyphics, as I now know), and the enthusiasm for them as a surprising backwardness in Canada. The teacher read my essay to the class, and everyone marvelled at my lack of appreciation. No, the students did not reject me for it; rather they pitied me. I still remember a bright girl—I think she was student council president—asking me privately and seriously whether this was really my opinion, and then expressing her regret that I was missing out on so much.

To understand the sense of humour of a different culture is one of the more difficult tasks of adjustment. In Germany at that time humour was appreciated “when in place,” but it was certainly out of place on many occasions. In Canada, on the other hand, humour seemed to be welcomed in any context. My respect for our teachers suffered a serious set-back when the staff put on a hilarious Christmas show during a pre-Christmas assembly. There were jokes, funny costumes, clowning acts, and such, all on the theme of Christmas. For me, Christmas was holy, and this was nothing short of desecration, and that done by people I had come to know as educated and refined. I simply could not comprehend it.

I have emphasized my kind reception at school by both staff and students, but I must add that not everything was smooth adjustment for me in a welcoming and tolerant atmosphere. Suffice it to recount one troubling “run-in” with my mediaeval history teacher; I’ll call him Mr. X. He was a good elderly teacher, and I enjoyed his classes. He was in the habit, however, of asking for a modern example whenever some wickedness or atrocity was perpetrated in the Middle Ages. Invariably, some student would raise his or her hand and answer: “The Germans!” This had reference to the Hitler era and the Second World War, and it was always accepted by Mr. X. One has to remember that this was only three years after the end of the war, and before the estrangement between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union which issued into the Cold War era. Germany was still the recent enemy, and the anti-German sentiments of the war years lingered on.

Once, when Mr. X used the Germans again as apparently the only acknowledged perpetrators of evil, I raised my hand and asked whether I could say something. Immediately an expectant hush fell over the class as

Mr. X allowed me to speak. I rose and told of my experience of walking through the bombed-out inner city of Mannheim, describing the frightening devastation and desolation I had seen. "And this was done by the Allies," I concluded. Mr. X was saved by the bell from having to respond.

Why was I, a newcomer from Germany, so daring? Partly it was unpremeditated spontaneity, but partly it was the result of three years of post-war indoctrination, by the American occupation forces, on the virtues and freedoms of democracy. In America (and for me and others that included Canada then), we were taught, unlike in Hitler Germany, there was total freedom of speech, a hallmark of true democracy. Should I not be able, then, to challenge Mr. X's one-sided perspective?

The next day, I was called to the principal's office. Mr. Ziegler, whom I had met on my first day of school, was friendly and asked how I was getting along, but I felt very uneasy. One was not called to the principal's office without good reason, and I knew that this call must have been occasioned by my comments in history class. Soon Mr. Ziegler came to the point: "There has been a little incident in Mr. X's class . . ." he began. Would this jeopardize my education? Could this endanger my mother? Given my background, thoughts like these flashed through my mind.

"Did I do anything against the law?" I asked immediately.

"Oh, no, no," Mr. Ziegler reassured me. "There is freedom of speech in Canada, as long as one does not call people to arms against the government."

Since I had obviously not done that, I felt much better, but was far from relaxed.

"If I call Mr. X, would you apologize to him?" Mr. Ziegler asked.

"No, I will not," I said bravely, although I was shaking inwardly. "What I said was completely true."

"I'll call him anyway," Mr. Ziegler replied, and of course I could not stop him.

Mr. X appeared, and Mr. Ziegler probably expected that his presence would induce me to apologize anyway. I didn't, and a time of awkward silence followed. It must have lasted for only a few seconds, but to me it seemed uncomfortably long. Eventually Mr. X broke the silence and said that he would still be ready to have me in his class. The meeting was adjourned.

Mr. X never held this incident against me, either in his attitude towards me or through my grades. He was a good man, but—like most

Canadians, as I discovered later—he was deeply imbued with the widespread Allied perspective on World War II, that is, as nothing other than Good fighting Evil. Although I was thoroughly informed about German atrocities by this time and felt no sympathy for Hitler at all, such a one-sided view made no sense to me even as a teenager, especially when I considered that the Western Powers had worked hand in glove with the Stalinist Soviet Union. Perhaps Mr. X had lost a son in the war? Or perhaps he had simply never been challenged in this one-sidedness? As I said, he was a good teacher and treated me as a gentleman even after this event.

Mr. Ziegler, who would perhaps not have called me to his office on his own initiative, also did not seem to hold the incident against me. Once during the following spring, when I hitchhiked to my farm job in the Niagara area, he picked me up in his fine limousine, even though he was in the company of another dignified gentleman. After the encounter just related, I felt especially grateful to him for this kind gesture.

The political mood illustrated by this incident changed drastically within a short time, when the Soviet Berlin blockade and the Western airlift to Berlin brought into the open the growing rift between the West and the Soviet Union. West Germany became an ally now, and the Soviet Union turned into the opponent in the Cold War. For me, as undoubtedly for other Germans in Canada, the political climate changed significantly and made adjustment to Canada much easier.

Eventually I completed Grades 11-13 at the Kitchener-Waterloo Collegiate, achieving first my Junior and then my Senior Matriculation. I got first-class standing in most subjects, and received two scholarships that together would almost cover my college tuition. These years, while not always easy, were an important adjustment to Canada for me and laid a solid ground for my further education.

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# 31

## *Early Experiences, Adventures, and Adjustments*

My school attendance was accompanied, of course, by many experiences that introduced me to Canada in areas other than the scholastic. When I now read the entries in my *Braunes Büchlein* that cover the time from our arrival in Waterloo to the end of our first full year in Canada (November 1, 1948–December 28, 1949 [the last entry in



Waterloo-Kitchener United  
Mennonite Church (George Street)

that faithful little companion]), I am impressed anew with the many significant events they record.

*November 3, 1948.* A shopping trip with Onkel Jasch and Tante Liese to stores in Kitchener where they outfitted Mother and me with new clothes. Mine included a brown suit and a tie.

*November 6.* We attended the funeral of Tante Olga Janzen, the wife of Onkel Heinz, in the Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church, our first service in the church that would become our spiritual

home. We made the acquaintance of many relatives there.

After the funeral, Onkel George and Tante Schura Neufeld took us along to Niagara-on-the-Lake, where we met Onkel Kolja and Tante

Anna Dick from Wernersville, Pennsylvania, who had sent us so many food parcels to Germany and had made great efforts to have us



Onkel Kolja and Tante Anna Dick, with Linda (left) and Mary (right)

immigrate to the United States. With them were their daughters Mary and Linda, both somewhat younger than I. We spent several days together, getting to know them and exploring the various natural and historical sights along the Niagara River from Lake

Ontario to Lake Erie. Most impressive, of course, were the Niagara Falls. Then our dear relatives brought us back to Waterloo, but before they left they bought a variety of household items for us.

*November 12.* I visited Principal Ziegler of the Kitchener-Waterloo Collegiate and enrolled as a student (see previous chapter).

*December 5.* Tante Liesel drove with me to Toronto's Union Station where she met a distant relative. I had hoped to meet the Froeses (Tante Lyda, Gerd, and Edgar), who were to be on the same train, but they had headed on to Bradwell, Saskatchewan, without disembarking in Toronto.

*December 10.* We received a postcard from my father in Karaganda! This was our first personal contact since 1941. He wrote very cautiously, but we knew now that he was alive and "free" (a relative term). He lived with his sister, Tante Ira, and her son, my cousin Walter(lein), and he worked as a bookkeeper. Further postcards would reach us during the next two years. We learned, among other things, that Mother's youngest brother, Onkel Heinz, had died in 1942, and my Grandmother Janzen in 1943. Grandmother Dueck from Pyatigorsk and Tante Karin, Mother's only sister, with her children Eduard and Lena, lived together, but Onkel Petja, her husband, "is not with them" (writes my father; that is, he was in concentration camp). Onkel Mitja, Mother's oldest brother, lived with his family some distance away. Father wrote that they had a warm place to live and enough to eat. I conclude the entry in my *Braunes Büchlein*: "Der Herr hat unsere Gebete erhört." (The Lord has heard our prayers.) Some time in 1951, the correspondence stopped again.



*December 24-25.* We celebrated Christmas with our Janzen relatives, and I enjoyed that very much. I comment on the many gifts we received, stating that I would soon have enough money to buy a bicycle. This happened on December 28 already. I was ecstatic! For the next seven years, this (second-hand) bicycle was my faithful companion and often my solace in loneliness.

*December 27.* I received my first letter from Michael in Scheinfeld. Great joy! My correspondence with friends from Germany and with Edgar from Saskatchewan is the subject of many entries from then on.

The year 1949 was equally full of significant events and experiences.

*March 15.* Mother began work in the Huck Glove Factory in Kitchener. I had gone with her to apply for the job, since she knew no English. It turned out, however, that many of the workers in this factory spoke German, so that she had no problems with respect to language. As in previous contexts, she was soon valued by her employers and liked by her fellow workers. The work itself, however, was neither challenging nor fulfilling. She sewed gloves here for approximately three years.

*March 23.* Liesel took me to St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church to hear Mozart's *Requiem*. After that, we went to a restaurant for ice cream. This outing was the first of various musical and cultural events to which I accompanied Liesel. Like others before her, she failed to improve my musicality, but she contributed much to my knowledge *about* music, for which I am grateful to her. I believe my companionship in various such ventures, as well as at home, gave her pleasure also, because she, like I, was often lonesome. She concealed this behind a front of competent work (as a public health nurse) and an energetic and often self-willed and critical directness, which I, however, countered with disarming humour.

*Middle of April.* I hitchhiked to Onkel George and Tante Schura Neufeld in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and back. My experience was good and encouraged me to do much hitchhiking in subsequent years.

*May 11.* Bill Huras invited me to a lay theatre performance by the young people of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Kitchener, in which he played a role. I enjoyed it very much. Another similar invitation followed later but, on the whole, my good relations to my fellow students did not translate into association outside of school.

*May 20.* Onkel Heinz allowed me to drive his car along a stretch of lonely country road. What a thrill!

*June 6.* I hitchhiked to Niagara-on-the-Lake again, this time to stay with Onkel George and Tante Schura and work on various fruit farms throughout the summer.

*July 3.* The Neufelds and I took the steamship *Cayuga* up the Niagara River to Queenston and back again. It would take too much space to detail all the trips, picnics, and other extensions of kindness shown to me by Onkel George and Tante Schura, together with their three boys, Richard (10), Philip (7), and Jamie (5) during that summer, in addition to giving me free room and board on their fruit farm. Approximately every second Saturday morning I hitchhiked home to Waterloo, spent the weekend there, and took the bus back on Sunday evening.



Onkel George and Tante Schura  
(Janzen) Neufeld

ones in the inner city, flanked by high-rise buildings. It was somewhat eerie, for I was always haunted by the question: What would happen here in case of a bombing raid? In the evening, I returned by the same steamer.

*September 6.* The next school year began—Grade 12, my final year of school, as I thought then. I was better adjusted now, and my studies went well.

*November 1.* We had now been in Waterloo for one full year. I write: “Haben ein wenig gefeiert und deutsche Schallplatten gespielt.” (We celebrated a little and played German records.)

*December 28, 1949.* On this day I wrote my last entry into my *Braunes Büchlein*. It had accompanied me for five years (January 1945–December 1949), and what years they were! I write: “Dieses Büchlein hat ausgedient. Fünf inhaltsreiche Jahre hat es mich begleitet. Ich habe alle meine wichtigsten Ereignisse dieser Zeit hineingeschrieben. Es war mir manches Mal ein Freund und ein Helfer. Ich weiss gar nicht einmal, ob ich es für mich oder für andere geschrieben habe.” (This little book has

*August 29.* On this day I made a memorable trip on my own. I took the steamer *Cayuga* again, but this time northward across Lake Ontario, to spend a day in Toronto. Among other things, I saw the Zoo, the “Castle” (Casa Loma), and St. James Cathedral, but for the most part I walked along the streets, especially the canyon-like

completed its service. It has accompanied me for five eventful years. I entered into it all the events important for me during this time. Many a time it was a friend and helper to me. I don't even know whether I wrote it for myself or for others.) Then I partially quote a verse from the New Testament: "Trachtet am ersten nach dem Reich Gottes . . . , so wird euch solches alles zufallen." (Strive first for the kingdom of God . . . and all these things will be given to you as well" [Matthew 6:33]). My signature follows.

In addition to many experiences of special personal significance, like those just reviewed briefly, I encountered Canada in a more general way. I was confronted with many cultural differences from my past. Although I was not unaware of cultural differences, this did not make it easy to understand and feel at home in yet another culture. Canada certainly did not impress me as altogether strange. It was, after all, a Northern country with deep European roots. And yet, Canada was dominated by British culture, even though many other ethnic groups were represented in the population. Our present multiculturalism lay far in the future.

As my run-in with Mr. X in school already highlighted, we were Germans, and as such we were associated ethnically with a nation that had only recently been Canada's enemy in war. Further, we joined German-speaking relatives and a German-speaking church that itself had constituted a suspect minority throughout that war.

Moreover, we were DPs, that is, part of the amalgam of uprooted people of many nationalities that were stranded in central Europe after the war, mostly in refugee camps. Many of them had been brought to Germany as forced labourers. Others had fled with the German army when it retreated from Russia and the German-occupied eastern European countries. Others again had been Russian or other prisoners of war in Germany and were now liberated. Whether these people had come to the West voluntarily or under duress, they soon learned that a return to their former eastern homelands would in all likelihood not mean a happy homecoming, but—especially in the case of the Soviet Union—a suspicious reception often ending in Siberian exile.

These DPs were welcomed, like we, in a sparsely settled country, but they also represented a certain threat, or at least perceived threat, to the job market for Canadians. Many of them had lived through years of a turbulent past and lacked some of the qualities expected of good citizenship. Crimes happened, as might be expected. Newspapers often

reported such crimes generically as committed by “a DP.” We, too, were tarnished by this labelling and encountered the resultant suspicion.

Adjustment did not necessarily mean facing only negative experiences; it simply meant encountering differences of view and behaviour. I already mentioned some such differences in connection with my school experiences; such as the “pale and undernourished girls,” as they seemed to me, the enthusiasm for the comics, and the apparently always appropriate jokes.

Sometimes adjustment simply meant surprise that some things were as they were. Why, for example, did people go looking at houses as a pastime, even if they had no intention of buying one? If these houses had been impressive, that would have made sense, but they were the ordinary little brick dwellings you saw everywhere. In fact, the houses surprised us by their smallness, their squeaking stairs, and their often ill-fitting doors and flimsy latches. In Germany we personally had had very little space, but the houses in Scheinfeld, for example, were mostly large and old and solidly built.

And why were these houses not surrounded with nice fences and flower gardens? Even the grass that wanted to grow was not allowed to, but was cut down as soon as it reached a few centimetres in height, to create dull green carpets without flowers or anything. Did I say centimetres? No, inches! Twelve inches to a foot, three feet to a yard, 1760 yards to a mile! 4840 square yards to an acre, 160 acres to a quarter-section, and so on and on! How simple, rational, and orderly the metric system appeared in retrospect! Well, eventually Canada would see the point but only much, much later.

Not only the lawns impressed me as monotonous and stereotyped; so did the towns and cities. Why did all the streets—well, almost all—run at right angles, producing a chessboard pattern? And why did so many towns look the same? Two main streets intersected to form the town centre: a post office on one corner, a bank at the next, a hotel on the third, and a drugstore to conclude the pattern. How refreshing that the rivers and woods did not conform to this monotony, but then, no one went hiking in the woods. I could not imagine that boys would not do so. I made a few attempts, but the landscape was not conducive for this, or a fence around woodland that marked it as private property, perhaps even with a sign, “No trespassing!”

These are only a few examples of the strangeness I experienced when coming to Canada, and I was not alone. They are meant to illustrate an

immigrant's task of adjustment, rethinking, and relearning. They are not intended to detract from my appreciation of Canada. As I have said before, people were generally friendly, even if a bit reserved in public places. (Seldom would a passenger in a public bus speak to his or her neighbour, unless they had entered together.) They were generous in allowing for a newcomer's awkward English. They were generally helpful and well-meaning. And there were the obvious advantages of a country not destroyed by war, having abundant food and offering possibilities to get ahead. I knew well that we were fortunate to have been able to come to Canada. Yet, an immigrant misses the familiar and struggles to understand that which is strange, whether the cultural differences encountered are major or trivial. How could it be otherwise?

If there is a critical element in my description of differences, it pertains not to the differences as such but to a certain smugness or complacency that I often sensed. Soon after coming to Canada, I discovered the possibilities of hitchhiking. That was long before the fears that later surrounded the picking up of a stranger. Drivers readily gave a lift to a boy by the roadside who was well-dressed and did not look dangerous. I criss-crossed Ontario by thumbing my way, sometimes in order to get cheaply where I needed to go but often also just to explore the country.

Hitchhiking was also a valuable introduction to Canadian culture. I had many good conversations with the people who picked me up. They immediately recognized me as a newcomer, of course, and asked me about my impressions of Canada. I tried to be open and honest, pointing out the good sides as well as some I liked a little less. At that point I would often notice that a certain discomfort came over my host. I sensed that people expected me to express a black-and-white picture. Had I not come from horrible, war-torn Europe? Should I not rejoice at having left my past behind and come to a land flowing with milk and honey? And here I was ruminating on the pros and cons of each side! Often my driver would end this conversation with a firm and confession-like affirmation: "Well, I think we live in the best country in the world!" This having been made clear, we could go on to other subjects.

With time, I deliberately adopted a less open attitude. I realized that most people did not really want to know how it had been in Europe, but were looking for an affirmation of their image of Canada-as "the best country in the world." I realized that the years of war and propaganda had deeply imbued Canadians with a one-sided perspective that they

were not ready to have challenged by a teenage newcomer. Mr. X in school had not been an exception. Even our relatives, who spoke German, read German books, and loved German music, but had come from Russia without spending any length of time in Germany, seemed to be somewhat less than understanding of my love for Germany and my longing and homesickness. I began to keep these feelings to myself unless I was asked explicitly, and that did not happen often. This sense of having to hold back my feelings and longings contributed, I think, to my increasing isolation described in the next chapter.

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# 32

## *Lonely and Homesick*

My quick and successful reentry into high school studies may have given the impression that I made the adjustment to life in Canada with relative ease. Such a conclusion, however, would be far from true. My personal and emotional adjustment proceeded along a much more difficult and bumpy road. It would not be an overstatement to say that, for some years at least, I led a kind of dual existence. On the one hand, my fellow students and teachers, I think, saw me as a “bright and jolly little fellow,” funny in his strange appearance and ways, but willing to learn, to fit in, and, if necessary, even to speak up and assert himself. Emotionally and in my private life, on the other hand, I found the adjustment difficult, suffered loneliness and homesickness, and withdrew into inner depression and outward shyness.

Even before my graduation from high school, two major events brought great changes to our life that were significant for this withdrawal on my part, though not its only cause: the deaths of Onkel Jasch and Tante Liese. They died within two months of each other, he on February 16, 1950 and she on April 18 of the same year. Apart from the sad loss of these dear relatives, who had received us so warmly and graciously, their deaths meant the loss of our first home in Canada and the need for us to move into different quarters.

Onkel Hardy and Tante Anna Janzen, with their three children, Paul, Linda, and Helene, moved into the parental home on 164 Erb Street West. With their help and—unknown to us until years later—their financial subsidy, Mother and I rented the second floor of a house on 34 Euclid Avenue, a few blocks east of our former Erb Street home. We moved in on June 26. Euclid Avenue was a quiet residential location on a street shaded by large trees. The elderly landlady, Mrs. Hasenpflug,

occupied the main floor. This would be my home for the next five years, and Mother's for two years beyond that. While not spacious, it was very adequate for our needs.



Mother in our home at 34 Euclid Ave.

The first years there were to be my loneliest since the time in Chor-titza after Tante Ira, with Walterlein and our grandparents, had moved away to Melitopol. With loneliness came homesickness, or vice versa. In my case, I surmise, it was the loneliness—not felt as intensely while living with our relatives—that trig-

gered at this time a particularly intense longing for Germany, for Scheinfeld, and for my friends there.

To be sure, my homesickness for Germany and my loneliness in Canada did not begin only now. As early as November 28, 1948, less than a month after our arrival in Canada, my *Braunes Büchlein* bears the entry: “Ich bin traurig. . . Ich habe Heimweh nach Deutschland, und vor allem nach Scheinfeld.” (I am sad. . . I am homesick for Germany, and above all for Scheinfeld.) Other entries repeat this theme or express my joy about mail received from Michael and other friends.

There were many reasons for this state of mind. In the circle of our relatives there were few if any young people my age. At school I related well to Bill Huras and others, but they remained school friends only. I do not remember entering any of my fellow high school students' homes. Their social lives were so different from mine. It was the time of the double-feature movies. Each Friday evening, everyone—so it seemed to me—went to the movies. I went along a few times, but the movies did not interest me. My fellow students had dates, but I was not particularly interested in the opposite sex. Perhaps my maturing in this respect was delayed, since my energies had been channeled into getting acquainted with the new ways of life, mastering the language, adjusting to a new school system, and generally learning to live in a new culture. Moreover, I must have seemed quaint in dress and manners rather than interesting



and attractive to the girls. Many of them were friendly in a benevolent way, I felt, rather than drawn to me as a person.

The young people in our Mennonite church were also friendly enough, but they too were so different. On the first Sunday of attending the George Street Church, I joined a group of boys standing in a circle in front of the church before the service. They were talking about cars, a subject to which I had nothing to contribute. We had never had a car in the family. In Germany, few people owned private cars during the years we were there, so that cars were not a part of general conversation. I did not know the makes of cars nor about anything under the hood. So I listened. Perhaps the next Sunday my chance might come to participate in some other subject, I thought.

But next Sunday the conversation again focused on cars. Could there be so much to say about cars? Little did I know that this subject was inexhaustible, as was that of sports, another area where I was excluded through ignorance and lack of interest and skill. Please don't misunderstand. These boys did not reject me; they were friendly and welcoming. We were simply on different wavelengths.

One Sunday afternoon when I was particularly lonely, my mother encouraged me to phone one of the boys from church and ask whether he would be interested to go bike riding with me, perhaps to one of the forested areas along the Grand River. I gathered all my courage and did this. A bit surprised by the call, the boy consented. A few minutes later, however, he called back to say that he could have his dad's car, and he would pick me up instead. That was well meant, but it cast me into the role of a passenger rather than a cyclist on equal terms. Eventually I would find my place among the young people, even take up some leadership in the youth group and teach Sunday school. But for some years I withdrew into shyness and isolation.

As long as we lived with Onkel Jasch and Tante Liese and had frequent interaction with the other relatives, this isolation was counterbalanced somewhat by the adults. They knew Russia, if not Germany, and to some extent they understood our situation. Especially Liesel, who lived in the same house, had interests in German literature and in cultural aspects that created some common ground between us, even though she was 24 years older than I. She took me along to concerts and introduced me to the world of classical music. As to literature, we could talk, for example, about Josef Viktor von Scheffel's *Der Trompeter von Säckingen*, a German epic in verse that I had read with enjoyment

earlier and that she also loved. She also introduced me to the novel *Gottfried Kämpfer*, the story of a boy growing up in a private Moravian church school with its boyhood adventures, but also its piety and its learning. This connected with my school experiences and my friends in Scheinfeld, and it made a deep impression on me, an impression that did much to pave the way for my own later involvement in private church school education.

It was natural for Mother and me to attend the Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church (George Street Church) where our relatives worshipped and where Onkel Jasch had been the *Ältester* (elder; leading minister) until his recent retirement. The language there was German, and for Mother the forms of worship as well as many social customs were familiar from Russia. I myself had been conscious of my Mennonite background even when we lived in Germany and worshipped in Lutheran churches. Theologically, I had little difficulty with the sermons I heard in Waterloo. Inwardly I struggled intensely and for many years with the whole question of nonresistance-pacifism, a problem for me after all our war experiences, but the peace position was also one of the attractions of Mennonite faith.

But I did not feel at home in this Mennonite church context. For January 30, 1949, my *Braunes Büchlein* states that I visited a Lutheran church (St. John's in Waterloo) for the first time. "Es war wundervoll. Fast wie in Deutschland. Ich fühle mich da viel mehr zu Hause als in der mennonitischen Kirche." (It was wonderful. Almost like in Germany. I feel much more at home there than in the Mennonite church.) Further visits to this and other Lutheran churches appear in later entries. Once I express my regret that Mother would never come along.

In spite of these visits, I kept attending the George Street Mennonite Church on most Sundays, and I make various positive comments about it in my entries, including references to some youth events, such as a tobogganing party. Mother was soon received as a member in that church and became well-liked and respected as a good and devoted Sunday school teacher as long as she lived in Waterloo. For me the process took longer; I was eventually received as a member in that Mennonite church on June 11, 1950. This tension within me between the Lutheran and the Mennonite church was in part theological, but—at this early time at least—it was first and foremost emotional, a matter of feeling or not feeling at home.

My homesickness for Germany is expressed with special focus and clarity in connection with three visits to Kitchener by the Vienna Boys Choir. My response to each seems symptomatic of my inner development in this respect. In our early years in Canada, contacts with Europe through travelling choirs, speakers, and other cultural exchanges were still rare, especially with the German cultural realm. I was ecstatic about the first visit of the Vienna Boys Choir. My *Schwarzes Büchlein* (Black Booklet; from 1950 on the successor to my *Braunes Büchlein*) contains the exuberant entry: “Es war grossartig! Es hat mir schon lange nicht mehr so gut gegangen wie an diesem Abend. . . . Es ist eine Wohltat, mal wieder ein so ausgezeichnetes Deutsch zu hören.” (It was wonderful! For a long time I have not been as happy as I was this evening. . . . It does one good to hear such exquisite German again.)

Almost two years later, and on two evenings, February 14 and 15, 1953, the Vienna Boys Choir visited Kitchener again, and I attended both performances. My entry is equally enthusiastic, but more detailed and nostalgic. It closes with a citation of two verses of Friedrich Rückert’s poem “Aus der Jugendzeit,” a poem of melancholy longing. The second stanza—written out in my booklet—focuses on a homeland lost:

O du Heimatflur, o du Heimatflur,  
 lass zu deinem heil’gen Raum  
 mich noch einmal nur, mich noch einmal nur  
 entfliehn im Traum!

Freely translated:

Oh you, my homeland,  
 Oh you, my homeland,  
 let me in a dream escape to your sacred space  
 just one more time, just one more time!

I add: “Friedrich Rückert muss gewusst haben, wie es in der Fremde ist.” (Friedrich Rückert must have known how it is to be in a foreign land.) This was at the height of my lonely phase.

Anticipating my later story, I include here the third visit of the Vienna Boys Choir another two years later on March 28, 1955. Again I reflect exuberantly on it, but this time my emphasis is on the lovely singing, the good German, and the generally elevating impression of the evening; my comments lack the earlier nostalgia for home. By then I was on my way out of the depths of loneliness and homesickness that had marked my preceding years.

I have focused first on the aspect of homesickness. As mentioned already, I think this might have been less intense if I had not been very lonely in my personal life during the years that followed our move to 34 Euclid Avenue. Like the homesickness, this loneliness, too, had begun before our move, but our new living situation contributed significantly to its deepening. Mother and I lived by ourselves now, and Mother was away at her work all day. I, on the other hand, did much of my studying at home, with only our old landlady moving about quietly on the main floor. During 1950-1951, I attended school—now Grade 13—only in the afternoons, working at part-time jobs in the mornings. In the evenings I sat at home to prepare myself to write the provincial final examinations without having attended classes. During the following college years (1951-1953)—I completed a B.A. in two years plus a summer school—I again spent most of my private study time at home.

My social life was almost nonexistent. We were still invited to various relatives and church friends, and I appreciated that, but I had little company among young people. My school friends remained just that. Among the church young people, I was well-liked and respected, I think. Quite early in my Waterloo years, I was voted into the young people's executive committee. At its meetings, however, I felt shy and tongue-tied. It was different if I was asked to perform a formal task, such as making a presentation on a biblical subject at a youth meeting. Then, just as in school, I could be free and express myself.

I felt different from the others, out of tune, isolated. Some of this may have been due to my lack of competency in two areas that were of special interest to most young people: music and sports. I was not musical and could therefore not participate in the church choir, which almost fully overlapped in membership with the youth group. Sometimes the group would find non-musical roles for me, such as making the introduction to a musical program presented by the youth group or the youth choir in church. Such tangential duties, however, did not add up to full choir participation.

It was similar in sports. Not only was I no competent sportsman; I did not even know the games that were popular in Canada. I was a liability to any baseball team, whether in school or in the context of the church youth group, and would consequently be chosen last if teams were to include everyone. Hockey was ruled out altogether; I did not even know how to skate. During our refugee years, I sometimes wished I could learn to skate but I had no skates.

It would be wrong, however, to attribute my loneliness solely to externals like these. The deeper feeling was one of not belonging, of being in a foreign land. On December 28, 1949, I write in my *Braunes Büchlein*: “Manchmal kommt mir meine Lage so traurig vor. Wieder leben wir in der Fremde.” (Sometimes my situation seems so sad to me. Again we are living in a foreign land.) I proceed immediately to acknowledge how good things are in Canada in external terms, and I certainly do not blame anyone for my sadness. The relatives, the people at school, the adults as well as the young people at church, Canadians generally for the most part—they all were friendly and well-meaning. The factors in my sense of isolation were largely, but not only, personal. I think it is not altogether atypical for immigrants to experience a deepening of loneliness and strangeness in the new land after the first excitement of a new start. Rather than a smoothly accelerating adjustment and sense of belonging, many go through times of sadness and longing, even if their external conditions are improving.

My twentieth birthday—August 7, 1952—may represent my lowest point in this respect. On that day, my *Schwarzes Büchlein* reads: “Heute ist mein zwanzigster Geburtstag. Es war sehr einsam bei uns; kein Besuch. Mama bemüht sich sehr, mir über die Einsamkeit hinwegzuhelfen, aber an Tagen wie heute hilft das nicht viel.” (Today is my twentieth birthday. It was very lonely at our place; no visitors. Mother is trying hard to help me get over this loneliness, but on days like today that doesn’t help much.) Among my papers I have a letter written to myself on that day. In it I tell of a wonderful dream I had that night, even though I seldom dreamt clearly. In it I met many of my friends from Konitz [why not Scheinfeld?!] and even recognized some by name. In this letter I also acknowledge Mother’s attempts to cheer me up, and I mention my own guilt feelings at being so depressed: “Ich komme mir undankbar vor; wir haben es ja sonst so gut. Aber Einsamkeit ist schlimm.” (I feel ungrateful; after all, in other respects things are so good. But loneliness is terrible.)

Knowing that a tendency towards depression runs in my mother’s line of the family, in retrospect I surmise that my years of greatest homesickness and loneliness could be interpreted, in part at least, as a low-grade depression. Even if that were correct, however, such a depression—a term and concept unknown to me until I worked in mental hospitals a few years later—would have been triggered or exacerbated by the tangible phenomena just described: the loss of my

German context, of Scheinfeld and my friends; the separation from immediate family; my lack of musicality and my disinterest in the popular forms of sports; and a sense of isolation in a new culture. These were the aspects of my life I could identify in those years already and that I still remember clearly, whatever psychological substratum may have been at work as well.

In addition to my faith, I had one major lifeline through this valley of the shadow: Onkel Hardy and Tante Anna with their family. They lived only a 10- to 15-minute walk away, and when I was with them, I felt at home and happy. In their harmonious and loving family I sensed the reality of what I had consciously missed in my own life ever since Mother and I had been separated from our other relatives. For some time this longing for family had been an undefined sense of absence. It was as early as our time in Techentin (1945), however, that I consciously identified it as missing a real family context because, much as I loved my mother, two did not make a family. The Pfarrhaus-family in Scheinfeld and the life with Onkel Jasch, Tante Liese, and Liesel had offered some dimensions of it, but at 34 Euclid I again felt the void and even more intensely.

Hardy and Anna were always kind and welcoming when I knocked on their door, but I had one problem: I did not want to visit so often that I would become a burden or nuisance to them. So I kept count of the days between my visits and checked my desire to go there too often. At least, so I thought. In retrospect, I am sure they must have sighed inwardly many a time when I rang the doorbell once again, but if they did so, they never let on.

What did we do? Nothing special. We talked about all kinds of everyday things. We joked and teased at times. We played records, including German ones, on Hardy's self-constructed stereo with its wonderful sound. There would be evening snack, but that itself was not a major attraction; it was the *Gemütlichkeit* that counted. Sometimes they asked me to stay with the children for an evening. Then the children would try to make me understand the radio programs they found so funny and, when I failed to relate to the humour, they thought it was due to my limited English and tried to explain the words. The problem, however, was not lack of vocabulary, but a different sense of humour, for what is perceived as humorous is largely determined by cultural context. However, I did enjoy staying with the children, and I think they also liked me.

To go out with the family on a picnic or the like was very special. A day trip to Wasaga Beach on Georgian Bay in the summer of 1950 stands out in my mind. Liesel was along also, and we spent the day playing in the water and on the beach. The fact that I had to work in the furniture factory on the following day, my skin burned red and my back blistered from exposure to the sun, did not matter; it had been a wonderful day.

To the special experiences at “Hardy’s,” as Mother and I would say, belonged celebrating Christmas Eve at their place, and often also Christmas dinner the next day. It became a regular tradition, and belongs to my best memories of my Waterloo years. Mother and I did get invitations to other relatives and friends, too, both around Christmas and at other times; to highlight Hardy’s should not devalue these. But being there for me through years of loneliness and offering me a family setting at a time I needed it most was something I experienced only at the home of Hardy and Anna.

I cannot leave those lonely years on Euclid without mentioning our immediate neighbours, the Neufeld sisters Wera, Olja (Olga), and Alice. Olja was close to Mother in age, and the others were older and younger, respectively. They were in close reach in case of immediate need. For some time we did not have our own telephone, but walked over to the Neufelds to make calls if they were sufficiently urgent. Around Christmas, but also at other times, we enjoyed many a delicious meal around their festively set dining room table, sometimes together with others, at other times as the only guests. They were truly good neighbours. But, of course, they were not friends my age and could do little to alleviate the loneliness and homesickness characterized in this chapter.

Positive developments in my external and emotional life began to take shape even during this time, and especially during my last college year (1952-1953). Significant improvement, however, became noticeable during my next two years of study at the Evangelical Lutheran Seminary of Canada (1953-1955). These developments were linked closely to my part-time and summer jobs, but especially to my academic progress.

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# 33

## *Jobs, Jobs, Jobs*

Throughout my seven years in Waterloo, I was a student. This was unusual among immigrants my age (16 years) and older who came to Canada after World War II. During the war and post-war years, few had been able to pursue a high school education, however irregular and interrupted, or even merely learn English. Furthermore, the general mentality among immigrants was to “get established” economically after so many years of precarious existence, and that meant finding a job. Last but not least, few of the mothers of young people my age—the fathers were mostly prisoners of war, exiled, or dead—were as supportive of education as my mother was. So I studied, at first not altogether enthusiastically, but later with growing conviction.

Being a student, however, left the summers for remunerative employment, together with whatever time I could spare for part-time jobs during the school years. Yet it would be wrong to equate my schooling and my work experiences with learning and non-learning, respectively. My greatly varied stints of employment were certainly rich learning experiences, though of a different kind than schools have to offer.

The jobs I held at various times, listed in chronological order, consisted of working on a fruit farm (harvesting fruit and related tasks), in a furniture factory (sanding, gluing, and nailing), in two drug stores (as delivery boy and sales clerk), in a transformer factory (operating electric saws), in a bank (three summers, as teller), in the college tuck shop (as co-manager), in the parts department of a car dealership (filing index cards), in two psychiatric hospitals (for a total of three summers, as attendant-orderly), and in college (as lecturer in German). I learned many things in these places and roles that purely academic pursuits



would never have taught me. In detailing some of my work situations, I will highlight the learning aspects.

First came the search for a summer job before the end of each school year, or alternatively, for a part-time job before or during the year. This alone could make a long and intriguing story. In that post-war era jobs were available, but that does not mean it was easy to find them, as is sometimes supposed in retrospect. It was certainly not easy for a new immigrant small of stature and slight of build. The highly paid jobs that were open to unskilled labour, like construction work, were off the list for me. Even if I could have performed some of them, after a first glance the manager or foreman would judge me unfit for them. For jobs less associated with size and robust appearance, there was still the matter of language. While my English was adequate for everyday communication, employers still had to be ready to accept a heavy German accent.

Also, most openings advertised required “some experience” in whatever the line of work. Further, many jobs that were suitable as student summer employment were obtained through family or other connections. Finally, if a prospective employer did seem interested and ready to pursue the matter, the time inevitably came when, as a matter of honesty, I had to state that I would not stay beyond the summer or the school year, but was planning to return to school again. At that point repeatedly an official would regret that he or she could not hire me because the firm was looking for someone who could be trained for a future career in the firm. I experienced times of hopelessness, when I felt I had checked all ads, had cycled to all major employers in Kitchener-Waterloo in search of work, and had pursued whatever personal connections I had but everything without success. Nevertheless, I can say that in the end I always did find work without any long periods of lost earning time.

For my first summer in Canada (1949), Onkel George and Tante Schura invited me to stay with them (free-of-charge) on their fruit farm near Niagara-on-the-Lake. I gratefully accepted, and spent a healthy, if not always easy, summer in the gardens and fields in that rich fruit-growing area. Sometimes I worked for these relatives, picking strawberries and cherries, “suckering” and picking tomatoes, or thinning out and eventually picking and sorting peaches.

The next summer (1950) saw me at the Globe Furniture Factory in Waterloo, this time through the recommendation of Onkel Hans Braun, a relative of the Janzens, who had worked in the office of that firm for

many years. I was grateful to him, too, although this was probably my least interesting and physically most demanding and unpleasant summer employment. For ten hours a day I assembled hymnal racks for the backs of church pews, sanding, gluing, and nailing. It took about 12 minutes to finish one rack. The room was hot. Sawdust got under one's clothes and irritated the skin. A glue heater close to me spread an unpleasant odour; and a clock right in front of me reminded me constantly of the slow crawling of time. If earlier I had not been completely sure about continuing my studies, this summer certainly convinced me.

The following winter (1950-1951) I attended high school (grade 13), but only in the afternoons, reserving the mornings for part-time employment to supplement Mother's factory salary. Probably I found my half-day morning job at the Canadian Transformer Company in Waterloo through a newspaper ad. My main task there was to use various electrical saws to separate individual transformers, which were spooled side by side, onto the same long cardboard tube with only a small space separating them. It took precision sawing to cut through this small space without damaging the wires on either side. I certainly enjoyed this more than the work at the furniture factory, but it lasted only until Christmas when the plant was moved to another city, so I had to look for another job.

I was subsequently employed by Mr. Pirie, owner of Pirie's Pharmacy, and worked there for about two months. The store was small and the work light: mostly filling shelves, dusting, delivering orders on my bicycle, as well as doing some waiting on customers. In addition to over-the-counter medicines and other items, this included selling ice cream cones and magazines. This is the only job from which I was ever "fired." That word does not convey at all, however, the gentle way in which Mr. Pirie explained how difficult it was for me as an immigrant to learn to know the names of product brands that his young son, for example, knew from his early childhood years; names like Ovaltine and Vicks' VapoRub. He was absolutely right, and I did not argue. In fact, I was rather glad because preparing for the approaching provincial Grade 13 examinations could now receive more of my time.

I no longer remember how I found a position in the Canadian Bank of Commerce in Waterloo for the following summer (1951) and, as it turned out, also for the two succeeding summers (1952 and 1953). There must have been a need for employees in that field because, in order to employ me for the summer only, the bank made the effort to obtain from

head office an exemption from the policy of not hiring part-time workers. The need must have continued, as I was hired for the next two summers also. It was not high-paying work, but I liked it, and I learned much about banking and finances that proved useful throughout my later life.

When one of the tellers left the bank two weeks after my arrival, I was promoted to the position of teller—rather prematurely, as far as experience was concerned. Someone, usually Mr. Carthew, the accountant (today we would probably say assistant manager), would look over my shoulder at first and point to various places on my ledger sheet, saying: “You enter this figure here, and that one there.” Why? No one bothered telling me; I had to piece things together for myself. Thus I learned the work by imitation.

Unknown to Mr. Carthew, he taught me something else as well. Of course I did make mistakes, and he was an outspoken man with a rather volatile temper that could quickly flare up. I had the choice of allowing myself either to feel defeated and dejected, or to respond defiantly, neither of which would have helped the situation. Since I did respect his competency, I found it easier instead to accept a reprimand. I also noticed that his anger would not last long nor carry over to the next day. So I learned to respond quietly, acknowledging my error and seeking to correct it, perhaps even by asking for his help to do so. This not only diffused his displeasure, but led to a good relationship between us.

More than that; toward the end of the summer, shortly before I was ready to enrol as a student at Waterloo College, Mr. Carthew called me aside and told me, in a rather solemn tone, that he had an offer to make. If I would stay with the bank, I would be trained as a banker, and my salary would be raised immediately from the approximately \$140 per month I was earning to \$203 per month. Whew, what a raise! I certainly felt honoured, but not tempted, nor have I ever regretted that I did not accept the generous offer.

Toward the end of my first summer at the bank I began to think of a part-time job to accompany my quickly approaching first year of college study. But this time I did not need to look long. One of our bank customers was Mr. Hahn, a pharmacist and the owner of Hahn’s Drug Store, a well established and reputable pharmacy in Waterloo. Mr. Carthew told Mr. Hahn about me, including my experience (in both senses of the word) at Pirie’s Drug Store. Mr. Hahn took the risk of hiring me for three late afternoons a week and for all of Saturday, mainly

to check stock received and refill shelves. Mr. Hahn was a tall, slightly greying, dignified gentleman, a real gentleman in every way. Only about two weeks into my work, he told me that he had realized already that I could do more than fill shelves. I should also work in the store as a sales clerk, and he would give me an appropriate raise in salary right away.

This was the beginning of a happy work situation throughout the school year, plus occasional times of helping out later, especially when Rexall's famous one-cent sale was on. Among my congenial coworkers were Mr. Hahn's son and daughter; Mr. Blaney, a second pharmacist; and other pleasant people. We did not sell ice cream or magazines but, in addition to the expected modern products, the store carried a range of older medications, some of them familiar to me from Russia (for example, Tincture of Valerian, an early sedative). I began to read the labels of medications, and was not altogether averse to Fred Blaney's suggestion that I should study pharmacy. Some 20 years later, when I unexpectedly walked into Hahn's Pharmacy for a visit, Mr. Hahn, by then old and stooped but with the same friendly look, recognized me at once and called out in happy recognition: "Waldemar!" He, too, like Mr. Carthew, had been my teacher, though in very different ways.

The next two summers (1952 and 1953) saw me at the bank again, the second only for a relatively brief time because I needed to take two summer courses at the University of Western Ontario in London to complete my B.A. After that summer school, Onkel Hardy provided me with brief stopgap employment in his parts department at Halwig Motors in Kitchener before I enrolled as a student at the Waterloo Lutheran Seminary.

During the college year 1952-1953, I co-managed the Waterloo College Tuck Shop with a fellow student, Bill Borden. In a tiny space under a stairway we sold milk, chocolate milk, doughnuts, chocolate bars, and other snack items during intermissions. We barely broke even, in spite of all the time and effort we invested. Financially it was not a success, but it was an educational experience.

My next three summers introduced me to the world of mental hospitals and mental illness. For one summer (1954) I worked as an attendant or orderly at the Homewood Sanitarium in Guelph some 25 kilometres from Waterloo. There followed two further summers (1955 and 1956) of similar work at the Brandon Mental Hospital in Brandon, Manitoba. Entry into this work was provided by a summer volunteer program operated by Mennonite Central Committee. During World

War II, some Mennonite young men had done alternative service as conscientious objectors to military service, in mental hospitals, since it was apparently not easy to find personnel for these institutions. After the war, MCC continued to maintain voluntary service (VS) units in various mental hospitals and related institutions.

My applying for such a VS position for the summer of 1954 was driven by mixed motives. Yes, I wanted to do Christian service, but I was also uncertain about what I wanted to do now that I had completed my B.A. and one year of seminary studies. I should mention here, that “voluntary service” in this instance did not mean unremunerated work; the “voluntary” indicated more the willingness to do work from which many people shied away. “VSers” were paid regular salaries by the hospitals, but contributed a certain percentage of their earnings to MCC. My acceptance resolved the problem of finding a summer job, but what would it be like?

When I reported to the Homewood Sanitarium, I was shown into a waiting room adjacent to a ward. Sitting there, I heard strange noises of various sorts coming from the ward, noises not conducive to setting an already tense newcomer at ease. Eventually I was signed on and assigned a room; the hospital provided room and board. Five other unit members were to join me, one other fellow, and four young women, but none of them had arrived yet. Eventually we were all there, and I shared a room with Benito Perri from California, who was our unit leader. Ben and I got along well, as did the whole small unit of six.

The work was certainly different from anything I had done before. I worked on a ward with old men, most of whom were suffering from some form of dementia. Since the hospital was private and “upscale,” with patients paying the phenomenal sum of approximately \$11 a day, there was numerically adequate staffing; on my ward, six attendants for about 35 patients during the day shift. Certain pretences were maintained, like dressing patients in shirt and tie, even those that could not recognize a tie for what it was. Our main work, however, was physical care, such as washing and dressing the patients, looking after their toilet needs and pre-washing soiled sheets and clothes before sending them to the laundry. Maintenance rather than treatment was what most patients required. While the setting and the work introduced me generally to the world of mental illness, specific learning in this field was very limited.

However, many of the patients were interesting characters, even in their present dysfunctional state. Often character traits of their earlier life

reappeared in fragmented form, but not always inappropriately. One attendant, while washing a former financier, asked the patient jokingly: “Danny (not his real name), do I get a raise today?” “No.” “Why not?” “You have not deserved it!” His response was right to the point. Equally humorous, but less appreciated, was another situation. A laundry cart full of freshly washed and ironed sheets, pillow cases, and other items had been brought in by the laundry personnel and left standing on the ward. A very short time later, the attendants who were to look after it found the cart empty. A search started, and the many individual pieces of laundry had been distributed all over the ward: on window sills, behind radiators, and so on. A former cloth merchant, it was discovered, had efficiently plied his trade and “unpacked the shipment!”

Sometimes a little ingenuity could be helpful. One old gentleman would always smile broadly when I brought him his meal and wanted to spoon-feed him, but he would not open his mouth. That made spoon-feeding very difficult, until I remembered that old people are often far-sighted. He wasn’t stubborn; he just did not see the spoon held close to his mouth. If I held up the spoon a yard away and at his eye level, then moved it forward slowly, his mouth would be open by the time the spoon reached it. I learned much about patience at this job, and about doing dirty and distasteful tasks without forgetting that these debilitated people

were still persons whom God loved. Some staff members made great efforts to treat them with care and compassion, among them those whose language was often peppered with four-letter words. Others just tried to get through the day, with less consideration for the patients than was needed—and sometimes we were all guilty of that.

Unit life was an important component of this summer. Our unit of six was not the most exciting group to be with, but for me, who had



Our MCC unit in Guelph

grown up as an only child and had experienced much loneliness in childhood and later, it was nice to associate regularly with a group of young people to which I rightfully belonged. None of us became close friends, but neither did we experience the tensions that some such units had to contend with. We got along and did many things together. We went on outings in the vicinity, had small parties, and even visited some Mennonite congregations, upon invitation, and “brought a program,” that is, conducted an evening service.

I also spent my next summer (1955) working in a psychiatric institution, the Brandon Mental Hospital, again in the context of an MCC VS unit, but it was a vastly different experience from that in Guelph. This time I was the unit leader, responsible to MCC for a large unit of 18 members, although the male-female ratio was the same as in Guelph (6 men, 12 women). We came from all over Canada and represented many, if not most, branches of Mennonite tradition. Unit members brought along many differences, and one of my tasks as unit leader was to mediate between differing personalities and opinions. One fellow, for example, considered it sinful for girls to wear slacks, while the girl who caused the offence (although she was not the only one in slacks) found it equally sinful that this fellow wanted to go bowling. Other conflicts could be of a theological sort—but I must hasten to add that the slacks and bowling issues were theological, too, for their respective proponents.

One theological question asked verbally or inwardly by all, I am sure, concerned the meaningfulness of apparently meaningless existence. If a patient sat crouched in one position day in and day out, neither doing or saying anything, or doing or saying senseless things, could his or her life have meaning? I had struggled with this question earlier already, and I had two years of graduate study in theology behind me by then; but many of our unit members were young people straight from the farm with very little encounter with “the world,” either externally or academically. My own perspective, worked out in Guelph already, or perhaps earlier, harked back to the Hitler era and its ideology regarding “unworthy life,” that is, the life of Jews, Gypsies, and also the mentally retarded (we did not use language like “mentally challenged” then). I told some of our unit members: The meaning of the apparently meaningless life of the patients in question might not be evident to us in their individual lives, understood as self-contained, but in their function in society. They protect our society from becoming a tooth-and-claw

survival of the strongest and fittest (the superior race, as Hitler ideology had it), because as long as we others take care of these most helpless of people, we establish a front line for compassion and love. In retrospect I realize that I probably tried to “overexplain” situations where the only answer perhaps was: “Suffering will always remain a mystery to us.” For my mind, however, such intellectual groping was necessary, and maybe it also helped some of the others.

A less rational and perhaps more helpful response to the shock—at least for many of our members—of seeing human conditions and forms of suffering not encountered thus far was the sharing of interesting and often funny stories from life on the wards. There were plenty of these, just as there had been at the Homewood Sanitarium. There was Kenny (not his real name), for example, a manic-depressive patient (bi-polar disorder, in today’s language). During one manic phase he paraded around wearing both a tie plus a bow-tie. “Where’s your third tie, Kenny?” an attendant asked him. Promptly he pulled it out of his pocket. On another occasion, a patient, suffering from paranoia, claimed to be “David, Jesus, and Lord Nelson who won the battle of Trafalgar.” Having studied Hebrew, and wishing to probe how far his delusions went, I asked him: “If you are David, surely you know Hebrew?” I got a squelching answer: “When I *was* David, I did.” Sometimes we felt guilty about laughing at such shared experiences. Were we making light of the patients’ plight? Probably not. We were simply venting our intense emotions, and if we had not laughed, we would have wept. Basically, there was much goodwill and Christian love towards the patients among us.

To cope with the patients was one challenge; another was to relate to the staff. Since our unit was large, we were visible in the hospital, and our Christian motivation for being there was at least vaguely known. To some of the long-time staff members, we may have seemed naïve in our “goody-goody idealism.” However, to us they—or at least a good number of them—seemed crude, when they used their profanities, smoked and drank, and sometimes treated patients with apparent rudeness. I say apparent, because even then I realized that the four-letter words that spiced their language merely indicated the limited vocabulary provided by their background, and that many of them communicated goodwill to the patients in their own ways, though sometimes in terms we were prone to misunderstand.



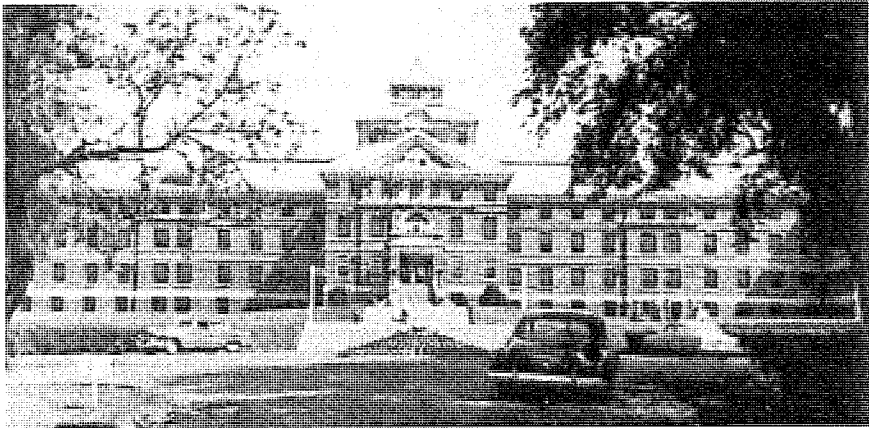
Take smoking, for example, a widespread habit then and not yet challenged by medical condemnation. There was a certain grace and camaraderie in the manner in which an attendant could pull out his pack of cigarettes, offer one to a patient, then help himself, and finally hold out his burning match or lighter to light the cigarette for the patient (who, of course, could not possess matches or lighter). It was almost like a little secular communion service, which we as non-smokers could not replicate. Eventually I discovered a perhaps weak but still meaningful substitute: Life Savers! One could pull out a roll of them with as much show of generosity as a pack of cigarettes, hold it out to the patient to help himself to a sweet treat, then help oneself, and conclude the little “ceremony” with a friendly smile. I know, for a smoker this was no truly satisfactory substitute, but it could at least convey an attitude.

In contrast to my experience at Guelph, my work in Brandon provided me with a significant introduction to mental illness. First, there was an exposure to a greater number of patients and a broader range of illnesses. On the ward where I worked during most of this summer and the next, there were approximately 150 patients, with only five attendants during the day shift and even fewer in the evening and at night. Clearly, this skeleton staff could not perform the bulk of the actual work. Probably for that reason, the composition of the patients was pragmatic. Some could render many services, including bathing other patients, barbering, keeping clothes in order, dishing out meals, and more; others could do some simple jobs, like sweeping the floor, helping to carry food from the kitchen to the ward under the guidance of an attendant, and carrying out the garbage later; while a large proportion of patients was highly dysfunctional.

For much of the time, one of my tasks was to oversee some 30 patients who worked in the dining room at meal times: getting the food, dishing it out, and cleaning up. There was no pretence of extra service here, as there had been in the Homewood Sanitarium, like dressing the patients with ties or doing all the work for them. For a newcomer, a first impression of the ward could be most depressing: shabby dress, patients lying around or sitting on the floor, bizarre behaviour on the part of many. But after a while I concluded that if I should ever have to be in such an institution, I would prefer Brandon, because there the ward constituted a living community of sorts, where people had tasks, and where the more able ones could help in caring for those who could do less.

This mix of patients—all of them long-term with well-developed symptoms of their respective illnesses—was in itself a study in mental disorders. Attendants received a certain amount of theoretical instruction during the winter, so that I could ask the permanent staff members about patients and their behaviours. I also began to read relevant literature. Eventually I developed an interest in and some knowledge about mental health and illness. This was supplemented by studies in pastoral psychology courses in seminary. Later, as a college teacher, I taught a one-semester course in Mental Hygiene, an introduction to personality theory and mental disorders, for a good number of years. More important, my mental hospital work introduced me to a deeper understanding of human nature, both “normal” and “abnormal,” as well as the fluidity of the boundary between the two.

In spite of the diversities and tensions that marked our unit, and perhaps because of them, this summer stands out in my memory for its rich social life. The unit was vibrant and active, and as the unit leader I was in the midst of what went on. We had regular unit meetings at which we discussed our unit affairs, planned programs (including visits to churches or meetings with other MCC units in Manitoba), heard speakers on mental illness and other topics, conducted Bible studies, and more. We also engaged in many spontaneous activities, some of them as a whole unit and others in smaller groups.



Brandon Mental Hospital, main building

The spacious and nicely landscaped hospital grounds and various other buildings surrounded the stately, four-storey brick central building capped by a two-storey tower. Flat agricultural land extended north toward the “Colony,” a branch of the hospital that was located just south

of Highway No. 1. These grounds were the setting for our “tamer” social activities, such as walks, volleyball, or tennis, but I hasten to say that none of our social life was “wild.” The immediate surroundings were also attractive in a simple prairie way. To the south and west, the terrain fell off to the Assiniboine River beyond which lay the city of Brandon. Directly south of the hospital was an apparently ever-productive rhubarb garden, of which we tasted enough that summer to keep me away from “that weed” as much as possible in later years. West of the garden and starting just beyond Highway No.10, connecting Highway No. 1 and the hospital with the city of Brandon, stretched an area of grassland and shrubs traversed by ravines and sloping down from the higher prairie to the Assiniboine River and the city. This was ideal terrain for wiener roasts with group singing, for testing how steep an ascent my roommate’s Volkswagen—a novelty then—could manage, or for watching the city lights beyond the river at night.

Longer walks by twos or threes, or in larger groups, could take us north to various ice cream places and fast-food outlets, while a short car



Brandon unit friends, Arnold Funk, Edith Thiessen, and Margaret Wiens

ride of a little over a mile brought us to the restaurants of Brandon. My roommate and friend Arnold Funk, the Volkswagen owner, and I paid many a late night visit to them; late, because we worked on different shifts, so that we had time off together only after the end of the evening shift. A typical snack consisted of coffee (10 cents) and pie (15 cents). That was our lowest limit for saying grace before eating.

Of course, other unit members would come along at times or go out in other groups. Since the whole unit of 18 could arrange only a limited number of events together, much of the social interaction took place in smaller groups. While we did not break off into

cliques, I wish to think, a certain amount of conscious balancing of association was needed to include everyone, at least to some extent, in the informal social life. Perhaps some did feel marginalized nevertheless; I hope this was not so. We had one married couple in the unit, but generally our group was not marked by dating or formation of couples. For me, this was probably the first time in Canada where I felt I belonged fully to a circle of young people, and where the loneliness and shyness that had gradually taken hold of me after immigrating seemed almost overcome.

I returned to Brandon to work there for another summer (1956), but this time not as a unit member, although I joined the MCC unit of that summer for various activities. My work was basically a continuation of the previous summer; I was placed on the same ward and worked mostly with the same staff and patients. I enjoyed good interaction with the unit, although my relationship was somewhat marginal, since I was not a member, but I had expected that. I had just graduated with a Bachelor of Divinity degree from the Mennonite and Bethany Biblical Seminaries in Chicago and had already received an appointment to teach at the Canadian Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg, so my thoughts were directed forward.

The last part-time work of my student years was different from all others. During the two academic years between my mental hospital summers (1953-1954 and 1954-1955) I was a college instructor! At times I could hardly believe it myself that, only five years after landing in Halifax, I would begin teaching at the college level. To be sure, it was only one course, Introductory German, and I had only a B.A. behind my name, but this was more than casual employment for financial reasons. Teaching German had something to do with who I was, and with what I could do that not everyone else was also qualified to do. And, although I did not know it then, it was the beginning of over four decades of teaching at the university level.

This job came about through an appointment process that was at first traumatic and then very affirming. Waterloo College was looking for a lecturer in Introductory German, and I applied for that part-time position for the year ahead when I would be a student in the Lutheran Seminary, a part of the same institution. After some time, the president of both the College and the Seminary called me to his office. He praised my academic work and stated that I would be well qualified to teach the course, but—and he was evidently sorry and perhaps embarrassed to have to say it—because I was small of stature and youthful in appearance (perhaps

looking even younger than my 21 years), he doubted I could gain the necessary authority and maintain discipline in the class in question. He regretted that he could not give me the position for these reasons. Quietly and without protest I left the room, but I was deeply hurt. It had often been difficult for me to be one of the smallest of the boys in my class. I could understand that construction foremen were not looking for prospective workers of my build. But that I would be denied an academic position on the basis of my size, even though I had just been declared academically qualified, came unexpectedly.

It was a time of transition at Waterloo College, however, a transition that would eventually turn little Waterloo College (affiliated with the University of Western Ontario) into two large and flourishing universities (the University of Waterloo and Waterloo Lutheran University, the latter eventually renamed Wilfrid Laurier University). The president who had just turned me down had already resigned, and he left the institution a little while later. Somehow Dean Lloyd H. Schaus heard of my rejection, perhaps through my theology professor and mentor, Dr. Otto Heick. Before the beginning of the new academic year, I was called to the dean's office. Dean Schaus was not only the dean, but also the professor who had taught the Introductory German course in previous years and wanted to give it to someone else due to his increasing administrative load. He had none of the concerns expressed by the outgoing president, and he offered me the course. After a deep blow to my self-image and self-confidence, I received one of the greatest affirmations!

I was indeed very young for this appointment. Most of my 27 students were very close to me in age, and some were older than I. Nevertheless, it was a very enjoyable task for me to teach my native language to these students and then to another class—this time in the new state-of-the-art building that heralded the institution's expansion. I had a good relationship with the students, and had no discipline problems. These two years of teaching were a significant factor, although not the only ones, in my pursuit of a teaching career.

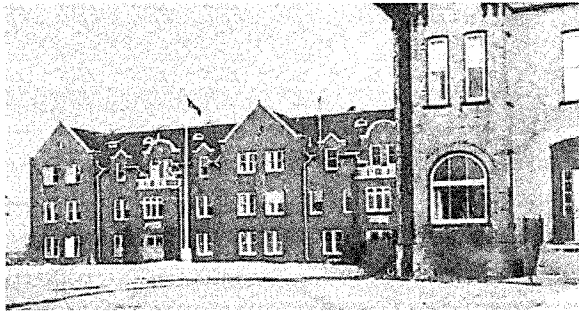
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# 34

## *My Years at Waterloo College*

On September 19, 1951, I enrolled as a student in Waterloo College. This was a small local college of approximately 200 students, located mainly in one building, Willison Hall, set back from Albert Street by a spacious lawn. It was an ivy-covered, three-and-a-half-storey brick building, modestly imposing, and by its very structure suggestive of an academic institution. Willison Hall also housed the Evangelical Lutheran Seminary of Canada.

College and Seminary were not located in different parts of Willison



Waterloo College and Seminary

Hall, but shared the available spaces as needed. In a sense they were one institution, administered by the Lutheran Canada Synod through one Board of Directors and one President. The institution was founded in 1911 and

within a few years developed full liberal arts and theological seminary programmes. In 1925 the College became affiliated with the University of Western Ontario in London, and its degrees were conferred by that university. During my student years, the College offered three-year B.A. (General) and four-year B.A. (Honours) degrees, all in the humanities, but a number of science courses were available to round out the educational horizon. Waterloo College was a small institution, but it

upheld respectable academic standards. These were guaranteed, in part, by its accountability to the University of Western Ontario, but only in part. Much of the College's high quality education was due to the efforts of its small but dedicated core faculty.



Mother as laboratory technologist

Kitchener-Waterloo Hospital were small. This changed somewhat when her general education and intelligence were recognized and she was gradually drawn into laboratory technologist duties. Her raise in salary was only modest, however, since she did not have formal certification. I had won two scholarships upon high school graduation. Together they almost covered my college tuition, which was approximately \$200 in my first year. I also had some savings from my part-time and summer jobs.

Many Canadians would have thought our total income a very meagre base for continuing studies, but Mother—happy with my wish to study—and I did not consider ourselves poor at all. We were close enough to our refugee years to perceive our present standard of living as remarkably high, and we were very thankful. When a school friend during those years mentioned to me that he received an allowance of \$5.00 a week just for entertainment and similar personal expenses, I could only marvel. The notion of allowance as such was unknown to me, and the amount seemed staggering when I considered the fact that a substantial textbook might cost less than \$3.00.

When I enrolled as a student on September 19, I was keenly aware of the significant step I was taking. On October 7, I wrote in my *Schwarzes Büchlein*: "Ich glaube, ich werde mich im College wohl fühlen. Ein neuer

For me the existence of this local institution was a godsend, since I would not have been able financially to attend a university in another city. As it was, I lived at home and walked or cycled the one-and-a-half miles to college, and later to seminary, for a total of four years. Mother's earnings at the Huck Glove Factory, and from August 8, 1951 on, as an unskilled helper in the laboratory of the

Abschnitt in meinem Leben hat begonnen. Ich bin Student!” (I believe I will like it at College. A new phase of my life has begun. I am a [university] student!) My anticipation proved to be correct. On Christmas Eve of that year, having tasted a few months of college study, I confirmed in my *Schwarzes Büchlein*: “Ich freue mich, studieren zu dürfen.” (I am glad to be able to study.) To be sure, the two college years (followed by one summer school session in London, Ontario) that it took me to earn a three-year B.A. were not easy. They coincided with the time of my greatest loneliness and homesickness characterized earlier. However, my studies, as well as my interactions with students and faculty, constituted the richer and happier part of those lonely years. More than that, they offered me hope that academic study might be the road leading to a more satisfying life situation than the one in which I seemed to be caught. This, too, eventually proved to be the case.

I enrolled in a three-year pre-theological B.A. course. That meant a program made up of courses in various areas of the humanities, but with a certain slant towards those deemed particularly useful as a foundation for theological study at the seminary level. These included New Testament Greek, Latin, History, and Philosophy.

Studying theology was not primarily motivated by vocational aspirations on my part, although these were not ruled out, but by my need to pursue my own theological quest. The thought of pursuing such studies had grown gradually, rivalled for a long time by geography as an area of further study. For a while I kept my thoughts to myself, but on May 4, 1952, I record a decision in my *Schwarzes Büchlein*: “Heute habe ich mir vorgenommen, Theologie zu studieren und das auch nicht geheim zu halten. Ich habe darüber oft nachgedacht und die Möglichkeit erwogen. Ich denke, dass ein fester Entschluss besser ist als ein Tappen im Unbestimmten. Der Herr gebe mir seinen Segen!” (Today I decided to study theology and not to make a secret of it. I have often thought about it and considered the possibility. I think a firm decision is better than groping in uncertainty. May the Lord give me his blessing!) The entry does not indicate what may have moved me to this firm resolve at this point in time nor do I recall any triggering event or experience.

It is possible, however, to point out at least several factors leading up to this decision. First, faith issues had been of great importance to me ever since our flight from Chortitza in 1943, as these Memoirs have repeatedly recorded. Second, my new Mennonite church context with its pacifist tradition, together with our war experiences and the, at least



perceived, threat of a Third World War, made it imperative for me to gain some clarity regarding my own position and possible future action in this respect. Third, my high school learning, just like that in Scheinfeld, was stamped deeply by the Enlightenment-generated issues of religion and science, faith and reason. Were these compatible or conflicting? Did belief in the Bible, even if not extremely conservative and literalistic, make one an obscurantist in a modern society? These and related questions stirred in my mind, and the simplistic claims in either direction were less than satisfactory. Fourth, while my wish to study theology was not primarily motivated by vocational aspirations, I had met ministers, like Dr. Nickl and Pater Arnulf, who had modelled church vocations in impressive ways. The thought of becoming a minister had entered my mind from time to time, but I was sure that, in such a case, I would want to be a well-educated minister. This did not reflect a low view of the lay ministry that had characterized the Mennonite tradition, but rather a sense of needing to be well-equipped to address questions and problems of people like myself. Naively I assumed that these also moved most other people. Yet for the most part, my desire to study theology was not tied closely to thoughts of a future vocation.

The college world was very different from that of my previous school years. There were just under 200 students at Waterloo College when I began my studies there, as compared to the 1200 or so in the Kitchener-Waterloo Collegiate, so that a much more intimate atmosphere prevailed. Each course had only three lectures or fewer per week, for a total of 15-20 hours. Much of the study had to be done independently, of course, which conveyed a sense of both freedom and responsibility.

A certain "dignity," for want of a better term, characterized the atmosphere, symbolized, among other things, by the fact that a number of our professors still wore academic gowns to class. To be sure, student gossip suggested with friendly malice that this might be to save their clothes from chalk powder. The degrees behind the faculty members' names were awe-inspiring, although Waterloo, like most Canadian institutions of higher learning in those years, had many teachers without Ph.D. degrees. And, of course, serious study and good grades were valued highly, not only by the professors, but also by fellow students, which was only partially true in high school. I was an immigrant and in many ways different, but the fact that sports and social activities, though both well represented on campus, were not so central to student life, made me less marginal than I had been in high school.

As a Lutheran church institution, the college held a brief, usually liturgical, chapel service every morning, and I attended it fairly regularly. The President and Dean were Lutherans, as were a number of the professors. The students represented a variety of religious denominations; I do not remember what percentage were Lutherans. For a church college, the Lutheran stamp was pressed on our life and studies only lightly, and I am sure students of other traditions never felt out of place. Not being a Lutheran, although at home in a Lutheran context due to our refugee years, I experienced this openness to others positively, although at times I would have wished for a more “churchly” atmosphere.

College life began with “initiations,” that is, a tradition of a few days of “showing the freshmen their place” by having them dress in funny ways—such as a sheet wrapped around the normal clothes like a Roman toga—and performing lowly duties requested by higher level students, like polishing their shoes. An assembly in the form of a court “judged” certain “delinquent” freshmen and sentenced them to perform certain humorous tasks. The ones “picked on” were those who promised to be in the forefront of college life, and this special attention probably helped to raise their social profile further. The jury was asked to take an “oath” upon a copy of the Kinsey Report (a recent and much discussed study of sexual behaviour) with the words “So help me Kinsey!” As that report was widely questioned and ridiculed, as well as acclaimed, the implication was that nothing in these initiations was to be taken too seriously. Since I had the company of Bill Huras and other schoolmates from high school, I participated in these activities in a spirit of fun, even though I was shy and socially at the margins.

As to social life generally, a pattern established in high school repeated itself. I had a circle of good school friends; some of them hailed from high school yet, but others were new. We had lunch together, carried on conversations, helped each other with some school work, and more. None of these friendships, however, extended beyond college. When I went home, I was alone and almost without social life with young people my age. As described earlier, these were my most lonely years in Canada.

Occasionally I did participate in some extra-curricular events and contexts. For example, together with a professor and a carful of students, I attended operas in Toronto on two occasions. I was nominally a member of the I.V.C.F. (Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship), but I do not recall its activities at all. During my second year I joined the History

Club, but I think we had only two meetings. The pattern was always the same: the more formal and organized a context was, the better I was able to step into a role and function in it, but the freer and more informal an event or activity, the more marginal and inhibited I felt. One evening I was determined to break out of this restrictive pattern by going to a college dance. If others could do it, why not I?! But I knew nothing about dancing and felt so out of place that I stood at the edge of the milling crowd for a while, then slunk out and went home, confirmed once again in my sense of separation and loneliness.

I did attend our church's youth group during these lonely years, but my shyness and inhibition there has already been described. One new venture of a partly academic and partly social nature brought a little variety into my life. Since our Sunday school, as also our church services, were conducted in German, while younger children heard less and less of it in the homes, our church decided to offer some supplementary German instruction and asked me to teach a class in German language. I accepted, and on November 30, 1951, I began to teach German in our church on Friday evenings. I had a class of ten children aged 10-12 years. It was my first experience of teaching in any form. There was no plan, nor were there textbooks. Paedagogically I was totally on my own. It was a group of nice children, but they were lively, and it was Friday evening. To make a long story short, I muddled along, both with respect to discipline and to curriculum, but somehow I managed to continue for about three years. We even presented some programs for parents, and according to my *Schwarzes Büchlein*, they went quite well. It was not only my introduction to teaching, as mentioned, but also a break from studies and loneliness. Each late Friday afternoon I would walk the three kilometres from college to church, making a midway stop at a little restaurant to brace myself for the evening with a "supper out," a hotdog and a hot chocolate, at the cost of 25 cents. My expectations at that time were frugal.

The redeeming aspect of my college years were the studies. In my first year, I took introductory courses in English, Economics, Psychology, and New Testament Greek, as well as courses in Latin (Martial, Pliny, Virgil) and History (Mediaeval, Renaissance, Reformation), plus obligatory half-courses in Public Speaking, Library Science, and Physical Education (swimming at the "Y"). While I had taken high school courses in all of these fields except Economics and Psychology, the differences from high school with respect to depth and demands were significant,

and I threw myself into my studies with vigour. I spent long and lonely daytime hours over my books at home, and the evenings—though less lonely because Mother was home—were also filled with much reading.

The subjects were not equally demanding for me. Since I had had good training in grammar and some six years of school in Latin, I found no difficulty there, nor in New Testament Greek, which was easier than the classical Greek that I had begun to study with Pater Pirmin in the Kloster Schwarzenberg. Psychology and Economics, the two new areas, were relatively easy and also useful, but not particularly interesting. History, taught with enthusiasm by the widely travelled Professor Alexander Potter, captured my imagination in a new way. Not only was Dr. Potter an interesting lecturer; he was able to transcend the chronicling of rulers and wars as he offered insightful interpretations of different periods and movements. Then, there was English, from Beowulf and Chaucer to modern times. Having been in Canada for a mere three years, I was out of my depths, especially when under stress and time pressure during examinations. A longer essay assignment that earned me a grade of 80 percent was probably what “pushed me over the line” to a barely passing grade of “D” at the end of the year. While that was the lowest grade ever to appear on any transcript of mine, past or future, I was grateful to have passed; Professor Clark was not an easy marker, and those were times when failing grades were still handed down freely. In fact, this grade gave me greater satisfaction than the prize for highest standing in Psychology, taught by Professor Frank C. Peters, which I received that year.

Another summer of working in the bank led up to my second and last year of college study. Like my first year, it too was characterized by long hours of hard and often lonely work, but there were differences. I felt more secure on my academic path now. With the exception of the language courses, where participation was unavoidable, I had seldom spoken up in class during my first year. Now I began to participate in class discussions. Modern History (1555-1933), again with Dr. Potter, continued to be stimulating. History of Philosophy, from the earliest Greek thinkers to the present, though often difficult and confusing, opened new vistas. On the final examination, Professor Cragg asked the students to characterize one philosopher they had come to value especially. I chose St. Augustine and started writing. I wrote and wrote until the bell rang, and only then did I realize that I had left a large part of the examination untouched. I was sure I would fail the course but, as it

turned out, I received the College's prize for the highest standing in Philosophy that year!

A second Philosophy course, Introductory (Philosophical) Ethics, though only one semester, became of special significance to me because it was the first course I took with Professor Otto W. Heick. He was to become my foremost mentor in my Waterloo College and Seminary years.

Another course where the professor rather than the subject matter became important for me was Biblical Studies (Old Testament Prophets), taught by the Dean, Professor Lloyd H. Schaus. It was not only the first course in Religion I took on university level, but also my first one in Old Testament, the field that would become my own area of specialization



Dean Lloyd H. Schaus

and that I would teach for over four decades. Neither this course nor the teacher, however, inspired me to choose that direction. Dean Schaus was a solid teacher, but not exciting, and even though I received an "A" as my final grade, I had to struggle with an academic approach to biblical study and a mass of textual detail. But somehow, as I remember distinctly, I pondered the fact that a biblical scholar like Dean Schaus could function competently and be respected in the modern world.

Perhaps I, too, could achieve that synthesis? A seed was sown, but years would pass before it would bring fruit. How Dean Schaus furthered my future career by securing me a teaching position in German after my college graduation has already been told.

My academically most striking development took place, quite unexpectedly, in the area of English; here it was both the subject matter and the teacher that brought this about. My low grade in English in the previous year was certainly deserved on the basis of my final examination, but it did not tell the full story. I had received good instruction in German literature from Frau Dr. Sievers in Scheinfeld, and I had been a reader of German literature since then. Professor Clark had laid a necessary foundation for me to enter into English literature, rather than deterring me from it. This is evidenced by the fact that for my

second and final year I enrolled in two English courses: English Literature of the Nineteenth Century, and American and Canadian Literature.



Professor Flora Roy

As in the case of Frau Dr. Sievers, I was fortunate to find a woman teacher who combined great competence with personal charisma, Professor Flora Roy. The spark was ignited, and I immersed myself in the English poets, from Wordsworth and Coleridge to Tennyson and T. S. Eliot. Even more significant in opening up literary studies was Professor Roy's course in American Literature. It is hard for me to explain why that should be so, especially since much of the literature I encountered in this course seemed—item by item—quite strange and weird, from Cotton Mather and Washington Irving to Emily Dickinson,

Walt Whitman, and Archibald McLeish. I surmise that, in the works we read and through the inspiration of Professor Roy, I sensed “the pulse of the modern age,” for want of a better term. When it came to writing the major paper for the year, I chose a topic which, as Professor Roy told me later, no one else in the large class had chosen, and I “gave it all I had.” At graduation, and at Professor Roy's recommendation, I was awarded the College's senior prize in English for that year! It must have taken some courage on Professor Roy's part to give that prize to an immigrant whose English, both spoken and written, was far from perfect.

This was my last full year in college, but I needed an additional course and a half to fulfil all the requirements for the B.A. in order to be awarded that degree in fall. I chose to take these courses in a summer session at the University of Western Ontario in London. It was a happy experience in every way. I responded to an ad in the *Kitchener-Waterloo Record* by a Bruce Chambers, who was going to summer school at “Western” and was offering a ride to another summer school



Bruce Chambers

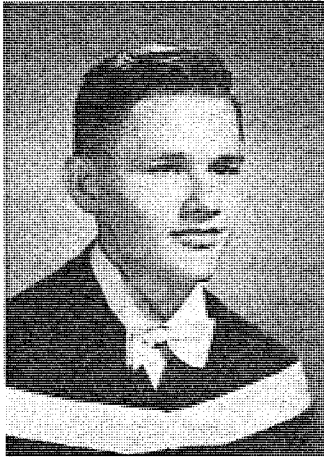
student. I accepted the offer. Once in London, the family in whose mansion I had earlier reserved a room was ready to accommodate Bruce also. That turned what might have been a socially lonely summer for me into one of pleasant and helpful companionship.

Bruce was five years older than I and had been a grade school teacher for several years. He was at home in Canada and a sociable person. Realizing quickly that I was a semi-adjusted newcomer, and shy at that, he took me under his wing. Not only did he offer companionship in our place of residence, he also took me to various places and events where I would otherwise never have gone. A prime example was a trip to nearby Stratford, where the later so famous Stratford Festival had just been established, to attend a Shakespearean play. Moreover, we went in the company of several pretty female students. Of course, it helped that Bruce had a car.

Our weekend restaurant outings became a regular feature of that time, since the university cafeteria was closed then and we had to fend for ourselves. Ordering something in a restaurant can be one of the more difficult tasks for an immigrant who lacks the proper vocabulary to decode a restaurant menu. Bruce was a good teacher. He was also one of the few Canadians who could identify for me the trees, flowers, and birds of the area. My German background had led me to believe that this was information one could expect most people to have about their home country, but soon after coming to Canada I realized that here this knowledge was the exception rather than the rule, at least if one excepted the maple tree, the beaver, and the buffalo. Well, Bruce knew. Not all my experiences in London were associated with Bruce, however. I went to several theatre performances and to Lutheran as well as United Church services. Since I had brought along my bicycle, I also explored the city on my own.

Of course, my reason for being there was not social, but academic. I chose a full course in Geology, which fulfilled the science requirement for my degree, and a half-course in political science (Municipal Affairs). Both were enjoyable and instructive. In addition to interesting lectures on earth history, strata, fossils, and rock formations, the Geology course included a lab period in which we practiced identifying rocks. In years to come, I found this knowledge most enriching as I travelled through various landscapes. The course Municipal Affairs could be quite tedious; it dealt with such topics as the responsibility for removal of driftwood if a river separated two counties. But Professor Inman, whose textbook in

Economics I had found very dry when I took Introductory Economics at Waterloo, proved to be an interesting lecturer. I observed here for the first time that the personal impression of authors can be very different from what one had come to expect on the basis of their writings.



My college graduation  
photo (1953)

Early in this summer session, I wrote in my *Schwarzes Büchlein*: “Es geht mir nochsolange grossartig.” (Thus far, my experience here has been wonderful.) And right after the course I confirmed: “Die Londoner Zeit hat mir sehr wohlgetan.” (The time in London was very pleasant and good for me.) It also completed my graduation requirements. A Waterloo College convocation had already been held in May at St. Matthew’s Lutheran Church

in Kitchener, and there I received the above-mentioned Philosophy prize and English prize. The B.A. degree was conferred on me at the fall convocation of the University of Western Ontario.

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## *Student at the Evangelical Lutheran Seminary of Canada*

What should I do next? To study theology was my aim, but could or should I do so immediately? The question was largely a financial one. Perhaps I should find employment for a year or more before continuing my studies? But what was I qualified to do with a B.A. (General)? Mother and I talked it over and decided that we could make seminary study possible for me financially, after all, and that would be my next step.

The Evangelical Lutheran Seminary of Canada was integrated with Waterloo College spatially and also in other ways, so that it did not require much adjustment to enrol there. I was welcomed warmly by the faculty, since my grades and my references were good. Some of the professors knew me already. It was a small seminary with five professors and fewer than 20 full-time students. One United Church student and I, a Mennonite, were the only two non-Lutheran full-time students, but there were also several part-time students, most of them Mennonite ministers from the twin cities and vicinity who represented different Mennonite conferences. This allowed for a certain amount of “Mennonite ecumenism” during my two years at the Lutheran Seminary.

The faculty consisted of five professors: Dr. Helmut T. Lehman, soon succeeded by Dr. J. Ray Houser (President; Church History); Dr. Ulrich S. Leupold (Dean; New Testament; Church Music); Dr. Otto W. Heick (Systematic Theology); Dr. Howard N. Bream (Old Testament); and Mr. George F. Durst (Liturgics; Church Architecture). For some subjects, we had part-time lecturers.

My first seminary year began on September 28, 1953, with an opening talk by the Dean, Dr. Leupold. He was a fine German musicologist and theologian who had come to Canada before the war,

and would become one of my favourite seminary teachers. Generally a serious man, he presented us on this occasion—in his strong German accent—with a list of wise yet gently humorous points of advice for new seminarians. What will it be like to be a seminarian? Point 1: “The old ladies in the church will love you.” I do not recall all the other points, but at least one other also dealt with the matter of being loved: “If you want to be loved, preach the law! People may not observe it, but they will nod in agreement if you lay it down firmly. To preach the gospel is a much more difficult matter.” It was a brief, somewhat sobering, but very helpful introduction.

Socially, my high school and college pattern repeated itself once more. I had good seminary friends; in fact, in view of the small numbers, we were all friends of sorts. But once again, for me this did not carry over into friendships outside of school. And yet, in contrast to my lonely college years, the two seminary years were different. I was beginning to be somewhat less of a loner and to feel more positive about myself and my future. If I had been suffering from a low-grade depression, it had begun to lift. Several factors contributed to this. First, my college years had made me academically surer of myself. Second, my various summer and part-time jobs had exposed me to a great variety of people and had thereby given me greater courage in approaching strangers. The summer at London with Bruce Chambers had been a good social experience. And my teaching of German in the College, which accompanied my two years of study at the Seminary, went well, gave me some status, and also offered interaction with other young people, even if they were my students and I their teacher.

Paradoxically, it was the Lutheran Seminary that also brought me into closer involvement with my own Mennonite church. The Seminary required of its students that they do some practical church work. In my case, the President thought it would make most sense if I would do this in my own home congregation, and he approached our pastor, Rev. Henry P. Epp, in the matter. It was agreed that I should teach a Sunday school class. The class I was assigned consisted of ten boys, ages 10-12. I took my assignment very seriously, prepared myself as well as I could, and enjoyed my boys. This assignment also made me a part of the Sunday school teachers' meetings and conferences. My German teaching on Friday nights also continued.

When my Homiletics course required practice preaching, I preached my first sermon on March 21, 1954 in the St. James Lutheran Church in

the nearby town of Elmira. It was the church where our Homiletics lecturer was the pastor, and it was his kindness that made this possible. I learned much from him, and I am sorry to have forgotten his name. Only a little later, however, on April 7, I was invited to preach in our Mennonite church. Thus my attendance at the Lutheran Seminary simultaneously led to the strengthening of my ties to our own church. During this time, I was still—or was it again?—a member of our Young People's Committee. But now, in contrast to my earlier shyness and tendency to withdraw, I took a more active leadership role and felt more at home, although I was still inhibited in many ways, especially in informal settings.

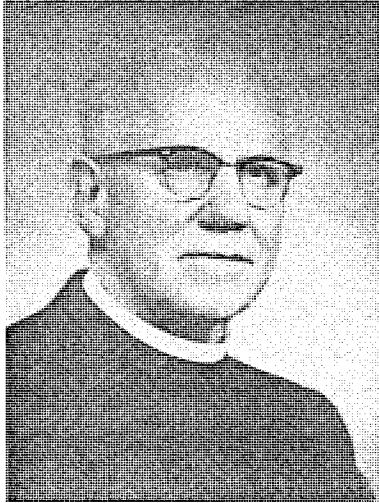
Central to my seminary experience, of course, were my studies. Having had no Sunday school in the Soviet context and only short stints of religious instruction during our refugee life, my knowledge of the Bible was very uneven and rather limited. The courses in Old and New Testament extended my content knowledge considerably and also brought some structure to it. This spanned the whole range from memorizing outlines of biblical books to considering current theories of scholarly Bible interpretation. These courses introduced me to historical-critical study and its findings. Many of its theories were considered at that time to be common academic consensus in the field. Some of them raised questions for me but, on the whole, I found the biblical subjects stimulating. The fact that my professors were devout Christians helped me to accept new and potentially disturbing knowledge in a positive manner.

Dr. Bream, our Old Testament professor and a recent graduate of the University of Chicago, was a nice person and imparted valuable knowledge, but he was new to teaching. Our New Testament professor, Dr. Leupold, on the other hand, was impressive both as a person and as a wise and seasoned teacher. I still keep, as a prized possession, a paper I wrote for him (reviewing Gerhard Gloege's, *Reich Gottes und Kirche im Neuen Testament*), for which he gave me a grade of 100 percent and wrote: "Thank you for a very fine and comprehensive synthesis as well as intelligent critique."

Dr. Leupold was also a well qualified and prominent musicologist, and I took his required course, Church Music. It included the history of church music, hymnology, Lutheran church music, and even the structure and function of the organ, all "with application to practical problems in the parish," as the Calendar put it. No musical background

or ability was required, so that I could actually enjoy it and earn a grade of 92 percent. It was probably the only success in anything musical in my life!

My theological quest—the doubts and questions that had provided the main motivation for pursuing theological study—was addressed most



Dr. Otto W. Heick

directly and helpfully, however, in the courses in Systematic Theology taught by Dr. Heick. I had taken a course in Philosophical Ethics from him in College already and had learned to know and appreciate him as a teacher and a person. A mentor-student relationship developed with time. An extra bond between us was our German background. Dr. Heick had immigrated to the United States in 1923 at the age of 28, continued his studies there, and pursued academic as well as pastoral work. After coming to Waterloo College in 1947-1948, he taught German Literature in addition to his major field, Systematic Theology. Outside of the classroom, we usually spoke German with each other. My mother and I also visited the Heicks in their home a few times, and they reciprocated, but this was limited by Mrs. Heick's ill health.

Dr. Heick was a well published scholar and a true Lutheran to the core. I do not mean that he was narrow in his views; his positive acceptance of me was evidence of that. Relating to me and to the Mennonite ministers who studied part-time at the Seminary also induced him to extend his reading in Anabaptist-Mennonite literature and to expand his course, Reformation Theology, beyond the mainline Reformers to include a section on the "Left Wing of the Reformation." When he taught the early Church Fathers and Thomas Aquinas, they came to life for me. Among other things, I learned from him to go to the original sources. And when he had covered the theology of a certain period, he would say: "And now, let us look at what they sang in the church at that time. That is where their real theology comes through."

With all his breadth of knowledge and width of perspective, however, Dr. Heick was, as I said, a Lutheran to the core. When he

occasionally mentioned his conversion, he did not refer to a conversion from something else to Christianity but from Pietism to Lutheranism, which was synonymous for him with a conversion from “law” to “gospel,” or from “works” to “grace.” He suggested—with some justification, as I discovered later—that the Anabaptists, though they had apparently moved furthest away from the Catholic church during the Reformation, had actually not moved in a straight line but in a circle, so that they were eventually closer to the Catholics in their emphasis on “good works” than the mainline Protestants. Although I often argued with Dr. Heck then, I realize now that, if I have any resources to counter my perfectionist tendencies with a reliance on God’s grace, I owe these to an understanding of the gospel that was conveyed to me in large measure by Dr. Heck. Sometimes we students would say that Dr. Heck had four major saints: Luther, Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky, and Barth, although he was not an Existentialist strictly speaking, since he was too much of a systematic theologian, nor a schoolish Barthian, for which he was too Lutheran.

In my college years already, I used a number of the essays I had to write as opportunities to work on my position with respect to war and pacifism. This continued in Seminary. I did not see pacifism, the traditional Mennonite stance, as an obvious or easy solution to the question of a Christian’s attitude to war, but I was drawn to it as the position taught and lived by Jesus and the church in the first several centuries of its existence. In College already, I wrote an essay for Dr. Heck, entitled “Is It Unchristian to Participate in War?”, arguing the affirmative view. Dr. Heck gave me an “A,” but added that I was confusing law and gospel, the natural order and the kingdom of God, the New Testament paradox that the new aeon is both here and to come, and the fact that a Christian is always both “*simul justus et peccator*” (both just and a sinner). Then he added: “But from your point of view, this is a fair treatment of the subject.” At another time, being a peaceful man himself, he formulated his acceptance of my growing conviction of pacifism in approximately these words: “There is so much overbalance in the direction of war in our time that it may be good if some people have an overbalance in the other direction.” Thus we argued and stood in some tension theologically, but with understanding and goodwill on both sides. I know that Dr. Heck would have loved to see me become a Lutheran, but he never exerted any pressure in that direction.

Dr. Heck also impressed me through his personal demeanour. Reddish-blond and balding, slightly on the tall side, and deliberate in his movements and manner of speaking, he was not particularly impressive in appearance or dynamic as a speaker. On the other hand, he was always friendly and radiated a certain calm assurance, whether in class or walking along the street followed by his faithful dog. I never saw him angry, harried, or hectically busy, even though he had an impressive publication record, served a small German Lutheran church as preacher on many Sundays, and cared faithfully for his invalid wife in later years. His calm and friendly assurance permeated his theology, too. From him I learned that “doing theology” must not only be a serious, or even a grim task, but should contain an element of playfulness. As the angels sing God’s praise, the theologians should think God’s praise. Dr. Heck’s example modelled an approach different from the ambitious, hectic, harassed, and driven mentality of so many career academics, including theologians.

To conclude this chapter, I want to mention a few books that became landmarks in my theological reading. Early in my first seminary year, Dr. Heck gave me the first volume of *Die christliche Wahrheit* (*Christian Truth*), a work in systematic theology by Lutheran theologian Paul Althaus. I understood only a fraction of what I read, but it made a deep impression on me. It helped me to realize that there was vastly more to know and explore about the Christian faith than the often simplistic and cliché-ridden formulations I was accustomed to hear, especially in Canada. That held promise for my further study. The first volume of Paul Tillich’s *Systematic Theology*, treating the nature of revelation, was extensively used in Dr. Heck’s course in Philosophy of Religion and made a similar impression on me, as did Rudolf Otto’s *The Idea of the Holy*.

Two books, very different in length, significantly shaped my understanding of the core of Christian faith: Paul Tillich’s little volume *The Courage to Be*, and Swedish theologian and bishop Anders Nygren’s extensive work *Agape and Eros*. It was of great importance for me to hear and meet Professor Nygren during his visit at Waterloo College and Seminary, although I was disappointed when he answered someone’s (not my) question concerning pacifism with a simplistic statement somewhat like this: “If wolves and sheep live together, eventually the wolves will eat the sheep, and then there will be no more sheep.” In other words, pacifism doesn’t have a chance in our world. Was he ready to

consider all non-pacifists as wolves by nature, I wondered. My version of pacifism assumed that even for those who are ready to go to war there is a capacity for peace to which one can appeal.

Reading the Church Fathers also made a strong impact on me. Since I had grown up in the Enlightenment-shaped mentality of the Western world, I assumed—with so many of my contemporaries—that history was the story of progress, and that a study of the past merely served the purpose of seeing how we had come to our more advanced and enlightened present; it was not a real search for knowledge or truth (other than in the Bible) that could still instruct us. When I read St. Augustine's *Confessions* (in College already), or Tertullian's *De Anima* (*About the Soul*), I marvelled at the brilliance of thought and the depth of insight they conveyed. And a lecture by Dr. Heick on Thomas Aquinas' proofs of the existence of God held me spellbound by that mediaeval theologian's brilliance, even though we lived in a theological-philosophical era, Neo-Orthodoxy, where proofs of God's existence did not stand high in course.

This is but a small sampling of some of the impact my naturally vastly wider reading had on me. Nor was my significant reading only in Dr. Heick's areas of teaching. I already mentioned Gerhard Gloege's work in New Testament that I reviewed for Dr. Leupold. And—while I do not remember any particularly outstanding work in the Old Testament area—these were the years when the thought of studying further in that field kept recurring to me. When I reflected in later years on why that might have been so, even if my most impressive teachers were in Systematic Theology and New Testament, I came to the conclusion that two factors were at work. First, there was the desire to search for the earliest sources of the faith, and they were not to be found in Christian theology or in the New Testament, but in the Old. Second, there must have been a certain resonance in me—a lover of geography since childhood and for years a refugee on the move—to the theme of wandering in the Old Testament. At least once I did have a valuable conversation with Dr. Bream concerning the nature and prospects of further study in Old Testament.

The account of my studies at the Seminary has considered my two years there together. Of course, there was academic progress from my first to my second year, but also a general continuity: of professors, of fellow students, of fields of study, and of atmosphere. A few special events took place during my second year. Waterloo College occupied a

new state-of-the-art building north of Willison Hall, and my German class was also relocated there. This was the first new building on campus, and it heralded the expansion that would result in two large universities within a few years.

On September 22, 1954, Mother and I received a first communication from my father after four years of silence. It was a



Looking at a letter from Father 1953, he was released again (in 1954 or 1955) and communicated freely with us through long and relatively open letters.

On March 31, 1955, Mother and I received Canadian citizenship. Five years was the minimum waiting period, but for reasons I do not remember, we had waited a little longer. One practical consequence of this event was the possibility for me to take the last of my three years of seminary study at Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Chicago; earlier I would not have received permission to enter the United States. This

telegram congratulating Mother on her birthday (September 24). We had assumed that Father's silence had been due to the Korean War and the more tense relations between East and West during that time. Later we learned, however, that Father had again been arrested, this time for communicating with us in Canada. After some time in prison in Karaganda, he had been exiled to a village in the vicinity, where he lived with a Russian family but was not allowed to leave the village or to write to us. Some time after Stalin's death in



Father in Karaganda, June 25, 1956; my parents' silver wedding date



possibility had gradually become a firm plan because I felt it necessary to do at least some of my theological study in a school of my own denomination. Our minister, Rev. Henry Epp, also nudged me in that direction. I left Waterloo Seminary with mixed feelings. In addition to leaving my now familiar context and my home church, this would be my first major geographical move (not counting my two summers in Guelph and in Brandon), involving a change of country. On the other hand, I also felt excitement and a sense of adventure.

On May 7, the seminary community had a final banquet to conclude the academic year. I was asked to give a little farewell speech. My *Schwarzes Büchlein* reports: "Alle waren sehr nett. Nachher waren wir noch bei Dr. Houser. An diesem Abend fühlte ich mich nicht als Fremder im Seminar. Meine Noten waren 'A' in allen Fächern. Dem Herrn sei Dank für alles." (Everyone was very nice. Afterwards we were at Dr. Houser's [the President's] yet. On this evening I did not feel like a stranger in the Seminary. My final grades were "A"s in all subjects. Thanks to the Lord for everything.) This entry confirms my positive memories of those two seminary years, although it also reveals the fact that I had often been aware of being a Mennonite in a Lutheran context. Neither students nor professors had ever intentionally shown me a lack of acceptance, but it was unavoidable that the Lutheran students had experiences in common, such as conferences, retreats, and festivities—in short, a whole denominational context—to which I did not belong.

For the summer, I planned to work in a mental hospital again, this time in Brandon, Manitoba. During the next academic year, I would be attending the Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Chicago, and I was looking forward to it.

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## *Seminary Student in Chicago*

After a happy summer of working in the context of an MCC unit at the Brandon Mental Hospital, I returned to Waterloo for a week of holidays. The summer had given me much new social confidence, and also a fair amount of income. Of my monthly wage of \$200, the highest I had ever earned, I had had to pay only \$25 a month for room and board. Of course, there had been incidental expenses, but most of my summer earnings would form a solid contribution to my study costs in Chicago. The rest would be amply covered, given my modest expectations, by a scholarship of \$700, granted to me by the Conference of Mennonites in Ontario. For the first time, I would be financially independent of my mother. Although I had worked away from home for three summers, the coming year would also be my first long separation from her. Mother and I had gotten along well, and I was not anxious to leave her, but at the age of 23, a young man does feel a certain excitement about setting out on his own, both socially and financially. The prospects for a year in Chicago looked good.

I took the train to Chicago in the company of Arthur Dick, a fellow Mennonite from our Waterloo church. For him, it would be the first year in seminary, and for me, my third and last. Opening chapel and registration took place on September 9, 1955, and classes began on September 12. Mennonite Biblical Seminary was located at 4614 Woodlawn Avenue between 46th and 47th Street on Chicago's South Side, some six miles south of the "Loop" or city centre. The "campus"—although that is hardly the most fitting description—consisted of a chain of five buildings on the west side of Woodlawn. From south to north they were an apartment block, two stately mansions, another apartment block, and a red brick Gothic church with an attached education wing

around the corner. Two further buildings in the vicinity also belonged to the Seminary.

The interestingly built mansions and the church were testimony to the affluent neighbourhood this had once been, while the apartment buildings gave evidence of the encroachment of cheaper and less refined



Mennonite Biblical Seminary buildings, Chicago

housing that came with a social and racial change in the neighbourhood. At this time, the area could be characterized as a semi-slum; not a real slum, like the parts a mile or so west of us, but certainly quite low class, dilapidated, and very

crowded. Closely parked cars lined every street, and most of them had bumps and scratches. At first I was surprised that so many of these were big, fine cars, if one disregarded the damages. Later I came to realize that people who live in low quality housing, but have some pride left, as well as some money, can put the latter into cars and clothes.

The population of the area was black; we at the Seminary were a white island. This changed a little further south, where the white population was retreating toward the campus of the University of Chicago while the black was advancing. Not too many years later, our area would become the spawning ground and home of the Black Panthers movement. Even now, it was a crime-ridden area, but this was still the time before racial violence along colour lines erupted in the United States. We were reticent to walk along the streets alone after dark, but during the daytime I often found myself a lone white person among blacks without feeling unsafe.

The Seminary itself was a warm and friendly living community, and I liked it from the start. In contrast to Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, where most students were young and unmarried, the students here were mostly married and some had families. There was a group of approximately a dozen or so unmarried students. Some, including me and my roommate Don Kaufman, lived in "4614," called the "Main House," because it had been the first of the buildings purchased by the

Seminary. This impressive mansion had a large and comfortably furnished living-dining room, the latter with a long table, where the single students had their meals. The residence was supervised by a host couple, C.J. (Cornelius J.) and Wilma Dyck, who would sit at the respective ends of the table and preside over the main meals. These meals were dignified but happy occasions and provided the setting for both fun and serious interaction. Our young dietician, Phyllis Mueller, cooked good meals, but doing the dishes and performing other household duties fell to us students in turn. We also washed and ironed our own laundry, a learning experience for me.

The administrative offices of the Seminary and a library were housed in the education wing of the church. The Woodlawn Mennonite Church was operated by the Seminary community and some others, such as graduate students at the University of Chicago who lived at the Seminary. During my year there, the pastor was Floyd Bartel, my fellow student in third year. It was a church with considerable outreach to the black community, especially through its Sunday school.

The Seminary had opened its doors in September of 1945 under the presidency of Dr. A. Warkentin. After his death two years later, Dr. S. F. Pannabecker became President. Academically, Mennonite Biblical Seminary was affiliated with Bethany Biblical Seminary, an institution operated by the Church of the Brethren, an "historic peace church" like the Mennonites. For instructional purposes, the two faculties and student bodies became one, but the degrees were conferred by Bethany. Instruction took place at the Bethany campus at 3435 West Van Buren Street, approximately three miles west of the Loop. We Mennonite students took our Seminary school bus to Bethany in the morning, and returned with it in the late afternoon. If someone missed the bus, he or she had to negotiate the distance of nine or ten miles by taking the "L," that is, the Elevated Railroad, Chicago's rapid transit system, and then a city bus.

When I set out for Chicago, I had three aims in mind. Of course, I wanted to finish my last seminary year successfully and graduate with the B.D. (Bachelor of Divinity) degree. Having spent four years in very intense and single-minded concentration on the academic side of my life, however, I consciously decided to give less exclusive priority to my studies this year and devote more attention to my social life. Finally, I wanted to get to know Chicago, both its glory and its problems. When the academic year was over, I had achieved all three of these goals to a

considerable degree. Of course, the last two aims were mostly intertwined since I interacted with my social community largely by encountering the city in the company of my fellow seminarians.

The setting of the Seminary community was ready-made for expanding my social contacts. The meals and the life together in the Main House provided daily interaction. In my roommate, Don Kaufman, and our next door neighbour, James Waltner, as well as the others who not only came for meals but also lived in the Main House, I found immediate fellowship at all times. However, there were also many occasions of interacting with other members of our community. Some of those were formally structured, like the Wednesday night prayer meetings. Others were of the “Who-wants-to-go-downtown-and . . .?” variety. There were always some people planning some things, be they cultural, religious, or entertaining.

I also received many invitations for meals from resident faculty members and from married students. This was partly due to a general spirit of hospitality, but it also had another reason. I evoked special interest because I was born in the Soviet Union and had experienced World War II. In Canada, that was nothing special, since many immigrants had arrived after the war. In the United States, however, there had been very little recent immigration from Europe, and coming from the other side of the Iron Curtain was almost like coming from another planet. Again and again I had to tell my story, not only in private settings, but also in several churches and in the Bethany Seminary chapel.

When I read my *Schwarzes Büchlein* now, I marvel at the many special events I attended. Some of them were musical. At Orchestra Hall I heard the *Obernkirchener Kinderchor* (Obernkirchen Children’s Choir) from Germany, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, and the Robert Shaw Chorale; at the Moody Bible Institute’s Torrey-Gray Auditorium, Handel’s *Messiah*; at Bethany Chapel, the black singer Rosa Page Welch. I attended at least three theatre performances: *Hamlet* at the University of Chicago, as well as a play by Tolstoy and another by Zuckmeyer. I visited various places of interest, among them the Oriental Institute Museum at the University of Chicago, the Museum of Science and Industry, the Bahai Temple, and a synagogue.

Several times I heard famous speakers at the Chicago Sunday Evening Club, for example, E. Stanley Jones, “Apostle to India” and collaborator with Mahatma Ghandi, and the Quaker theologian and

author Elton Trueblood. Sometimes I accompanied C.J. Dyck to his graduate classes at the University of Chicago where I heard prominent scholars such as the church historians Jaroslav Pelikan and James Hastings Nicholls, as well as the Old Testament scholar Coert Rylaarsdam. Special speakers I heard there were ethicist H. Richard Niebuhr, Dutch theologian Hendrik Kraemer, and German theologian Helmut Thielicke. I also went to hear Old Testament scholar Frank Moore Cross (my professor years later) lecture on the Dead Sea Scrolls, but the large auditorium was so crowded I could not get in. There were also other events, and I did not have to go to any of them alone; there were always one or more others who went along or who took me along.

I did not only pursue my enjoyment and my interests, however. I preached in several churches: in Summerfield, Illinois, close to St. Louis; in Carlock, Illinois; in Goshen, Indiana; and in our own Woodlawn Church. When the community of Summerfield and the Mennonite church there were hit by a tornado, I went with other students to help with the clean-up. Other church- or Seminary-related events included an opening retreat at pleasant Camp Friedenswald; a retreat at Palos Park, where Professor Lawrence Burkholder of Goshen College spoke movingly on "Christ and Human Suffering;" and an interesting International Students' Conference at Goshen College, attended by participants from some 20 countries.

During this year, I also made two longer trips. For the Thanksgiving holidays, Don Kaufman took me along to his home in Freeman, South Dakota. It was a long train trip from Chicago's impressive Union Station into the snowy and flat American Mid-West. I had always been fascinated by railroads and train travel. The week in Freeman was enjoyable as Don introduced me to family members and to the farm setting from which he came. From there, several young people, including Don and me, drove by car to Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas. I had heard much of this Mennonite centre and was glad for the chance to see the College, as well as the headquarters of the General Conference Mennonite Church in adjacent Newton. We sat in on several classes taught by Don's former professors. In one discussion round I met Edmund G. Kaufmann, former President of Bethel College, and John Howard Yoder, a young but ascending theological star in the Mennonite world. The Santa Fe Railroad took us back to Chicago.

The other trip took me home to Waterloo together with Arthur Dick. I spent a week there, including a traditional Christmas at the home

of Hardy and Anna. Of course, I was glad to see Mother again. On New Year's Eve the youth group in church had a party, and I went to it. There a strange feeling came over me. Although I had become an active participant in the youth group in my last year in Waterloo and had lost some of my shyness and sense of isolation, these very feelings were suddenly there again. I stood around, felt tongue-tied and alone, and eventually left before the evening was over. On the way back to Chicago, Arthur Dick remarked that he had seen me change into my old withdrawn manner that evening, and he was noticing during the train ride, how I gradually loosened up and became my freer "Chicago self" again. Apparently the impact of the lonely years had not left me altogether. In spring, Mother came to Chicago for a week, and I introduced her to the Seminary community and showed her some of the city.

My aim to get to know Chicago not only pertained to its cultural and other greatness but also included its problems. For that, there was also ample opportunity. The Seminary's location in a poor and decaying black neighbourhood was ready-made to introduce me to the city's gloomier aspects. Even though racial relations seemed peaceful at that time, the conditions in this neighbourhood were less than ideal. Moreover, the whole culture of black America was new and strange to me, but throughout that year I had much occasion to learn to know it better.

A phenomenon that struck me the first night after my arrival was the noise. We were located close to 47th Street and Woodlawn, a major intersection. Throughout the night there was noise; people were yelling, cars were screeching, and the howling of police, fire, and ambulance sirens never seemed to cease. Would I ever be able to sleep here? I did. I was amazed how thoroughly one gets accustomed to such noise. When I went to preach in the small community of Summerfield and stayed overnight on a lonely farm, I lay there for hours and couldn't fall asleep—it was simply too quiet!

There was much evidence of rough living and crime around the Seminary. I mentioned already that most cars seemed somehow damaged. In addition to deliberate vandalism, there was simply not enough "fender room" in this crowded area. Another problem was theft. In our introductory meetings at Seminary we were warned never to leave a briefcase or anything else in a car, locked or unlocked, day or night. We were told to always check that the door was locked behind us when we

left the house. Store windows were heavily barred. Policemen apparently never walked the streets alone. Once I saw two policemen arrest someone at gunpoint.

I witnessed the worst scene of my year only about a month after I arrived. One early morning, when I was the first to go out to our bus which was parked in the back lane, I came upon two persons who were looking down at a young black woman lying on the sidewalk. She was motionless with a big and bloody gash in her chest. She had been stabbed to death. Someone had already called the police, and neighbours were beginning to gather. It was heart-wrenching to see her little daughter running toward her mother, but someone averted her and took her back. Some of our people knew the woman. Later we were told that the murder had been committed in the context of a love triangle. In my *Schwarzes Büchlein* I note that this was already the second murder in the immediate vicinity within one month. Fortunately, it remained the only such event I witnessed.

Also close to the beginning of the school year, I had another and very different experience in the context of black people. We had heard of the mass meetings at the Church of the Deliverance which was located several blocks west of the Seminary, and some of us students decided to attend a service there on a Sunday evening. The walk would have been scary, if there had not been five or six of us. The large, low hall was crowded. Somewhere I heard that it held about 2000 people. It looked like a sea of heads and, as far as I could tell, ours were the only white ones. A choir of about 200 white-robed singers, accompanied by two pianos, sang spirituals. I think the preacher—or was it the worship leader?—was a woman. Excitement rose and intensified. Some people jumped up and raised their hands, while shouts of “Halleluiah!!” and other exclamations fanned the ecstatic atmosphere. Someone—or were there several?—fainted, but ushers were immediately at hand to help. I remember neither positive nor negative feelings; it was all just strange, very strange, but it offered a striking sample of black spirituality. However exotic it seemed to me, it was a counterbalance to the crime and decay evident in the area.

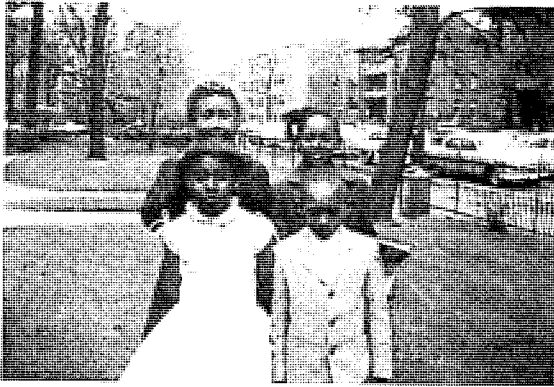
Another form of experiencing black life, culture, and faith opened up to me when I began teaching a Sunday school class of some 15 black eight-year-old children in our Woodlawn Mennonite Church. The Seminary required some practical work experience of all students, and I opted for teaching since I had done some Sunday school teaching in



Waterloo. Well, my previous experience proved only minimally helpful in this totally different setting, but teaching this class became a good, and certainly a learning experience for me. I hope it was that also for the children.

The church, through its services and events and particularly through the Sunday school, was one major avenue for the Seminary community to interact with the surrounding population. The Sunday school was large and growing. I still have the minutes of one meeting where we discussed how to cope with the growing numbers of children. Should we set a limit and send the overflow to other churches? Or extend the facilities? It was a problem many Sunday schools throughout our churches today would wish to have! Why was this so? First, some parents, mostly single mothers, were devout people and wanted their children to “get some religion.” Another reason was the fact that Sunday school brought interesting diversion into the lives of these children, who grew up in a crowded area, living in shabby apartments and playing outside between cars, brick, cement, and asphalt with very little open space, not to mention green space. (The Seminary’s fenced-in lawn just south of the Main House was open for community children with adult supervision at certain hours each day—another outreach effort.)

After my description of the area, one might expect the Sunday school children to look like ragamuffins, but far from it! They came dressed in their Sunday best, the boys often in white shirts and the girls in pretty dresses and little hats. For special occasions the boys would wear suits and felt hats, like little men, and on Mother’s Day all children wore a flower on their dresses or lapels. I have a photo from a Christmas



Four of my Sunday School pupils

pageant where the black angels with haloes, wings, and white dresses look truly angelic. (The adults who came to church were equally well dressed.) This was not the daily appearance of the children on the streets, of course, and if some child in ragged clothes would call to me

“Hello, Teacher!” I knew it was someone from my class, but it was impossible to recognize who it was.

Recognizing my pupils could be a real problem in class, too, and it took me some time before I could associate the right names with the, to me at least, identical black faces with gleaming white teeth and a head of kinky curls. Experienced teachers told me that black people had no such problems, because they looked for features we were not accustomed to observe, mostly for the precise differences in shade of skin colour, while to us they all looked simply “black.”

We teachers visited some of the homes of our pupils. For greater safety, we paired up to do this; my partner was usually another Canadian, Ray Reimer. When we rang the doorbell of a long apartment block of three or four storeys, a voice would cautiously ask who it was. When we identified ourselves as the Sunday school teachers of their children, however, we were always gladly admitted. Then we walked through long and poorly lit corridors until we reached the right door. The apartment was usually small and crowded. In some instances, the father may have been at work, but often we encountered single-mother families. We heard various life stories, some of brave attempts to provide a good upbringing for the child or children under difficult conditions. Once we were asked to wait in the front room while my pupil, a girl, searched a stuffed and crowded closet for a dress for her mother, who was waiting next door. So this was the source of the pretty clothes we often saw on Sunday! The visits were instructive for us, and they created a connection to at least some of the children—we could not possibly visit all—that extended beyond the one-hour class on Sunday.

Whatever curriculum we used, I had to adapt it considerably to what was possible to achieve. Take for example, Jesus’ Parable of the Sower and the Fourfold Soil. Would these children, far away from any farm experience, know what seed was? I doubted it. For demonstration purposes, and in the absence of any wheat grains or the like, I brought some kernels of corn to class. Could these grow, I asked the children. Several nodded. What would they need to grow, I asked further, expecting to hear soil, moisture, warmth, or the like. Several shouted out immediately and without prompting each other: “Butter and salt!” Butter and salt! Ah, popcorn! How does one teach stories from an agricultural biblical setting to these children?

A more profound problem arose when I wanted to teach them the Lord’s Prayer. “Our Father . . .” But wait! Many of them were growing up

without fathers, and others had fathers that would hardly do as examples of someone who reflected the nature of the biblical God. It was refreshing that the children were quite open with their questions, and not accustomed to well-worn traditional answers. For example, "Teacher (they never used my name), how can Jesus be the son of God and also the son of Mary and Joseph?" "Teacher, who made the devil?" My seminary theology was often sorely tested. Perhaps, however, I trusted them too little? Once I heard Joan Enz, wife of Professor Jacob J. Enz and an experienced teacher in that setting, rehearse the names of the Books of Moses with her not-much-older class: "Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy." Later I asked her whether these were not too long and difficult terms. She turned to me in her vivacious manner, eyes sparkling: "Too long? You should hear the swear words they can learn! Why not the biblical terms, then?!"

The neatness of Sunday dress, described earlier, stood in no relation to what I understood as good behaviour. The children were nice and likeable, and I remember no behaviour that was deliberately malicious. But they were lively and uninhibited, and that not only in their questioning. For a while, discipline seemed not to be a great problem, but as the children grew more accustomed to me and the class, their liveliness tended to take over. Grabbing for crayons, speaking when not called upon, and other disturbances increased. For some time, good Sundays and bad Sundays alternated, but eventually I sensed that I was losing control. This came to a head when one of the boys tilted his chair back so far that he fell over and landed in the adjacent class, which was separated from ours by only a curtain.

I realized that either something had to change or I had to quit. I decided on the former, and some time after Christmas I carried through my "reformation." I announced that from now on things would be different, and I "laid down the law." First, from now on, if you want to say something, you must raise your hand. Second, you may take only one crayon at a time. Third, you may not tilt back your chair. And a few more. If you break a rule, I will warn you once. If you break one again, I will warn you a second time. If you do it a third time, you will leave the class. To be sent out of class was a severe punishment because being in Sunday school was a treat in the drab life of the children. While I was still speaking, someone did one of the forbidden things. I immediately interrupted my speech and told him or her, "This is the first time I warn you." Given my Lutheran emphasis on grace, I felt somewhat guilty to

take this legalistic approach, but it worked. The rest of the class period went smoothly and orderly, and the children liked it. After class, one girl beamed at me and said: "Teacher, wasn't it nice and quiet?"

Classes went well from then to the end of the school year. Although there were some infractions, I didn't have to send anyone from class. For the last two months, I dispensed with the curriculum and focused on the Lord's Prayer. I reasoned that the children should take at least one thing from this class that would not be easily forgotten, but would be a help to them in later life. I hope that somewhere there may still be a member of that class who is praying the Lord's Prayer!

It has taken me a long time to come to the topic of my studies. When I came to Chicago, I had resolved not to focus single-mindedly on academics, but also to engage in social life and to get to know the city. This I did, *but* I also studied. Again as in Waterloo, I appreciated all my teachers, although naturally some made a greater impact on me than others. Among these, the President, Dr. S. F. Pannabecker, and the Old Testament Professor, Jacob J. Enz, must be singled out.

Dr. Pannabecker taught History and Missions. After some time as a college lecturer in chemistry, he had spent many years in China as a missionary. His background in science, I believe, injected a certain precision and sobriety into the teaching of his subjects. He transformed my understanding of missions. After some enthusiasm for mission work as early as my Scheinfeld years, I had come to regard it as an effort that tended to be a matter for dreamers and enthusiasts, very pious but lacking solid substance. Dr. Pannabecker modelled and taught something very different, and I gained a new respect for the dedication, but also the thoroughness and depth of thought that marked our Conference's approach to missions.

Professor Enz, still in his doctoral program at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore and a student of W. F. Albright, the famous archaeologist and linguist, attracted me also by his thoroughness and competence. Added to that was my growing inclination to work further in the field of Old Testament. I appreciated Jake Enz's thoughtful lectures, and I was the only Mennonite student who, together with one Church of the Brethren student, studied Advanced Hebrew with him that year. Jake and I became friends in the process, and remained so until his death.

One of the many stimulating aspects that Jake Enz contributed to my Chicago experience was to steer to me a request from the *Mennonite*

*Weekly Review* for a longer article on the Dead Sea Scrolls, a topic that elicited widespread interest at that time. I accepted, and I needed some pictures for the article. At Jake's suggestion, we visited Professor G. Ernest Wright, professor at McCormick Seminary and editor of the journal *Biblical Archaeologist*. He graciously provided pictorial material. Unknown to me then, this was my introduction to the man who would become my *Doktorvater* (Ph.D. thesis adviser) at Harvard some years later.

Professor Donovan Smucker was my teacher in Christian Ethics and Anabaptist Theology. He was an interesting teacher and a popular lecturer at conferences. I learned much from him, but at many points was also critical of him; at least partly because it was in his teaching areas where I struggled with the tensions between my Lutheran background and the current Anabaptist-Mennonite theological trends which were shaped by Harold S. Bender's classic formulation of *The Anabaptist Vision*. It is interesting to compare Dr. Heck's comment on one of my essays advocating Christian pacifism that concluded with the remark quoted earlier: "But from your [Mennonite] point of view, this is a fair statement of the subject" with Professor Smucker's note on a paper: "You are obviously a convinced Anabaptist-Lutheran, with the latter more than the former." Both professors were tolerant and understanding, and both gave me a grade of "A." This anecdotal comparison may illustrate the struggle within me at that time. Once I asked Dr. Pannabecker



Mennonite Seminary grads of 1956, four of them Canadians: Ramon Jantz (first from left), David Schroeder (second), I (fourth), Menno Bergen (tenth)

whether it was possible to be a Mennonite but not an Anabaptist. After a thoughtful silence, he said: "Yes, I think it is." That gave me assurance that I could work in the Mennonite church even with my many reservations toward, though not total rejection of, the growing enthusiasm of younger Mennonite theologians for the rediscovery of sixteenth-century Anabaptism.

I would be remiss in not mentioning Professor Jesse Ziegler of the Bethany faculty, who taught psychology-related subjects, such as Psychology of Youth Work, Pastoral Counselling, and Mental Hygiene. Dr. Ziegler was a well-qualified psychologist, and his courses helped me to bring order and some depth into the experiences and insights gained in my work in mental hospitals. However, this was the era when psychology began to fascinate the clergy, and when many ministers understood their role in spiritual care as analogous to that of the medical doctor or the clinical psychologist. Carl Rogers's "non-directive" or "client-centred" counselling seemed a particularly appropriate model for the pastor. Dr. Ziegler himself was certainly not simplistic in relating psychology and counselling to Christian ministry, yet the widespread but inappropriate "baptizing" of psychological notions and views of human nature by equating them with theological concepts (for example, Freud's super-ego with conscience) had not yet received the critical scrutiny found in the better works on the subject today. Without being in a position to critique some of the trends effectively, I did express my unease in this area. This resulted in some tension between Dr. Ziegler and me, together with goodwill and mutual appreciation.

All in all, I had experienced a good year of learning when graduation time came and, when the degrees were conferred at Bethany Seminary, I was one of two students of a class of approximately 60 students to graduate *magna cum laude* (with great distinction). Ten of these graduates were Mennonites, and four of the latter, including myself, were Canadians. Various social celebrations accompanied the formal graduation ceremonies: a banquet, a "grad skip" for a supper in a restaurant in Chinatown, followed by attending the Ice Capades, and many farewells of all sorts.

It was my last year of seminary studies, and I had to think practically about my future. With my election, by our Waterloo church, to the status of a ministerial candidate, the thought of becoming a minister did hold some attraction for me by now. There were difficulties, however. I was single and very young. At that time, our Mennonite conferences

generally did not call unmarried persons to the ministry, although there were exceptions to the rule. Further, I did not feel ready for a full-time pastoral position, not to mention the fact that most of our Canadian churches relied on lay ministers rather than paid pastors, while I had to find some work that would earn me a living. Teaching would be a different matter.

Thus, early in fall already, I wrote a letter to Rev. J. J. Thiessen, Chairman of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada as well as of the Board of Directors of Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC). I inquired generally about employment possibilities and, more specifically, whether there might be a teaching position for me at CMBC, the Conference's fledgling theological college. Developments took their time, but eventually I received a letter dated January 20, 1956, in which Rev. Thiessen informed me that the College Board, at its sessions on January 9 and 10, had decided to employ me, provided we could agree on details. My salary would be \$2700 per year. He also asked for a statement regarding my Christian faith. It was not a detailed and legalistic examination; all the Board wanted was reasonable assurance that I held to the Christian faith and was in sympathy with the historical Mennonite emphases. I had no problem providing an acceptable answer.

Rev. Thiessen also informed me that Dr. I. I. Friesen, President of the College, would be in Chicago for a conference, and that I should meet him at the Atlantic Hotel to discuss possible teaching areas. That meeting took place in a somewhat stiff and formal manner, as neither Dr. Friesen nor I was at ease with each other. But we did reach some understandings, and he sent me a follow-up letter outlining a proposed list of courses for me to teach. Later in the year, I also met Rev. Thiessen, whom I had come to know during some of his visits to Waterloo already, for a pleasant visit at the same hotel. Thus I became one of the few Mennonite graduates of the Seminary whose future plans had been formalized before graduation.

When I first announced my appointment to the students at the table in the Main House, they expressed considerable surprise. Yes, I was a good student, but I was so young, unknown in most Mennonite circles, and unfamiliar with Canadian Mennonite church practices and issues. Why would they choose *me*? I myself was somewhat surprised, but as the deliberations took their course, I noticed a recurrent theme: my knowledge of German. Mennonites in our increasingly bilingual Conference in Canada had almost no younger persons who had

theological education at the seminary level *and* proficiency in German. I had the advantage of speaking a fluent and grammatically correct German, together with at least some experience in teaching it. Some of my fellow Canadians at the Seminary, among them David Schroeder, who would become my colleague at CMBC a few years later, and C. J. Dyck, who became a well-known Mennonite historian, helpfully introduced me to situations and issues in the Conference of Mennonites in Canada that, in their opinion, were imperative for me to know in order to survive in my new position.

Was it a difficult decision for me to accept the call to CMBC? It certainly would have been if I had known that I was setting out on a road which I would leave only with my retirement 46 years later! No such thought entered my mind at that time. Instead, I thought that a year or two of teaching could not hurt, and after that I would see about the next step. I was also influenced by an address by President J. Ray Houser of Waterloo Lutheran Seminary in which he had counselled new seminary graduates not to be too choosy about the call they accepted after graduation; perhaps it would be best to accept the first invitation that came their way. Naïve or not, that is what I did and, for the time being, I was happy. Eight years after coming to Canada as an immigrant, I had received a solid education, and my life—at least for now—had found direction. I was thankful to the people who had shown confidence in me along the way, and to God.

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## *Postscript*

A book of memoirs is always an unfinished work because its author is still living while it is being written. To conclude mine with the twenty-fourth year of my life was not an altogether arbitrary decision because my first 24 years can be contrasted with my later life in several respects. First, they were the years of my childhood and youth, as compared to my adulthood. Of course, the end of youth is hard to define, but vocational and financial independence may be among the valid criteria. Second, they were my private years, after which I entered the public arena of a college teacher, albeit in a small public sphere: the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. Third, they were the years of moving from place to place. At the age of 24, I moved to Winnipeg, where I am still living. Finally, they were my years as a refugee, marked by a series of escapes. The first two parts of my Memoirs are clearly demarcated by an escape: the first from the Soviet Union, and the second from Soviet-occupied East Germany. The end of the third part, my emigration from Europe to Canada, can also be considered as an escape if seen against the background of our intense and fearful anticipation of a Third World War in which the Soviet Union would overrun Western Europe. The fourth part may not fit the pattern of a sub-plot ending with an escape, and yet, the change away from a refugee mentality is also an escape of sorts.

A Memoir is not a novel. The division of my story into its four parts was not an author's projection of a plot; it emerged slowly as I traced my story, guided by my memories. While a certain amount of retrospective interpretation is unavoidable, I tried to recall as accurately as possible—and with the help of my two companions, the *Braunes Büchlein* and the *Schwarzes Büchlein*—the events as I saw them then, as well as the feelings that accompanied them.

In contrast to the expectations of a novel, the themes that emerged in the writing do not come to a satisfactory conclusion. At the end of these Memoirs the reader is not expected to put the book away with a certain satisfaction, whether it be of the happy-ending type or any other kind.

Nor is the openendedness of the conclusion meant to tantalize the reader into projecting possible continuations, as modern literature likes to do. For these reasons, I have no interest in keeping the reader in a mode of suspense, wondering what happened further on in my life and the lives of those who were prominent in my story. When I told some of my story to others or showed them portions of this manuscript, I was usually asked questions like: "Did you ever see your father again?" "Did you ever revisit the Ukraine?" "Do you still speak Russian?" "What happened to your mother?" Therefore, as a matter of satisfying my readers as much as possible, I will summarize briefly the events of my later life and make a few relevant comments on the other main characters in my story.

*My Later Life.* After I moved to Winnipeg in 1956, I remained in the employ of Canadian Mennonite Bible College (eventually merged into the Canadian Mennonite University) until my retirement. I taught in various areas but, after further graduate studies, my specialty became the field of Old Testament with German as a minor field, but one also very important to me. I retired from full-time teaching in 1997 as Professor Emeritus of Old Testament, and from five more years of one-third time teaching in 2002. From 1959-1978, interrupted by periods of leave for graduate study, I was Registrar and then Academic Dean. I completed the degrees of M.A. (German, 1961; University of Manitoba); Th.M. (Old Testament, 1963; Harvard Divinity School); and Ph.D. (Near Eastern Languages and Literatures, 1969; Harvard University). In an adjunct capacity, I also taught various courses at the University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg, lectured and preached in many locations, and was able to write several books and many articles. My greatest satisfaction, however, always came from my encounter with students in and outside of the classroom.

In 1960, I was married to Mary (Warkentin) of Langley, British Columbia. We have enjoyed a very harmonious and happy marriage and have raised three children: Martin, Hildi, and Edwin. In the year of our marriage we joined First Mennonite Church of Winnipeg, where I was formally ordained to the ministry in 1978, although I preached frequently in our church and elsewhere ever since coming to Winnipeg.

In 1975, we took a three-week trip to Europe, for me the first return after 27 years, and for Mary a first visit. Scheinfeld and its surrounding area were among the places we visited. Since that time, I have made many trips to Europe, most of them together with Mary. These included

several visits to Scheinfeld and to former friends of that time, although all of them have moved away from there. Our visits have also included a trip to Ludwigslust-Techentin but none to Konitz.

I am often asked whether I have revisited the Ukraine, as so many Mennonites have done since it became possible. When I answer in the negative, many are surprised and wonder why I have not done so. Some factors were financial and circumstantial, but the main reasons have to do with complex emotions. As my Memoirs testify, I had many good childhood experiences there in addition to the negative ones. I do not deny my origin, and I follow events and developments in the former Soviet Union with interest and concern. I still speak Russian in a limited way. However, I do not share the nostalgia for that land which moves many Mennonites to revisit it, nor the inner need to search for my roots there. Perhaps it is because of the fact that I was already uprooted, together with my parents, long before Mother and I fled the Ukraine. Perhaps it is because my years in Germany shaped my life deeply and became more track-setting for my later life than my earlier childhood years, although that is difficult to determine.

*My Father.* We never saw my father again. After his release from his second exile in 1954 or 1955, he lived with his sister, my Tante Ira, and her son Walter(lein). We carried on an extensive correspondence with him. He also began to preach again. He applied repeatedly for permission to leave the Soviet Union, but his applications were always denied. We received permission from Canada for him to join us here, but that had little meaning in view of the Soviet refusals. He died in Karaganda on May 15, 1957, shortly after he was struck by a truck while crossing the street on the way to the post office to mail a letter to us.

*My Mother.* Mother joined me in Winnipeg in 1957. She found work in the laboratory of the Winnipeg General Hospital (now Health Sciences Centre), where she worked until her retirement in 1970. Late in her career she achieved certification as a Certified Laboratory Technologist (in Cytology). For nine years after my marriage to Mary, Mother lived with us, enjoying and spoiling the oldest two grandchildren. When our youngest son was born, she moved into her own little house where she lived for ten years. Then she moved to Autumn House, an apartment block for seniors. She was active in First Mennonite Church, her spiritual home and the centre of much of her social life. Soon after her retirement she visited Tante Ira and Walter near Berlin where they had moved in 1970. She also carried on an

extensive correspondence with her relatives in the Soviet Union, but did not live to see them when most of them moved to Germany. Because of increasing memory loss and other incapacitation, she had to be moved to Bethania Mennonite Personal Care Home, where she spent her last three-and-a-half years—always friendly and content—in the loving care of the staff. She died on February 12, 2001 at the age of 95 years.

*My Paternal Relatives.* My paternal grandmother, Susanne (Friesen) Janzen, Tante Ira, and Walter(lein) were deported from Melitopol to Kasakhstan when the German armies approached. There they lived under very primitive and difficult conditions to which Grandmother succumbed in 1943. Tante Ira was drafted into the *Trud Army*, a forced-labour brigade, so that Walter was left alone. After incredible hardships they eventually got together in Karaganda where my father found and joined them. Walter worked as a mechanic in a factory. He married Sigi (Sigrid) Rempel. In 1970 they, their children Peter and Olga, and Tante Ira, together with Sigi's parents and sister, were able to move to the DDR (German Democratic Republic; East Germany). They settled in Petershagen near Berlin, where they still live with their daughter Olga, and close to their son Peter with his wife Bärbel and their two children, Alexander and Antje. Tante Ira died in 1982. Mary and I visited there for the first time in 1992, 51 years after Walter and I had parted ways in Melitopol. We have been there a number of times, and Walter has visited us in Winnipeg once. We are staying in touch.

*My Maternal Relatives.* Grandmother Anna Dueck, Onkel Dietrich (Mitja) and Tante Gredel with son Heinz, and Tante Karin and Onkel Peter (Petja) with Helene (Lena) and Eduard, were exiled from Pyatigorsk, Caucasus, to various locations in Siberia in 1941, after the war with Germany had begun. The men spent time in concentration camps. Conditions were difficult, and Grandmother died in 1964. Onkel Heinz had been exiled earlier and died in concentration camp in 1942, leaving his young family, Tante Frieda and their son Victor (Vitja).

My mother corresponded with Tante Karin and her family. Onkel Mitja was reticent to write. In 1993, Tante Karin, in fragile health already, came to Germany with her daughter Helene and her husband Eduard Penner, as well as their daughter Irene with husband and children. Tante Karin died a few weeks after their arrival in Germany. The others settled in Dillenburg where Mary and I have been to see them on two occasions. My mother was too incapacitated by that time to visit her sister and relatives.

Tante Frieda, her second husband, Jakob Derksen, and their son Waldemar with family came to Neuss, Germany. Her son Victor, with his wife Nelly and their four children, Hermann, Helene, Elly, and Waldemar, also immigrated to Germany. After a short stay in Espelkamp, they settled in Schweinfurt, where Mary and I have visited them several times.

We have lost all contact with Onkel Mitja's family, but we know that he has died.

*Karin Dueck*, cousin to my mother, with her daughter Heidi, immigrated to Canada shortly after we did and settled in Virgil, Ontario. We exchanged many visits until Karin's death in 1999. Now we continue contacts with Heidi (Reimer) and her family.

*The Froeses*. Tante Froese, Tante Mariechen, Tante Lyda, Gerd, and Edgar came to Canada shortly after we did, stayed with relatives on farms in Saskatchewan for a short time, and then moved to Saskatoon. Tante Froese died after a few years. Tante Lyda married a widower, David Lepp, the father-in-law of her son Gerd, who had married Mr. Lepp's daughter Erica. Gerd studied in Saskatoon and in London, Ontario, earning a Ph.D. in Biophysics. He and Erica, with their three children, soon moved to Winnipeg where he was employed by the Health Sciences Centre until his retirement. Gerd and Erica joined our church, and we stayed in contact with them both there and socially. After his retirement, and some time after Erica's death, Gerd married Edith Schlierf, a friend from his years in Burghaslach near Scheinfeld. She moved to Winnipeg, and they had eleven years of a happy marriage until Gerd died in 2004. During those years, Mary and I had frequent social contact with them, and I had the pleasure of reminiscing with someone who knew the Scheinfeld area. Edith has moved back to Germany, but we are staying in contact with her.

Mother stayed in touch with Tante Mariechen and Tante Lyda in Saskatoon. After the death of Tante Lyda's husband, David Lepp, they moved to Winnipeg and joined my mother in Autumn House. Tante Lyda died in 1982. Tante Mariechen and Mother spent their last years in Bethania Mennonite Personal Care Home, where Tante Mariechen died in 1999 at the age of almost 98 years.

Edgar, like his older brother Gerd, studied in Saskatoon. Eventually he earned a Ph.D. in Geology at Queen's University, Kingston, and was employed by the Geological Survey of Canada in Ottawa, where he and his wife Shirley still live, now in retirement. We see each other, usually in

Winnipeg, but sometimes in Ottawa, once or twice a year and keep in touch otherwise also.

*Other Chortitza Friends and Acquaintances.* We lost contact with Tante Epp I, but Tante Epp II (Agnes Epp) and her daughter Agnes and stepdaughter Tina immigrated to Saskatchewan. I visited Tante Epp and Agnes in Saskatoon in the summer of 1955.

Most of the members of the Sudermann family settled in Winnipeg. We have been in contact with them, mainly through our common church, the First Mennonite Church of Winnipeg.

Mr. and Mrs. Hiersack, who lived in Gleissenberg during our refugee years in Wasserberndorf and Scheinfeld and who belonged to our Chortitza friends there, have died, but their daughter Elfi married Arthur Kroeger from Chortitza, who also came to the Gleissenberg area. They too live in Winnipeg and we relate to them through our common church.

*Frau Ruth Schepler* and Mother carried on a correspondence for many years. In 1992, Mary and I visited her briefly in her home in Techentin. When Mother died, I wrote to Frau Schepler to share the details and thanked her once more for all she had done for Mother and me in those difficult times in the past. She replied with a kind letter.

*Dr. Georg Nickl* wrote us a few letters. He died in 1956. Mary and I visited his grave in Scheinfeld. Whenever we mentioned his name to people there, they spoke fondly of him. We also knocked at the door of the Pfarrhaus on each of our later visits in Scheinfeld, but never met anyone at home.

*Frau Pflaum* returned to Bamberg, her home town, after her brother's death. She died there in 1969.

*Michael Pflaum* studied in Munich, earned a Ph.D. in German Studies, and married Trudi Albrecht, a fellow graduate in the same field. For many years he taught in a *Gymnasium* (high school) for adults, with long intervals of service abroad, first in Tehran and then in Bangkok. In the 1980s, Michael was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, and his condition deteriorated gradually. Mary and I visited him and Trudi in Munich whenever we went to Europe. He is almost completely paralyzed now. Trudi is caring for him, and we maintain contact with and through her.

*Wilfried Wirsching* became a medical doctor, first in Munich, and then in Feuchtwangen. We were kept informed about each other via Michael. Through that channel, he invited me to visit him and Brigitte,

his wife, in Feuchtwangen, and we met again after some 30 years. The old friendship was there immediately, and I have visited with him and Brigitte several times. They have never come to Canada, but visited us in Switzerland during one of my teaching assignments there. Our contacts are continuing by letter or telephone.

*Udo Goetz* and I carried on a correspondence for many years. Some time after both of us had married and entered professional life, the correspondence gradually ceased. In recent years, Udo found me through the Internet, and we have renewed our contact. He lives in Nürnberg and is very busy as an independent consulting engineer.

*Dr. Rolf and Ruth Schmidt* left Scheinfeld soon after our departure, together with the rest of the staff of the Geographical Institute. The Schmidts made their home in Bad Godesberg just south of Bonn. They asked Mother to be the godmother for their first son, Martin. They had three further sons, all of whom now have their own families. Mother carried on a regular correspondence with the Schmidts as long as her health permitted. Then I took over. Dr. and Mrs. Schmidt have twice been to Winnipeg, and Mary and I have visited them in Bad Godesberg. Dr. Schmidt died in 2001 at the age of 85 years. We still exchange an annual Christmas letter with Mrs. Schmidt.

*Frau Dr. Marianne Sievers* also left Scheinfeld soon after we did. She became the principal of a large high school in the Ruhr district, and eventually retired to her own house in Wuppertal. Mother stayed in contact with her as long as health permitted. Then I continued the correspondence. In 1975, Mary and I accepted her invitation to stay at her home for several days during our visit to Germany. She died in 1996 at the age of 83.

*Pater Arnulf Kremer* wrote at least one letter to me in Canada. He died in Würzburg in 1972.

*Other Scheinfeld Friends and Acquaintances.* Gradually, those of our acquaintances who were also refugees left Scheinfeld for various parts of Germany, and our Chortitza friends living in the vicinity emigrated to Canada. Our school class in the Oberschule, of which I was a part up to the end of Grade 9, has celebrated a number of reunions and has stayed in loose contact until the present. I was not able to attend any of the reunions, but did send a letter each time to keep my former fellow students informed about the further course of my life. A key figure in maintaining contact has been our former *Klassensprecher* (class speaker, or class representative), Georg Konrad Becker (Geko for short), who has

continued to function as a liaison and as organizer of reunions. A major reunion took place in 1996 in connection with the school's 50th anniversary. I received a copy of a special publication which told the story of the (now much expanded) Gymnasium Scheinfeld. As told already, I have also maintained connection with Michael, Wilfried, and Edgar, and have received some information about the others through them. There have been sporadic letter exchanges between me and a few other students. Some classmates have died, but some of the small remainder held a reunion in the summer of 2006 on the occasion of the school's 60th anniversary. I could not attend, but my chapter "Our School" from these Memoirs was reprinted, in German translation, in the school's anniversary publication. Further, a summarizing article based on Part III of these Memoirs appeared in the *Fränkische Landeszeitung*. When Mary and I were able to visit Scheinfeld briefly in the fall of 2006, we were most graciously hosted by the Principal and the Vice-Principal of the Gymnasium, who showed us the school and told us about its development and program.

*My Janzen Relatives in Ontario* have remained a part of my life in Canada. Marta (Shafer), the youngest of the children of Onkel Jasch and therewith my father's cousins, has reached the age of 90 by now. Her husband, Onkel Stan, died some years ago, but she is well and lives in Waterloo. Onkel Heinz died in 1950 already, while (Tante) Liesel lived until 2003. Tante Schura and Onkel George live in Ottawa, where Mary and I visited them last in the fall of 2005. Tante Anna died in 1974 already. After some time, Onkel Hardy married Erika Klassen; they live in Waterloo. Mary and I have had many and various contacts with all of these relatives over the years. Our connection to the next generation, the children of those mentioned, has been much more sporadic. I regret this, but given the geographical distance and all our different life stories, it seems inevitable.

*Onkel Kolja and Tante Anna Dick* and we corresponded for many years. In the early years they visited us in Canada a few times, and in the summer of 1966 Mother and I paid them a visit in their home in Wernersville, Pennsylvania. Onkel Kolja died in 1973, and Tante Anna some years later. For a number of years we exchanged Christmas letters or cards with their daughters Mary and Linda, but for some time now there has been no contact between us.

*Onkel Oscar and Tante Ruth Hamm* and their children, in neighbouring Saskatchewan, were sufficiently close to us geographically



to make various visits and other contacts possible. Onkel Oscar died in 1981, and Tante Ruth in 1996. Again, as with the Janzen relatives, the contact to the next generation has become tenuous, but we keep aware of each other.

*Bill Huras* graduated from Waterloo Lutheran Seminary in 1957, became a Lutheran pastor, and eventually the Lutheran Bishop for Eastern Canada. Somehow both of us became so immersed in our own life's paths that we never met or had any contact for many years. In latter years, we have exchanged a few letters.

*Dr. Flora Roy* remained at Waterloo College (later Waterloo Lutheran University; then Wilfrid Laurier University) as head of the English department and a highly respected scholar. Recently she has published some of her experiences as *Recollections of Waterloo College* (2004). Several decades into my own teaching career, I wrote her a letter to thank her for her significant contribution to my college experience and my later development. She answered with a gracious letter.

*Dr. Otto Heick* taught at the Waterloo Lutheran Seminary until his retirement, and then continued to teach on a part-time basis for many more years. If I remember correctly, he taught his last course, Introductory Greek, in his late eighties or early nineties. I stayed in intermittent contact with him until his death in 1990 at the age of 95 years.

*Dr. Ulrich Leupold* also continued at the Seminary, but succumbed to cancer in 1970.

*Dr. Jakob J. Enz* moved to Elkhart, Indiana, in 1958 when the Mennonite Biblical Seminary relocated from Chicago to Elkhart. He completed his doctorate at Johns Hopkins University. I had many occasions to visit with him later. He died in 2001.

This overview should suffice to indicate how long-lasting relationships were formed in those early phases of my life, sometimes on the basis of family bonds, but at other times as the result of relatively brief but deeply meaningful encounters. I am grateful for them all.

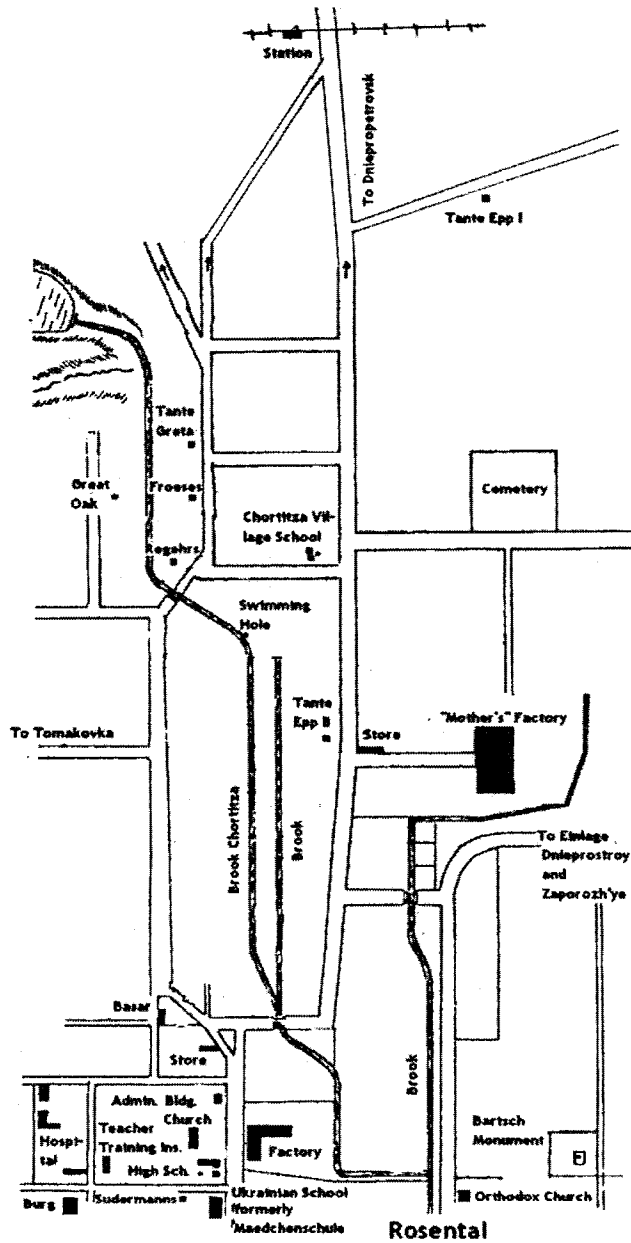


# Maps

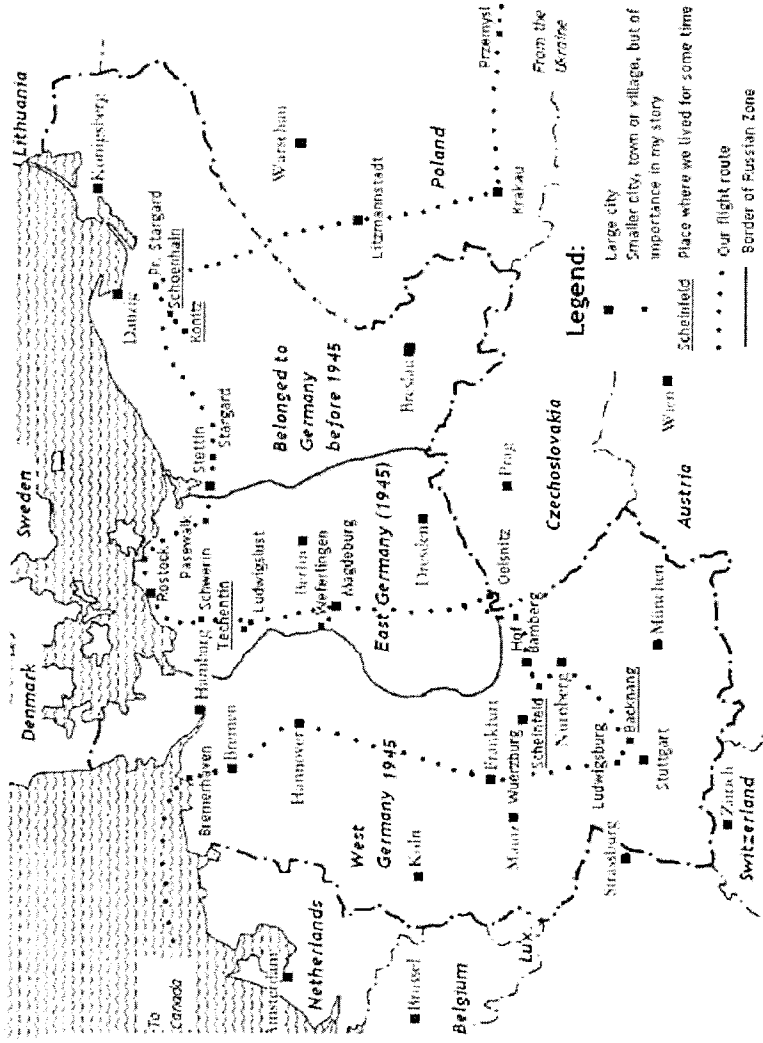




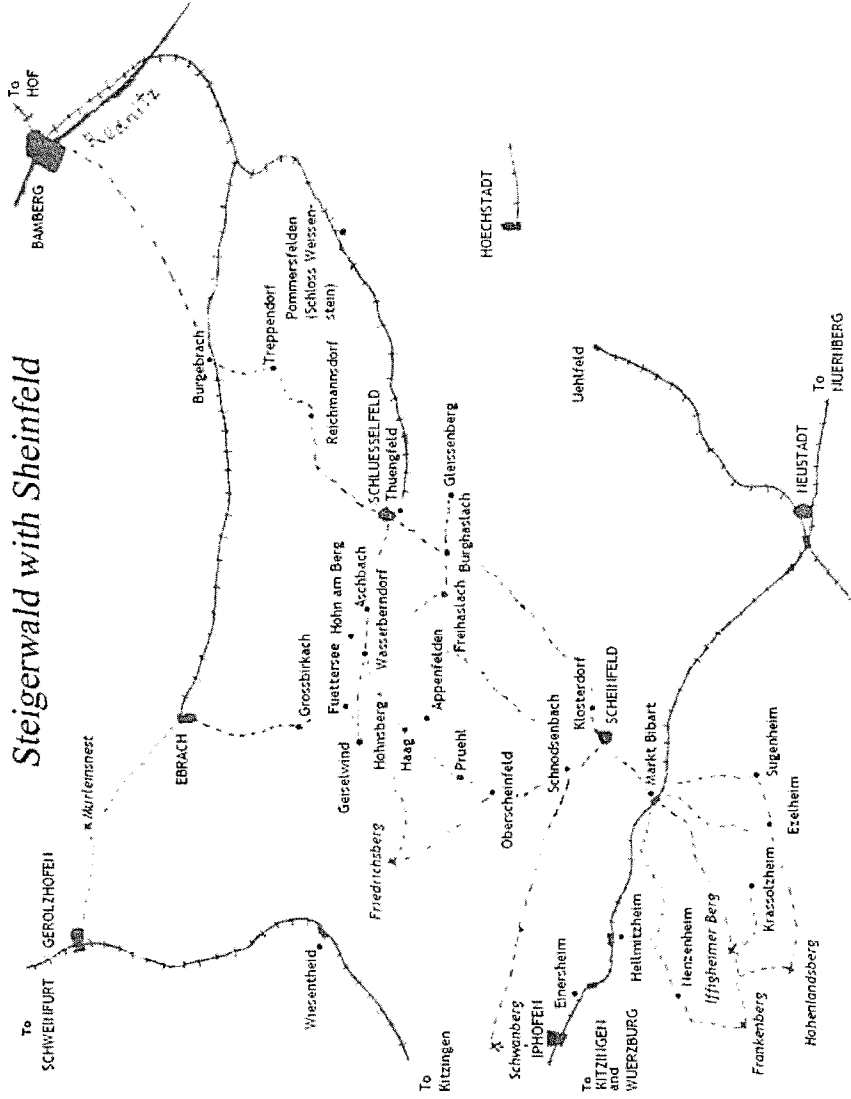
# Chortitza



# Central Europe ca. 1945

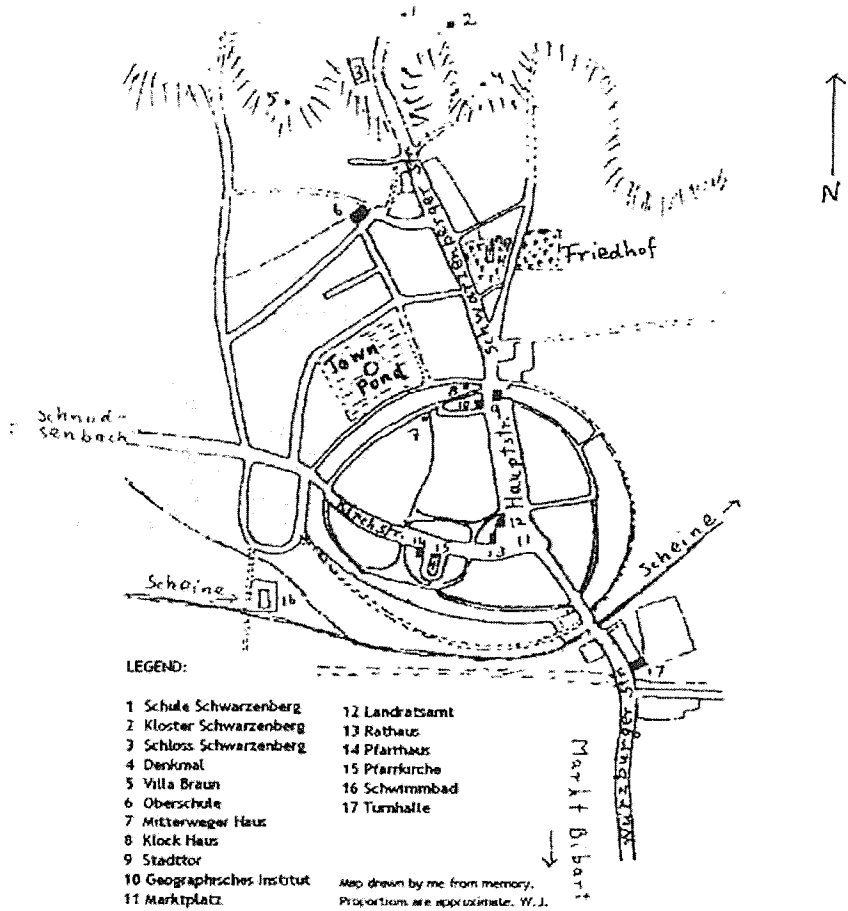


# Steigerwald with Scheinfeld

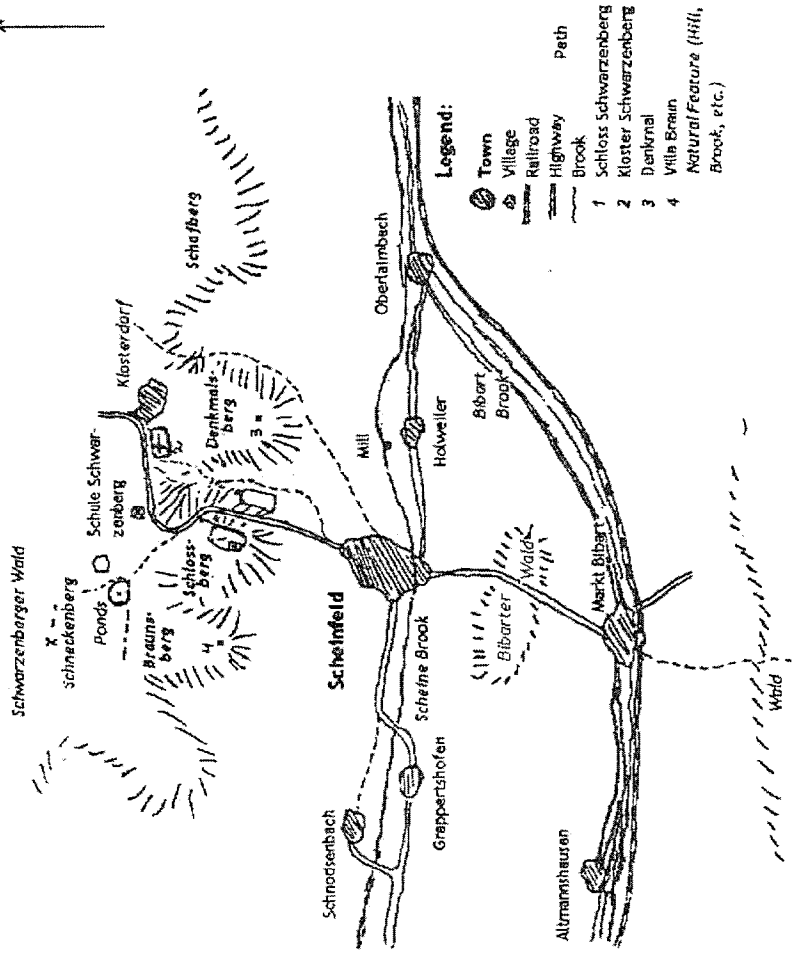




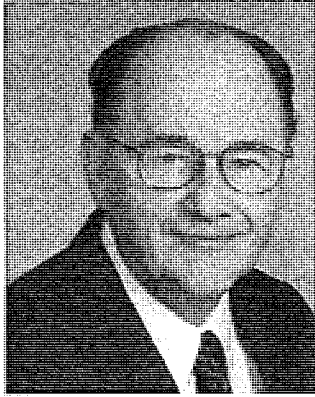
# SCHEINFELD



# SCHEINFELD AND SURROUNDINGS







Waldemar Janzen was born to German-Mennonite parents in Ukraine—then a part of the Soviet Union—in 1932. At the age of three, he lost his father to a Stalinist concentration camp. Later he, together with his mother, joined the stream of World War II refugees to the West, emigrating to Canada in 1948.

Encouraged by his mother, he pursued an academic career, earning the degrees of B.A. (University of Western Ontario); B.D. (Mennonite Biblical Seminary, then in

Chicago); M.A. (German; University of Manitoba); Th.M. (Old Testament; Harvard Divinity School), and Ph.D. (Near Eastern Languages and Literatures, Harvard University).

In 1956 he joined the faculty of the Canadian Mennonite Bible College, Winnipeg, where he taught mainly in the fields of Old Testament and German, serving also as dean for many years. In an adjunct capacity, he lectured extensively in the Universities of Manitoba and of Winnipeg, and was visiting professor and guest lecturer in several other institutions in Canada and abroad.

He is the author of several books and many articles, both scholarly and popular. Among his publications are *Mourning Cry and Woe Oracle* (BZAW; DeGruyter, 1972); *Still in the Image: Essays in Biblical Theology and Anthropology* (Faith and Life, 1982); *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Westminster/John Knox, 1994); and *Exodus* (BCBC; Herald, 2001). He derived his greatest inspiration and satisfaction, however, from teaching his students.

After many decades of full-time teaching, he retired from the Canadian Mennonite University (into which Canadian Mennonite Bible College had meanwhile merged) as Professor emeritus of Old Testament. He and his wife Mary enjoy an “active” retirement in Winnipeg. They have three adult children, Martin (in Singapore), Hildi (in Winnipeg), and Edwin (in Montreal). He continues to write and to do some preaching in his home congregation, First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, and elsewhere.