

Memories

By Ulla

What summer? The first summer memory flashing into my mind was a very sandy beach on the Baltic Sea in July 1928. I was busy filling a small bucket with water and then creating a river around a sand castle under the watchful eyes of my mother, who was more interested in digging up shells and colored pebbles (Bernstein, as she called it). Was she really looking for amber, or was she a forerunner to the “Sea Glass” association members?

We never went back to Fischerkaten, and I never found that perfect beach anywhere in the world, even while spending 20 years in Florida.

In trying to write about my life, memories come up (all from the 1920s era) with lots of snow and train travel and horses and my father. It’s like a kaleidoscope which would take me page after page to write, but how do I fit all those stories into my autobiography, which starts with my birth in Germany.

Before starting with my life, I should tell you about my parents. My father was born in Poland, of a Slovak Catholic father and a French-Russian-Jewish mother. My mother was born Germany of a father of unknown heritage (he was adopted by his father) and a Lutheran Prussian mother. They met just prior to the beginning of World War I in Berlin, Germany, and married after the end of World War I in Berlin. I am their only child.

I learned that my father had four younger siblings, but always felt that there was a certain amount of mystery to his origin. His father had been working as a forester on a large estate where his mother was governess (she spoke French, German and Russian) to a count’s children. She married in 1886 to a man who was 10 years her senior, and she was given land as a wedding present, which she later deeded solely to my father. For years, my father tried to find the truth, but all the correspondence he had with his mother has been lost. After school, my father apprenticed in the meat trade and as a journeyman went to Sweden and then to Germany, where he settled

and was caught up in World War I. My mother's father owned and operated a shoe store and shoe repair business, and he married a woman who already had a son, 10 years older than my mother.

My mother had a sister who was five years younger. Both my mother and her sister were shorter than 5 feet, but their half-brother was 6-foot-4-inches tall and belonged to the Regiment of the "Lange Maenner" in World War I and served in it with honor. This regiment had been started by Frederic the Great, a tradition the Prussian kings continued. My mother greatly admired her big brother, but she also was obsessed with wanderlust and found herself in Berlin and made her living as a sales clerk in different venues. Since she had a beautiful voice, she joined various clubs where she could display her talent and later met my father. Neither of my parents were "religious," in other words, attended any church or celebrated religious holidays or customs. My father used to say that his mother told him that because she was Jewish, he automatically was Jewish, even if he didn't practice its laws, but since my mother wasn't Jewish, I could only convert to Judaism or choose any belief by the time I was old enough. But I should never let it govern me.

I should mention that my father was a self-made man who became a successful businessman and race horse owner. We also had a real automobile (called a touring car) and a chauffeur as well as hired help for the household and a nanny to take care of me as my mother worked with my father in his business. In 1929, I was enrolled in the Volksschule (people's school) after having attended a year of the local synagogue preschool. As a newly enrolled first-grader, I had to walk to school with a Zuckerfüte (a cornucopia-type colored papier-mache container filled with sweets). My teacher for the next four years was Fräulein Lange. My nanny (Elsa) was to walk me to school and pick me up as well. This only worked for a while as I thought I was too old for a babysitter. Officially, my mother let me walk by myself but had Elsa follow me secretly, which was a good thing. Since it rained a lot, my mother had bought me an expensive black and white checked raincoat with a hood and black rubber boots to pull over one's shoes. But since none of the other children had anything as fancy as that, I didn't want to be different. I took it

off and dropped it in a doorway when I thought I was safely out of sight from home. I got thoroughly drenched, caught a cold and got a lecture but couldn't be convinced to wear the outfit, which Else had retrieved and which was donated to a Goodwill organization. When summer vacation time arrived in mid-July, my parents had other plans during this six-week period and decided to send me to my maternal grandparents.

It would be the last summer (1929) that everyone was still alive at my mother's parents, where I always stayed downstairs with them while Uncle Paul, Aunt Emma and cousin Annie lived upstairs in my grandparents' house. My first girlfriend in Dobrilugk (now called Doberlug) had come from Leipzig to be with her grandmother. My friend's name was Gerda, and her house, too, was on Mittelstrasse. The post office, where my uncle was postmaster, was located on a connecting street between Hauptstrasse (where my grandfather's shoe store was located). One day Gerda and I decided to "break into the post office" as part of a cops and robbers game, and we managed to climb through an open window into one of the offices, but were caught as we were trying to abscond with some stamps. Uncle Paul administered the spanking, and I didn't like him much after that.

My grandfather also had some land that he worked in his spare time, and I used to love going with him to that acre. I believe that is where he grew buckwheat and I loved the pancakes my grandmother made from it. Behind my grandparents' house (actually attached to it) were the wash house (also used as a slaughterhouse), a small stable (for a pig and a goat), the toilet (outhouse-type) and behind all the buildings, a fruit and vegetable garden, as well as a smelly dung heap.

The dung was utilized for fertilization, and once a year the area was cleaned out and transported with a dung wagon to the fields. Therefore, the house was built in such a way that a wagon could enter from the street and pass through a hallway to that area in the yard. One entered the living quarters through that hallway, the first door led into the living room and the second door into the kitchen. A bedroom was located off the living room on the other side of the kitchen. The living room was very large and had a small bed in one

corner (for my use), a sofa and a large table set in the middle of the room. Upstairs, the Rippins had also the same size living room, a bedroom, a second bedroom (above the downstairs kitchen) and a kitchen and den (above the downstairs hallway). In front of the house, across the area of the living room and its windows, a small flower garden existed with a chain-link fence around it. One day, Gerda and I decided to do some high jumping. We had found a tree branch and wanted to use it to determine how high we could jump. We stuck the branch into the chain-link fence, intending to go higher and higher; while one of us was to jump, the other would hold the other end of the branch. For a while it all went well. We took turns and inched up on the height. But we finally misjudged our prowess and when my turn came on the next higher rung (I always went first), I caught my foot on the branch, fell and jabbed my knee on a sharp rock of the sidewalk. We weren't smart enough yet to clear such obstacles out of our way. It was a deep wound and I was bleeding profusely. This curtailed my activities somewhat for the rest of the vacation.

Back in school in the fall, I "distinguished" myself by deciding that I was qualified as a teacher. As Fräulein Lange was to tell my parents afterwards, she had been called to the principal's office and asked us pupils to sit quietly, with hands folded, until she would return. Well, some boys in the back of the room started to make noise, so I got up from my seat, grabbed the teacher's ruler, and threatened to spank them with it unless they kept quiet. With ruler in hand, I walked around my classmates, admonishing them to sit perfectly still—or else! When Frl. Lange returned, she found some frightened children and me completely poised and in charge of the situation, reporting to her that I took care of everything. Amazing how one person can intimidate others! Scholastically, I did much better and all my grades were "Ones" (1=A).

After returning to school and shortly after my 6th birthday, I caught an inner ear infection, which kept me out of school for several weeks. Early in 1930, both my cousin Annie and my mother's mother died, and my mother was kept busy with going to these funerals and helping her sister and father. My summer vacation became visits to various racetracks around the city of Berlin as well as tracks in smaller cities with our touring car and chauffeur. I also received lessons in horseback riding and loved it. In 1931 my father's mother

passed away. He reminded me that I had met her once when I was only 4 and all three of us had travelled to Poland so that his mother could meet me and my mother. In trying to remember, all I could recall a lady with a black taffeta dress who called me Orsolka and lots of snow and riding in horse-drawn carriages and being on trains for a long time. In 1932 my mother's father died, and I went with her to his funeral and we stayed in the house which now belonged to my mother and her sister. They had to decide whether they wanted to keep it or sell it. They sold it.

Sometime during the early '20s, my father was able to visit the United States in conjunction with the import of racehorses by the Trabren Verein of Berlin, Germany, of which he was a member. Besides New York City, he also visited Springfield, Illinois, and told many stories from his trip. All in all, I have mostly happy memories of my childhood in the '20s, and one which was my big adventure.

In the summer, many Gypsy caravans would wander through the city and often stay for days at a time in the empty spaces to ply their trade of selling trinkets or fortune-telling. They travelled in very colorful wagons (pulled by horses) and also wore colorful clothes. When they camped at a location, they always built a fire to boil water and roast meat and corn. The camp that year was close to my school and the "barbecue smells" were overpowering, and I decided to give it a closer look. When I came to their gate, I decided to open it and check out the camp. Almost immediately, I was surrounded by several children. A little girl my age took my hand and took me to the fire and offered me some food. Her language sounded different from mine, but somehow we understood each other. Somehow I convinced her that I really wanted to see the inside of the wagon that she lived in and slept in. I was so impressed that I wanted to stay with her and spend the rest of my life with the caravan. But it was not in my cards.

My nanny, who was to follow me from a distance, had lost sight of me when I slipped into the camp. She had hurried home, upset my mother and as a result my father called the police to report a missing child. The police immediately suggested that I might be at the Gypsy camp and together with my father went

there to retrieve me. By now I was also hungry and wanted some more of the barbecue but instead had to go home with my father, thus ending my life as a Gypsy.

With the onset of the '30s, my father had become interested in politics, especially matters concerning Social Democrats. He went to meetings and made speeches, but neither he nor his friends could foresee what was to come. Also, my public school education was coming to an end, and I was to enter higher education at age 10 in 1933. At that time, there were several choices, such as public and private high schools (called lyceums for the girls). My father chose the Theresien Oberlyceum, which for each grade had two classes—"A" for live-in Catholic girls, which included religious instructions, and "B" for non-resident pupils without the religious instructions. The first-year class was the Sexta, followed by Quinta, Quarta, UnterTertia, OberTertia, UnterSekunda, OberSekunda and Prima. If you successfully graduated, you could enter any University. I was enrolled in the "B" Sexta with mostly Jewish girls. Until then I had few girlfriends except for Gisela Wemmer in public school, and she also came to this Lyceum, but wound up in the "A" Sexta class. As soon as I could read sufficiently, I was given many books to read, and my favorite author became Karl May, who primarily wrote about American Indians. Since my dreams of a Gypsy life had been shattered, I started to imagine life in the prairies and deserts of America.

Summer vacations we now spent on the North Sea on doctor's orders for my mother to help her aching feet by "Wattenlaufen," (i.e., when the ocean recedes at low tide, you are supposed to walk on the wet sand following the receding water. It's supposed to do wonders for your feet, and my mother swore by it). I enjoyed it also, as there often were musicians who came along with the group. I always remember one trumpet player, he was biracial from the Rhineland and went by the name "Nigger," but no offense was meant by it. Those were the summers of 1933-34-35, when we visited Büsum, Westerland/Sylt and took trips with shrimp boats to Helgoland.

Meanwhile, back in Berlin, one saw more and more uniformed people wearing brownish shirts or jackets (soon to be known as Nazi brownshirts). At first,

there were run-ins with the “blue shirts,” the Communist youth groups, but the latter got fewer and fewer. President Paul von Hindenburg died in 1934 and Adolf Hitler (his chancellor) took over as “Der Führer” (leader). At school, I loved all my new subjects and also made several new friends (Eva Seligsohn, Eva Schlesinger and Edith Weisse), all in the “B” class (and maintaining touch with Gisela in the “A” class). At home, my father had more and more meetings with different gentlemen in the evenings and one kept coming back and dined with us one evening. His name was Professor Steinhard.

We no longer had the touring car and chauffeur but still had a maid to help my mother in the household. My father’s business had moved to a different location in the city and with it our living quarters. In the late ’20s or early ’30s, my parents had bought property in Petershagen, a suburb, to use for holidays or retirement age. So in 1936, we would visit the property on Sundays and enjoy walks in the surrounding woods and nearby lakes, as my father was working on watercolor paintings and my mother grew beautiful flowers there (huge dahlias come to mind). This was also the summer of the Olympics. In gymnastics class in all schools, all girls between 12 and 14 who were about 5-foot-4 tall had to learn the program for the introductory dance. We all worked hard but they forgot to tell us that you also had to be a member of the BDM! (Bund Deutscher Mädel) and non-Jewish! After that disappointment, we cheered when a non-German got a medal at the Games.

1937 started on a quiet note until we came back to school and found out that two girls in our class would not join us as they had left Germany. One, Ursula L., had left for the U.S.A. with her parents and the other, one of my friends, Edith, was not coming back from Bolivia, where she usually spent her summer vacations. (I did get a postcard from her but all it said was, “Hope to see you again one of these days!” I never did.) In the downsizing of my personal life, the racehorses were gone one by one, except for the two mares for breeding. My father had contracted with a Baroness von Heynitz to board them on her estate in Dröschkau near Torgau (not far from Berlin). My mother’s feet had gotten better and she and I visited the alpine regions of Bavaria and Austria. She loved these areas so much that she booked a trip to Tyrol, Liechtenstein,

and Switzerland for the summer of 1938. We would stay at different cities in hotels and getting from one to the other by bus.

At school, I had reached the Secunda grade. In addition to school, us pupils also attended a school for ballroom dancing and social graces together with boys who attended gymnasiums. Two special dances stay in my mind, a costume party (I dressed up as a Gypsy) and the graduation ball, for which I wore a beautiful long taffeta dress with an orchid flower. But there were also some disturbing memories and the beginning of what was to become the end of an era.

In October of 1938, the two Evas and I were on our way to the Dance Studio and we were dressed to attend a Tea Dance. About a block from the studio, we were stopped by the uniformed brown-shirts, who told us we had to come with them. Since they were armed, we obeyed, and they marched us at least a mile to a movie theater. Inside, more youngsters were waiting, and then a party official gave a lecture praising Hitler and his ideas for raising youngsters to become healthy young adults, stressing not to smoke or use makeup and fancy clothes. The lecture was followed by a typical propaganda film and then we got a note to give our parents and were told to go home immediately. The note I gave my father was a request that he should enroll me in the BDM immediately, although at this point it was still voluntary (it became a law a couple of years later). The outcome of this episode was that we did not join but invested in makeup and cigarettes. I'm sorry to say, that's when I started smoking, as did Eva Seligsohn. Of course, our mothers didn't approve, and we had to sneak our smokes but were proud to show what we thought of Hitler and his ideas.

Meanwhile, my father had moved his business to a different location and was proud to show off the latest burglar protection for the front of the store, which had large glass windows. It was called Rolladen, which were motorized window shutters! (They are still in existence and I can't help remembering when I hear TV commercials for them here in Las Vegas in 2010!). As it turned out, it was a wise investment, as one night in November, "Kristallnacht" took place when the Nazis shattered unprotected storefronts

or spray painted fronts with the word “Jude” or the Star of David. It was meant to ruin the businesses and for days one had to walk through broken glass.

Shortly thereafter, Dr. Steinhard came to visit with important news, and my father decided that I was old enough to join the meeting, as I had turned 15. I found out that Dr. Steinhard worked for an organization that enabled people from Central or South America who were German or of German descent to exchange their properties with someone in Germany who wanted to leave here. He left us papers from a business in Brazil (father, mother, and 16-year-old son) itemizing land, buildings, cars, livestock and all items to be left behind. I think I grew up that night. Upon leaving, Dr. Steinhard urged us to discuss it carefully and decide as soon as possible. My mother immediately worried that none of us spoke Portuguese. Dr. Steinhard also told us that his wife and daughter Ursula were leaving for Jerusalem.

Before long, 1939 had begun and in March, the Oberlyceum notified all pupils that it would be closing its doors, but we were to come for a final assembly. Each pupil received a diploma. As it turned out, I had the second best grades in my “B” class. (Renata K. was first—unfortunately my diploma got lost over the years, but I always remembered the occasion.) In addition, I found out that Eva Schlesinger and her mother were leaving for Los Angeles, USA, while her father would stay in Berlin maintaining his medical practice in the ghetto section, where Jewish people had congregated and which eventually was closed out.

Since my education was not complete, even though adequate, we finally found a school to serve my needs. It was the Rackow Language Institute, which catered to children of the diplomatic community. It taught English, French, Spanish, German, Accounting, Typing, Shorthand and Economics. The only friend I had left, Eva Seligsohn, and I enrolled. This would still keep us short of our original goal, but keep us educated for another year. Our English teacher was from England and the wife of “Lord HawHaw,” whose radio program broadcast to England was pure Nazi propaganda.

In September of 1939, World War II began by Germany invading Poland toward the end of the year. I got into trouble with the Economics teacher. I insisted that Germany was doomed by being led by a dictator. This led to my immediate suspension, a month short of graduation, but I did get a certificate (mostly “B’s”). In the meantime, new laws had been passed where each youngster had to give something to the Fatherland, called “Pflichtjahr” by working on a farm. There were a couple of choices: Become a uniformed Arbeitsdienst member and work a year on a farm or attend a Home Economics school for one year, followed by six months on a private farm. Eva and I jumped at the latter choice and for the rest of 1940 learned German grammar, cooking, sewing, cleaning, gardening, and graduated in 1941. While there were boys at the Rackow school, the Home Economics school catered strictly to girls. Thus there was no dating people your own age. However, each family availed themselves of dating opportunities by socializing with people of their own class and their interests (in my case horses and horse racing). My mother had two gentlemen in mind and would have been happy to see me betrothed at age 17 or 18. I should mention that I had bought a book on basic Portuguese and tried to teach myself that year, since no foreign language classes were offered.

Except for the Dance School and the Rackow Language School, I had no regular contact with boys my age, thus there was no dating, as it’s known in the States. However, since we were involved in the horse racing business, families often had their children marry each other. My mother liked “Kurt,” but would have liked “Bert” as well. Both would inherit estates (in Franconia or Silesia, respectively) and both had shown an interest in marrying me. But first I had to fulfill my Pflichtjahr by working six months on a farm. That was the option I had taken when I went to Home Ec school. My father contacted the Baroness von Heynitz, where he had his brood mares. It seemed like a perfect solution for me. She said she was glad to oblige, as her estate would get extra points from the local party district. (As there was a war on, it would help with getting coupons for rationed items.)

The estate was actually owned by a Baron von Heynitz, but run completely by his wife, the Baroness—actually their title was Freiherr und Freifrau. Their

two daughters were married, the older to a Count von Schoenfeld and the younger to a Baron von Petersdorf. The latter had a small son, about three years of age, and was also expecting again. The manor house (I believe it qualified as a castle) dated back to the 13th century, had enormous walls and a tower with rooms built into it and a spiral staircase. The main wing had huge rooms on the ground level and numerous smaller rooms one story up. A long hall ran in front of these rooms. At the end opposite the tower, a new wing had been added on. Baroness von Petersdorf lived in the new wing with her son and a French maid, Lisette, while the Baron was stationed in Paris. He had been instrumental in getting Lisette the job.

The Baroness von Schoenfeld occupied two rooms upstairs in the main wing near the new addition; her husband was an officer in occupied Poland, one of the first to get into Russia when the war broke out on that front, and shortly after that got killed. Freifrau von Heynitz lived in two rooms at the other end of the main wing. There were about six rooms unoccupied between the two women. The huge tower area occupied an office on the ground floor where the estate manager worked together with Countess Schoenfeld. One floor up, Freiherr von Heynitz lived with his nurse and on the next floor up, which contained two small bedrooms and one bath. I was quartered as well as Sophie from Poland. Count Schoenfeld was responsible for her being there.

The estate contained more buildings: A dairy, living quarters for the estate manager and his wife, a small house for the cook (a middle-aged, unmarried woman), a barracks-style building for the laborers who were mostly Italians and Polish, a coop for fowl, a workshop and garage, plus numerous stables for horses and carriages. Above the carriage stables was a long room where a dozen French prisoners of war were quartered. Altogether, not counting the nine of us in the castle proper, about 25 people lived on this estate.

My father delivered me to Dröschkau near Torgau on April 14, 1941. That day, my father and I had breakfast, after which he had to leave. Frau von H. then explained to me my schedule of duties and the “dos and don’ts” of living there. I was to get up at 7 a.m. and report to the cook in the kitchen; she was to give me instructions of what to do and when to do it for her. Whenever I

was relieved of kitchen duty, I was to go to the office and they would assign me tasks depending on the time available. The “dos” meant that I was to follow all instructions and obey whatever I was assigned to and the “don’ts” concerned primarily the French prisoners, i.e., “Do not talk to them” (especially since the Baroness knew that I had learned French in school). She said that it was OK to talk to the Poles, Italians and Lisette, because none of them were prisoners of war, but she cautioned not to get too friendly with any of them. Being who I am, I do not like to be told “not to do something” and let those admonitions go in one ear and out the other.

As a gesture towards my father, I was to be allowed to dine with the family in the main dining room. (However, this was just Freifrau von Heynitz, Countess Schoenfeld, the nurse—whose name I cannot recall—and myself for breakfast and dinner; the estate manager would join us for lunch only.) The cook (again, I cannot recall her name) greeted me that first morning and told me that I would have to set the table for each meal, how it was to be done, where to find things and to carry in the dishes. I was then allowed to eat in there and as soon as the Baroness herself finished, allowed to get up from the table and clear up the dishes. Two teenage girls, one German and one Polish, were also employed in the kitchen, mostly to wash dishes, peel potatoes and help with baking. All breads were baked on the premises.

After clearing the breakfast dishes, I was to fix the sandwiches for the French prisoners. Cook told me that each got two sandwiches (she showed me how thin to slice the bread and then count out exactly 48 slices). Then, I had to spread a thick fruit-jam on every other slice, make a sandwich and stack them on a large tray. Two prisoners would come at 8:30 a.m. to pick up the tray and fill a large pitcher with ersatz-coffee and take everything into the field, or wherever the prisoners were working that day. Well, that very first day I greeted them with a whispered, “Bon Jour, je parle Francais et je suis votre amie.” Pretty risky, but I loved it because it was a “don’t!” And the next day, they passed a penciled note to me, asking if I could cut the slices of bread a little thicker. I obliged, but a couple days later, the cook caught on, and I had to let them know.

The noon and evening meals for the prisoners, usually a soup and a stew, were put up in large kettles, fixed by the cook, stirred by the two girls, and I had nothing to do with them. But we continued to write to each other. I encouraged them to let me know what I could get them from Berlin. My father was to visit in June and he could bring me those things. They asked for some playing cards, cigarettes and a football. My mother added a hard salami and a coffee cake to the care package. All that remained was to find a way to smuggle these items to their quarters. I knew I would have to do it one by one; the cards and cigarettes were easy to pass on over the next two days by sliding them under the sandwiches on the tray. But I couldn't figure out how to get the three large items to them. I wrote a note to them, asking for help. The answer came back that I should contact Lisette.

Until now, I had had almost no contact with her, as she kept exclusively to the new wing with the Baroness von Petersdorf and her little boy, taking care of all household chores and cooking on that end. Occasionally she would come to the main kitchen to get supplies, but I wasn't always there when she came. For some unknown reason, however, she was allowed to talk to them on Sunday afternoons when the prisoners were allowed to play soccer with the laborers and Lisette had no duties. At first I couldn't think of an excuse to contact her as I had no business in the new wing, but then I remembered that she would take the little boy for walks some times when his mother didn't feel up to it. So I kept my eyes peeled and, fortunately, that week, after my kitchen chores were done, I was working in the dairy painting signs—yes, each cow had a painted sign on her stable, giving her name, age and production quantities in liters. My job as a painter did not last, as I was using too thick of a coat of paint (just like the thick slices of bread). While painting signs outside at the entrance to the dairy, I spotted Lisette and quickly told her about my problem. She told me that that evening after dark I should sneak out with all three items (or one or two if I couldn't manage all three of them) and wait for her in the shadows of the tower. Although, officially I had no curfew, I was to be in my room after dark. Except for places on the estate, there was no place to go. Also, the door to the Baron's quarters was usually open and the nurse kept an eye on comings and goings. There were no lights on the staircase and

I groped my way and tiptoed till I got outside. I had the cake and sausage with me and waited. It seemed an eternity, but Lisette finally showed up. She suggested I come with her to the prisoners' quarters, but I was afraid and declined. There were no German guards; instead, at 9 p.m. when the prisoners were finished with supper, they were simply locked in by the estate manager. A padlock made sure that no one could enter from the outside without the proper key. But there was a small window to one side of the door which could be opened from the inside, but had bars on the outside so no one could escape, but there was room to hand things in or out. Lisette passed my gifts and I received a note of thanks from the prisoners the next morning. As to the football, Lisette suggested that I give it to her on Sunday afternoon, which also was my day off. While it was warm, I usually went down to the Elbe River to go swimming (this was the spot where the American troops met the Russian troops in 1945, ending World War II in Europe), and she figured that no one would pay attention to our meeting accidentally. Everything turned out fine.

For the next couple of months, everything went its routine way. My mother kept sending cigarettes and food items; I learned to cook (none of which I was able to use in later life), fed chickens, ducks and geese, and worked with horses—the only part I liked of my job!

Meanwhile, the war was in full swing with German troops on their way into Russia and Moscow. With it came the news of young men I had known being killed, one being "Kurt." All of this foreshadowed the beginning of the end. By the end of August, Russian prisoners of war also came on the scene to help with the harvest. Those prisoners were not quartered on the estate but in a camp near Torgau and marched to the places of work under heavy guard. They only got one meal a day, a thin kind of potato soup with a piece of rye bread. It was incomprehensible to me how they could do any kind of physical labor on such a ration. Also, there was absolutely no contact between them and any of us, as two of the French prisoners had to come and get the "slop" they were being fed and carry it to them. The only glimpse one got of the Russians was when they were being marched through, and what a pitiful sight

they made. In comparison, the French prisoners looked well-fed and well-dressed.

Most of the Frenchmen were farmers (peasant) back in France and all came from small villages. Only one of them had a higher education; his name was Jean from Trouville near Bolbec. He had studied engineering and also spoke English fluently, a fact he had kept secret. Instead he passed himself off as a farmer, as he felt that he would be better off in the long run. One day he wrote me a note in English, asking if I would come and watch the next soccer game so that he could talk with me. It turned out to be quite easy, no one paid any attention to us, and he wanted to know if I had any connections to get him false papers and some civilian clothes from Berlin, as he was planning to escape. I told him that I would have to check into it and would do so when I went home for my 18th birthday to Berlin. I was to get a few days off as I had almost completed my first six months of the duty year.

My suitor “Bert,” meanwhile, had asked my father’s permission to marry me and wanted to announce the engagement on my 18th birthday. His present to me was a young colt named “Coburg,” which was stabled on his parents’ estate in Silesia, where it perished in the final days of World War II together with all the buildings and other horses. “Bert” had fled to Sweden in 1944, as he was involved in the July coup against Hitler.

In the meantime, Lisette’s brother Pierre had come to Berlin as a “Fremdarbeiter” (foreign worker—of which more and more would come to Germany in order for the German men to do the soldiering). Lisette thought that he might be the best bet to get the documents and gave me his address. Through Pierre, I found out that a sort of black market existed through which one could get all kinds of documents. Of course, there was a price to be paid. As a “Pflichtjahr” girl, I only received a small allowance of 20.- Marks per month and had not saved very much. Lisette’s wages were a little higher, as she held down a position. After my return to the estate, I talked things over with her, and we figured that by selling some jewelry and using our saving, we could get enough money for Jean’s papers; Pierre had indicated that he could get a pair of pants and a jacket. But it would take a little time. What made me

do such a foolish thing? The anger about this senseless war, the thrill of doing something forbidden, and wanting to help a person I liked and who had asked me to. So every day I corresponded with Jean through notes tucked under the sandwiches on the tray.

Then, one day, the unthinkable happened. Marcel, who was carrying the tray, stumbled and spilled the sandwiches, and the wind carried off my note. I don't think that Marcel realized that the missing note could have serious consequences; I wasn't even aware of the mishap until Friday, October 17th. That day, I was called to the office where two men were expecting me. They showed me credentials identifying themselves as members of the "Parteigericht" (party court, or some such thing). They showed me the note I had written (and foolishly signed) and wanted to know what my connection was to Jean. Fortunately, on this note I had not gone into details about his planned escape, but merely said that I wanted to see him at the next soccer game to discuss a few points with him. The Nazi officials interrogated me for two hours, trying to find a way to connect me to Jean. All I could think of saying to prevent their arresting me for talking to prisoners of war was that I had found out that he could speak English and that I wanted to practice the language with him. A very weak excuse, but they could not break down my resistance to their questioning and finally gave up. They made me sign a piece of paper which spelled out that I had been interrogated and cautioned about my conduct with the prisoners and that this document instituted a warning. A second occurrence of this nature would mean arrest. I was dismissed and the two men then talked to the Baroness.

After they left, the Baroness informed me that she would have to contact my father and would have to ask him to come and pick me up as soon as possible. She felt that she could take no chances with the party court as it might cost her the foreign workers she was allowed to work on the estate.

My father arrived a couple of days later to take me back home. But there was more bad news to come. In trying to remember, I'm not sure what came first or if there was a connection.

We were still living at Rüdersdorfer Strasse, but the business was closed. The war had stalled imports for the delicatessen goods and rationing for meats and help was hard to come by, as most young men were drafted. When I contacted my best friend Eva Seligsohn, I found out that she now went by a different last name, as her mother had divorced her father (posthumously) so that Eva wouldn't have to wear the yellow star identifying her as Jewish in public. Eva was still working for the dentist's family where she had started her working Pflichtjahr as a nanny/housekeeper. (He was well-known and instrumental in helping her and her mother.) This reminded me of Dr. Steinhard, who had such a star when he visited and when I asked about him, my parents told me that he no longer arranged for property exchanges, as he had been given orders to resettle himself to a place in Poland. We later found out that he perished in Auschwitz. It was a very bleak November.

My fiancé Bert was 15 years my senior and entrenched in the horse breeding business and exempt from military service. Naturally, we discussed my plight with him and he introduced me to a Mr. Hoffman, who was a Regierungsrat at the Auswärtige AMT (foreign office), the German State Department, in charge of staffing, embassies, legations, consulates, etc., with secretaries, typists, teletypists, translators, and similar clerical help. Mr. Hoffman liked me and got me a proper work permit despite my lack of party credentials and told me to report for work at the AA on Wilhelmstrasse on December 1, 1941, where I was put in the typing pool of the Press Section. That place was like a madhouse every day that culminated when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on the 7th and the United States declared war against the Axis nations. All I remember is that any messages for Ribbentrop (Joachim von Ribbentrop, a Nazi war criminal, who was head of the AA) had to be typed on a special typewriter with very large print, but I wasn't a good enough typist to use it. Somehow I survived the Press Department and transferred to Mr. Hoffman's office in January 1942. At the New Year, Bert introduced me to skiing in the Riesengebirge (a mutual lady friend came along as chaperone).

At Mr. Hoffman's office, I learned to operate a teletype machine, routing incoming and outgoing messages to our embassies at Ankara, Budapest, Lisbon, and Vichy. Thus I learned interesting facts about the other sides in

this now worldwide war. In February I heard from Lisette, who had joined her brother Pierre to work in Berlin. She wanted me to know that Jean had escaped from the farm by swimming across the Elbe River. He had borrowed some clothes from an Italian worker on the farm and he still had the money Lisette and I had given him. About that time, my father was working for a farmer competitor who had been able to stay open due to large contracts from the military and party functions.

In August, Mr. Hoffman informed me that there might be an opening for a teletypist in Vichy, France, and to discuss it with my parents, as I would have to be away for 18 months. Secretly I had wished for Lisbon, but outwardly was thrilled to be considered for any post. My parents had no objections but Bert did. At my engagement in October 1941, we had set a tentative wedding date for October 1942, hoping that the war would come to an end, but this was not to be. He could have married me at this point if he wanted me to stay in Berlin, but did not for reasons of his own. I can only guess at knowing now that he disappeared to Sweden in 1944.

Accepting the Vichy assignment was like getting a special 19th birthday present. Mr. Hoffman got me a special passport and I packed and said my goodbyes to leave on Oct. 25 for the next chapter in my life. The train ticket (Berlin to Paris) was for a first-class compartment paid by the AA. When crossing the border into France, German troops checked passports, making me realize that the northern part of France was now under German occupation. Arriving in Paris, I was met by an official from the German embassy at Paris with instructions to take me to the Hotel d'Orsay on the Quai d'Orsay (near the German embassy), where a room had been booked for me and where I was to stay, relax and await further instructions as to when to proceed to Vichy. The next day I received a message that a car would pick me up to have me meet Gesandter (envoy) Dr. Rudolf Schleier. I didn't like his looks, with his Hitler-type moustache and thin spectacles. (Later I found out that he was there as a "watchdog" over ambassador Otto Abetz, who at times was at odds with Ribbentrop in Berlin.)

Dr. Schleier told me that I was too young to work in an unoccupied country where I would be in contact with enemy embassy personnel, and he would place me in the teletype pool in the Paris embassy. I argued that Mr. Hoffman had promised me the Vichy post, but Schleier said he outranked Hoffman. I don't know how I found the courage, but I demanded to see Mr. Abetz (the embassy head) and Schleier agreed. It only took one quick phone call and we were in the office of Otto Abetz. (Schleier must have been laughing inwardly in putting on this charade.) I pleaded my case but Abetz countered that both places offered experience of French language and culture. Abetz suggested that I should work a few days at the Paris embassy, after which I could proceed to Vichy.

In my innocence, I thought I had won, later on to find out the real reason for the delay. On the 5th of November, I boarded the train to Vichy with proper passport in the first-class compartment normally reserved for diplomatic couriers. Shortly before arriving at the new border checkpoint (known as the Demarkation Line between occupied and free France), a well-dressed gentleman came into my compartment and asked if I was going to be at the Vichy embassy. I told him that I was a new employee. He was very well spoken and I was pleased that my French was quite sufficient. He left after a while and then I noticed that he had left a generic envelope among my luggage. I didn't know if I should try and find him, call the conductor or ignore the whole thing, as it might be some kind of testing me. I did nothing. At the checkpoint, being a diplomatic compartment, it was not searched. The "mystery" gentleman appeared as we were close to Vichy Station and retrieved his envelope, thanking me.

This time I was met by the embassy chauffeur, who took me to a hotel on Boulevard Russe. The hotel was sandwiched in between two houses which housed the German embassy offices. The right housed the ambassador's office (Roland Krug von Nidda), two minor diplomats and three secretaries. The left one housed the chancellor in charge of all personnel matters, the visa section and teletypewriters and staff. His name was Mendel or Mendelsohn, but he was simply addressed as Herr Kanzler.

A message awaited me at the hotel that a Frau Annemarie Schröder would pick me up at 9 a.m. on November 6. In my luggage I had cheese and crackers and a bottle of wine and used these provisions to celebrate my arrival. The next morning, Frau Schröder gave me the grand tour of both houses, starting with my introduction to the ambassador, Roland Krug von Nidda. Last to meet was my other teletypist, Rosemarie. Frau S. was in her 40s and Fräulein R. in her late 20s. When asked how I wanted to be called, I opted for Ulla, an appellation dating back to my high school years. That first noon, Rosemarie and I walked to another building which contained our dining facilities. Every day the main meal (part of our perks) was served there between 12 and 2 p.m. (meat, chicken or fish, potatoes, vegetables and dessert), all very satisfying and better than what was available at that time in Germany. On November 7, we met with Herr Kanzler to work out a schedule for us three operators, with turns for the right hours.

On the 8th, I had a surprise package upon my return to the hotel. A large box of chocolates with a note attached to it thanking me for the help I had extended on the trip from Paris to Vichy. The name was not familiar to me and I didn't pursue it further. The 9th was uneventful but after I had gone to bed on the 10th, I was awakened with a loud pounding on my door and shouts of "OUVREZ LA PORTE." I put on my robe and confronted an unknown civilian and a German soldier in uniform, whom I asked in German what was the matter. The civilian, who also spoke German, asked me what embassy I worked for and after I told them, they apologized for disturbing me and left. Later I found out they were trying to arrest personnel from the American embassy (some were questioned in the same hotel).

The next morning on the 11th, I found out that previous agreements concerning the occupation of France had been broken and now encompassed the former free zone. The U.S. embassy closed, the U.S. ambassador there had been Admiral William Leahy and I believe he wrote a book about it. I'm only adding my personal impressions, as I was told to forget last night's events. The rest of November went by uneventfully until December 1, when a German officer appeared, introduced himself as Kurt and said he would oversee our section but be dressed in civilian clothes to fit in. He attended all official and

social functions during the Christmas season of 1942 and the ringing in of 1943!

The first half of 1943 was a happy one for me. By trading my daytime hours for someone else's nighttime hours, I would manage to have three full days available for train trips through the south of France visiting historic sites as well as the French Riviera. When in Vichy we had access to all spa facilities and use of the famous Vichy water. And to my delight, there were horseback riding facilities. During the summer, Kurt started to single me out for his attention. This was very different from what I had been used to, but I enjoyed it. He was born in Germany in the town his mother was from. She was married at that time to an Austrian and thus as a baby he came to grow up in Vienna, Austria. When Hitler annexed Austria in 1938, Kurt, having a German mother, joined the Nazi Party, feeling it was his duty. In many ways, we enjoyed the same things in food and drinks, reading (he was a teacher before the war), horseback riding, but argued constantly when it came to politics.

The last time I had seen Lisette, she had given me her parents' address in Paris and after I got to Vichy I had written to them asking to let me know when she came home. In July I heard from her and we arranged to meet in Paris at her parents' place. I told her about my trips to the south of France and she gave me the name and address of a Christian Leon-Dupont in Marseille, who had helped many people get to Portugal. I promised to look him up on my next excursion, which I had planned for August, and I did. Mr. Leon-Dupont was very noncommittal when I asked about the possibility of getting to Lisbon, claiming that security measures that were put in effect last November were making it almost impossible but promised to let me know if there was a change. When I returned from Marseilles, Kurt questioned me about my trip and suggested that I shouldn't visit people I didn't know, even though they were friends of friends. Kurt was quartered in Clermont-Ferrand, south Vichy. He drove daily along the Allier River, all part of the Auvergne, famous also for the ring of 60 volcanoes formed more than a hundred thousand years ago. I had another travel weekend coming up and Kurt suggested that we motor together through the Puy-de-Dôme area, which we did.

My 20th birthday came up a month later and, as always, I started the day going horseback riding but developed pains in my side, and the doctor who treated most of the people of the diplomatic community diagnosed appendicitis and checked me into the local hospital. Everything happened so fast and when I came to after the operation I was told that everything was fine but that I was also pregnant. There had been no chaperone on my trip with Kurt and I didn't know how to explain the situation to my parents, knowing that my father would not sanction having a Nazi son-in-law. On the other hand, Kurt was thrilled with the news when he came to visit and was already planning on more children, at least one of each gender. After I went back to work, I started to get easily tired and had problems working at night and asked for the two weeks' vacation I had coming. Originally I was supposed to go to Berlin, but under the circumstances, I opted for Paris, and Lisette found me a place to stay.

At Christmas 1943, I heard from my parents that there were more and more air raids. This was the last news I received. It would be over a year before I got news of them and over two years before I got their whole story. At the beginning of 1944, Ambassador Abetz came to Vichy to relieve Krug von Nidda and replaced him with a Mr. Struve. In February, I was visited by a Lt. Col. Schmidt of the Abwehr, which worked closely with the Gestapo, telling me that a Mr. Leon-Dupont has been arrested as a member of the French Resistance Movement and that my name had been found among his papers. I was to be discharged immediately and to be sent to a concentration camp in Germany for having cooperated with an enemy. I was to pack and wait in my hotel room. I called Kurt from there to give him the news and together we arrived at a temporary solution. After Kurt had found out about my pregnancy, he immediately had made arrangements at a Lebensborn facility (they existed all over to receive women impregnated by German (Nazi) military of all ranks). Since he still had an apartment in Vienna, he had chosen the Lebensborn hospital in Pernitz, Austria. The closest one (just outside Paris) was all booked up. However, I could not appear in Pernitz until 6 weeks prior to my due date, which meant May 1st. This meant I had to find a

place to stay for March and April. Kurt also knew Lt. Col. Schmidt, who agreed to have Kurt take care of me.

The next day we left Vichy by train to Paris and from there to Munich, where I stayed with relatives of Kurt. The most vivid memories from that time were some deadly air raids, the first a nighttime firebombing where we had to climb stairs to the attic with buckets of water to douse the flames and a daytime bombing which hit the house that contained the basement air-raid shelter. The ceiling of the shelter caved in and blocked the exits. It was hours before we were dug out. Being pregnant during all of this didn't help.

Kurt appeared at the end of April and we took the train to Vienna and from there to Wiener Neustadt and the local to Pernitz, where I was to stay until the birth of my child and for a while afterwards, depending on the outcome. I don't know how much all of this cost Kurt, but while staying there, the women were expected to volunteer their time to help in the various departments (kitchen, dining room, laundry facilities, pharmacy, office, etc., etc.). Everybody had to follow a special diet depending on the stage of one's pregnancy as well as some physical activities like walking or berry picking. There were lectures as well to remind us who made all this possible, "our glorious leader, the Führer."

On May 29, I went along to pick wild strawberries up in the wooded hills surrounding the hospital. It was a beautiful day with lots of sunshine and instead of returning with the group, I decided to climb up to an inviting meadow outside the wooded area and stretch out in it. I must have dozed off, to be awakened by a strange noise and opening my eyes I was looking into huge airplanes. Whether I heard or imagined shots, I got so scared that I started running into the woods and from there all the way to the hospital. The attendants thought I might go into labor and put me into the delivery room, but nothing happened. I went back to my room, but the evening of the 30th was back in the delivery room. I received injections to produce a natural delivery, which finally occurred after midnight on the 31st, at a quarter to one on June 1st, 1944. Kurt appeared for the "naming ceremony" for her, which coincided with the Allied invasion of Europe, i.e., D-Day, on June 6th. My

daughter had appeared 3 weeks early, but was not considered a preemie. On the other hand, I had problems producing enough milk and had to depend on others. Fortunately, at the same time I was there, a woman from Norway was there who produced too much. Her name was Brigid. This mixture of milks gave my daughter a healthy start. I was told that I could stay until September 1st and do volunteer work.

Then came July 20th, when an assassination attempt was made on Hitler's life. Some of the doctors left and Kurt appeared to let me know that he was on his way to Italy and gave me the name and address of a friend of his in Vienna who handled Kurt's finances and was to help me until he returned. Many well-known people my family knew were executed. One of the first Bert had been associated with, thus Bert's escape to Sweden. When I was terminated in Vichy, my passport was taken away and my "labor book" was marked "discharged-political unreliable." I had been able to extend my stay at the hospital by doubling up on volunteer activities. But when Brigid was ready to leave, I was told to leave with my daughter.

Kurt's friend Tony temporarily put us into a hotel, then into a small apartment. Meanwhile, Allied bombers had dropped leaflets telling us that the war was coming to an end shortly and that Russian and American troops were approaching Vienna. When I talked to Tony about this, he suggested that my not being Austrian by birth, I should return to Germany. Other than Kurt's relatives in Munich, my mother's half-brother came to mind in Weiden, Oberpfalz, part of Bavaria in southern Germany. I wrote to my Uncle Richard to let him know that I was coming and from there was trying to get to Berlin. Tony got us rail tickets and gave me the rest of the money Kurt had left. We boarded the train in February but shortly before Linz, Allied bombers were bombing rails to prevent rail and troop movements. The train had come to a stop and we were told to take cover under the rail cars. Not easy when you have a baby and a small suitcase. We survived but then we had to continue on foot until we could find a working railroad again. I don't remember how many miles we trudged through snow and cold before we met with a farmer and horse-drawn wagon who gave some of us a ride to a local rail station.

From there we continued with short rail trips and lots of walking and arrived on Weiden on February 15, 1945.

My uncle was retired from the railroad and now lived in a two-bedroom apartment, having turned over his house to his oldest son, who had five children. His second son was married and lived with his wife's family. His third son was unmarried and shared the apartment with his parents. At the time of our arrival, he was in the Army and fighting on the Italian front. Aunt Babette made it clear that we could only stay until her son Ludwig returned from the war. When I questioned my uncle about my parents, he told me that my father had been arrested, our address had been obliterated (bombed out) and my mother had moved together with a lady friend outside of Berlin, but it had been a while since he had news from her. I still wasn't able to find a job while my funds were running low.

Meanwhile, the war was being lost and on April 30, we heard on the radio that Hitler had committed suicide and American soldiers appeared in the streets the next day and were welcomed. All kinds of notices were being posted on buildings. To my delight, one notice was looking for English-speaking people. Another notice made it mandatory to fill out a questionnaire for the denazification process. And by word of mouth we found out that a huge warehouse had been opened for anyone to come and help themselves to the clothing that was stored there. The new clothes felt wonderful and I finally could discard my tattered ones.

I filed my questionnaire and my labor book was marked "Nicht Betroffen" (not affected), and was hired as an interpreter and secretary by 94th Constabulary. They had put up a tent city and were talking that Gen. Patton would take them into Czechoslovakia. A short while later, they did move on and I went to work for the American colonel in charge of the warehouse which had been acquisitioned to house supplies for the U.S. Army. All through the Oberpfalz and Niederbayern area, American occupation offices were set up in county seats like Regensburg, Roding, Vilshofen, Straubing, etc., etc., and with it came job offers.

One of the earliest soldiers to return home was my cousin Ludwig, and I had to move with my daughter to one and then to another apartment. At this point, I knew that I had come to a decision to find my parents. The provinces surrounding Berlin were occupied by the Russians while Berlin itself was divided by the four victors (U.S., Great Britain, France and Russia). On one hand, people were urged to return to their homes to alleviate the refugee problem, but no longer having a passport or birth certificate with my Berlin address prevented me getting a ticket to Berlin. What was I to do?

1945 was coming to an end. The war was over, Hitler had committed suicide, but nothing else was as had been anticipated. I had turned 22 in October and still no definite news on Kurt or my parents. In June I heard from Tony in Vienna that Kurt's unit had been captured, but he had not definite news if Kurt was alive or had died. My attempts at finding my parents had been futile.

It was November that I heard from Tony again informing me that Kurt had died and he was disposing of his belongings and would send me a portion of the profits when it was possible to do so. This pushed me into the decision to travel to Berlin, which was in the Soviet occupied zone. The city actually was divided into 4 separate occupied sectors (U.S., British, French and Russian), but completely surrounded by the Soviets. Train travel was possible but you needed a permit, i.e. proof of "whom and where and reason" of your visit. Not being able to do that, the permit was denied. In checking around, I found out that for 100 Reichmark I could cross the border illegally and catch a train in the Russian occupied zone into Berlin.

Of course, I would have to do that alone and leave my daughter behind. When I discussed it with my uncle, he advised against it but promised help in finding a temporary place for my daughter since he and his wife could not take care of her since their youngest son had returned from the war to live with them. True to his word he introduced me to a Catholic couple in his town of Weiden with two young daughters who were willing to take care of my daughter until my return (we figured one month).

It was January 1946 when I set off and met with the "guide" (a Herr Huber) in Hof, where he introduced me to my traveling companions, two men (one

about 30 and one 50 or so). He drove us to an area where the line between West and East Germany was drawn. He got out of the car with us and said he would walk us through the woods to the spot where we had to cross “No Man’s Land” and had to pay him. When we came out of the woods at midnight, we saw the wide expanse of no trees or bushes and the silvery shimmer of a brook reflecting the moonlight. The guide explained that we would have to wade through the brook and then continue to a small paved road, cross it and then climb the incline behind it and continue through more woods to another road, which had names and distances written on a pole. As much as I’ve tried I can’t recall the name we were supposed to follow. Mr. Huber also cautioned us that the small paved road behind the brook was patrolled by Russian troops and to lie low if we saw them coming from the western end until they disappeared at the eastern one. At this point, if we didn’t pay, we could go back with him.

We paid and took off. Just about the time we reached the brook, we heard shots fired but we couldn’t make out anything. We waited a bit but then crossed the chilly water and since the road was clear also crossed it. As I started my climb up the incline I slipped and cut my left knee on a sharp rock. Then I heard more shots and in no time Russian soldiers were surrounding us, yelling “Stoi!” the Russian word for Stop or Halt. All three of us wound up with an escort marching us to their post. There we met an interpreter who told the two men to get into a truck (already loaded with men) which would deliver them to the salt mines to work. I have no idea where that was or what would happen to them. He told me to wait where we had come in but didn’t offer any help when I showed him my bleeding knee. He left and my soldier escort returned and took me to another room where a bunch of soldiers were sitting around drinking. I pointed to my bloody knee hoping for some aid and one of the soldiers laughed and poured a glass of liquid over it and another one forced me to drink another glass of that liquid and knocked me out. Later I learned it was vodka. When I came to, I found myself on a bundle of straw in a dark, cold room. I couldn’t tell if I had thrown up or relieved myself but I ached all over. I wore no jewelry when I set out on this journey, only a wristwatch. I tried to see what time it was, but there was no more watch on

my wrist. I also realized that I no longer had my little traveling bag, which held a change of underwear and socks, an extra sweater, real U.S. coffee, chocolate and soaps (meant as gifts and/or bribes).

Before I had a chance to contemplate my fate any further, a man in civilian clothes came and told me to follow him. He spoke German with an accent and took me to a small room where I saw some of the contents from my bag on a table. He said the soldiers had sent for him as he was with the NKVD, who handled spies and that I might be a U.S. spy. The interrogation was almost a déjà-vu of the earlier Nazi interrogations I had survived. My defense was that the U.S. items were gifts from my employer and to use them as gifts for my family whom I was trying to locate in Berlin. I asked the official if I could get some first aid for my knee as I worried it might get infected and I would be happy to donate my U.S. gifts but was told that the Vodka Bath had taken care of that. When I told him that my watch was gone, he responded that I didn't need one and took me back to where the soldiers were drinking. The German interpreter I had met earlier also was there and I told him that I needed to clean up myself (as well as relieve myself) and he took me to a toilet but there was no sink or running water. He then took me back to my basement quarters.

I don't know how long I dozed on the straw when I was pulled up by a soldier, motioning to come along. He took me to the toilet I had used earlier, gave me a bucket with water and a toothbrush and showed me to scrub the seat. The smell overpowered me and I fainted again. More vodka revived me and this time I received a piece of black bread to chew on. I lost all track of time when the German interpreter showed up to take me to the small room where the NKVD official was waiting for me. We went through the same question and answer game as before. "Why was I living in the American zone and not with my parents" and "What was my mission to find out?"

Finally he announced that I was a spy for the U.S. military forces and was sentenced to death by a firing squad at daybreak! At this point I was no longer thinking clearly, just numb. He left me sitting there until daybreak, when a soldier came to lead me outside to a yard where several armed soldiers were

lined up. He took me to a wooden post and put a scarf over my eyes. The NKVD official had followed us and shouted several commands. In the meantime my mind had gone into overdrive. I saw my whole life in a matter of seconds, and my baby daughter beckoning to me, and I blacked out amid a volley of shots!

Then I saw light and I was still alive and aching and I could barely stand up. The next person I saw was the German interpreter who told me I was free to continue my quest.

He wouldn't give me his name but said that he had been a Communist Party member fighting the Nazis in Berlin back in the '30s and been in hiding until the Soviet Union conquered Germany. He brought me my traveling bag (minus the U.S. items) and gave me a chance to change and said he would take me to the rail station where I could get something to eat. My watch was gone but my stash of Reichsmark was still there and would last me to get to Berlin. With my money he bought me a ticket to Berlin, but cautioned that I would have to transfer to a different train in Dresden.

I summoned whatever strength I had left and finally arrived in Berlin, at the Schlesinger Bahnhof in East Berlin, which is now named Ostbahnhof. From there I made my way to the Rüdersdorfer Strasse, where we used to live. The whole way is mostly rubble from the wartime bombings and so is #65. One corner had a board set up on which messages are posted. One has my parents' name and with it a telephone number to call. I tear off the notice and set out to find a phone. That takes me back to the Ost Bahnhof and I call the number. To my disappointment it was not my parents who answered but Mr. Wollek, with whom my father had worked after his store was closed. He told me to stay put and he would get hold of my parents to pick me up at the station. Fortunately, I had enough money left for some hot tea and a brötchen (bun) and there was a waiting room with a bench I stretched out on. I don't know how long I was there when I heard my name called and tried to stand up and saw my mother looking puzzled. She didn't recognize me in my ragged state until I croaked "Mutti," and we broke down in a tearful reunion. To make a long story short, she took me to an apartment in East Berlin that had been

assigned to my father when he was liberated from Sachsenhausen (the Berlin concentration camp). When did he get there? One day in 1944 when he was on his way to work at his friends' place, he was arrested walking on the street. While we were together, he gave me the details of his arrest, his stay at the camp and the forced labor he had to do for the AEG (General Electric Work, Berlin). I don't want to put down here what I remember as he wrote down everything in detail during the next 10 years that he still lived.

During the next two weeks, my mother nursed me back to health and we brought each other up to date on all that had happened. But my next problem was "how to get back to West Germany?"

Travel between East and West Berlin was still possible at that time and as soon as I was able, I went to West Berlin to see my friend Eva Seligsohn's mother at their old address. I found they had reverted to their old last name again and Eva was working for the U.S. headquarters. After I told her of my recent ordeal, she took me to her office to get help to get back to West Germany. At the same time my parents also were able to repossess their property in Petershagen (including valuables they had hidden there) and they lived there until they died.

We all parted again and I was on my way back to Weiden, West Germany, where I found my daughter in good health. In trying to resume my previous employment, I found a number of changes and was directed to Regensburg for a final evaluation. This was now the center for all activities of the Provinces of Niederbayern and Oberpfalz under the auspices of the U.S. Government. I could start immediately as interpreter/secretary to the agricultural overseer. However, this was a traveling job and it meant more separation from my daughter. I was told that the job would last a year until all locations had been visited and included in the new U.S. program.

Naturally, at the beginning of the interviews, I had given a full report on my experience with the Russian military and the resulting health issues, and I checked into a local hospital for four weeks with a diagnosis of a weakened immune system, receiving the benefits of American medicines. Upon my release, I started my new job in the agricultural section. At the same time, I

also started using Helen as my first name and kept it until 1954. I enjoyed my new travelling job.

One item of interest was that I came across one of my father's horses, which I was able to claim in his name. The agricultural job came to a conclusion in May 1949 and I asked for an office position at the headquarters in Regensburg, where I had a single room with shared bathroom facilities with another woman in a widow's apartment but no kitchen facilities. I usually spent just a few days each month there.

About this time the control shifted from the U.S. military government headed by General Clay to the State Department led by John F. McCloy, who previously headed the World Bank. Some departments (like Agriculture) were eliminated while new ones sprang up, namely "Women's Affairs." A Miss Carroll took over the Regensburg office but since she spoke no German was assigned an interpreter/secretary and I was told to be it as it involved just as much travel as my previous one and I was all set up for it. It was also stressed that all this was geared towards takeover by a new German government in the near future. Again I consulted with my daughter's caretakers and they were happy to oblige as they benefited from the extra income.

I actually enjoyed this assignment. It entailed meeting with notable women in different towns and finding out what in their opinion was needed to revitalize their communities. I had been given a "crash course" that their K-K-K attitude (Kinder, Kirche, Küche) had left the men to follow the wrong political roads, thus women must become politically active. By 1950, the American department heads were sent home and the German assistants became the regional heads, and I the Women's Affairs advisor. In 1951, Mrs. McCloy came to visit my area and I was invited to travel with her from Regensburg to Landschut for a special luncheon in her private train compartment, which at one time had been used by Adolf Hitler. At that time, I also met my future husband, Johann. He was employed by the U.S. Information Department filming events and distributing literature to re-educate the German people.

Johann, who later shortened his name to John, had a story of his own to tell, but we found we had a lot in common and both had applied for future visas to

come to the United States. Meanwhile, my job as Women's Affairs Advisor continued successfully in the re-education of German women. In 1951, my number for a U.S. visa was called, and I contacted Marion C., who together with her sister had promised to sponsor us, i.e., primarily to book passage in an ocean liner and pay for it in full. This meant that I was obligated to repay it in full as soon as I had earned that amount in U.S. currency. It included \$10 for myself and daughter to spend on board during the five-day crossing. I was notified to be in Cherbourg, France, on Feb. 28, 1952, to board the Queen Elizabeth. I had a foot locker that contained all our belongings and somehow managed to keep it with us on the train from Regensburg to Munich and Paris, where after an overnight stay we had to board the "boat train" to Cherbourg. The crossing took five days until we came into New York's harbor, passing the Statue of Liberty. The immigration process in a huge hall on the dock was fast (we went through the section marked "K"), had our paperwork checked and luggage cleared, and then were allowed to find people we were to meet.

Marion had driven up to welcome us and together we took off for New Haven, Conn. The first month was hectic in trying to get settled and finding a job, a school, an apartment and establishing credit. I found a job with the MB Manufacturing Co. doing office work, typing, maintaining records and some translating of German manuscripts concerning aircraft components. All of this was from World War II, but none of it was in my expertise and I probably did a lousy job translating. We also found a small apartment on High Street, centrally located next to Yale University and the town's Green, where all traffic came together and where we had streetcars going to my job and to a Catholic grade school in which Marion had enrolled my daughter. The two places were within walking distance. It took me a year to repay the sisters for our passage.

About that time, Johann's immigration number had been called, and he arrived in the States in May of 1953. His sponsor lived in Reno but had not provided enough money to get him from New York to Reno. When I heard of his arrival, I mentioned it to my boss (the owner of MB Mfg.) thinking that John might do a better job of translating the papers I didn't understand, and he offered to employ him on a temporary basis. Thus John earned his fare to Reno and took off for Reno. I should mention that immediately after our arrivals, we applied

for citizenship, as it would take five years to obtain it. For John, it would mean a lot, as he could then be working for the aircraft industry in which he had experience. In December of 1953, my daughter and I followed John, met his sponsors (Mr. and Mrs. Lehnhoff) and got married in Reno and moved into the duplex occupied by the Lehnhoffs.

Of course, John, who found work in construction, also had to repay his sponsors and it was up to me to find employment. After two unsuccessful attempts, I answered an ad in the Reno Gazette and applied for a position of receptionist at KZTV. This was Reno's only television station, and since it was a new industry, no previous experience was required. The motto was, "We learn together," and did. I occupied the reception desk for one week when the owner of the station came for a visit to inspect our program. His name was Donald W. Reynolds. The entire staff was assembled to meet him. Afterwards, he asked to meet each of us individually. When my turn came and he learned of my background, he promoted me to work as his secretary to handle his correspondence with Baden-Baden, a spa in the Black Forest where he regularly went for treatments. To fill my working hours, I would also do the scheduling of the "live" programs and commercials for the hours that were not taken by one of the national networks. Mr. Reynolds already owned several newspapers, radio and television stations in Arkansas, Oklahoma and Nevada and was in the process of building a TV station in Southern Nevada, where he was connected with the Review Journal.

At the end of 1954, the F.C.C. approved him to operate KLRJ-TV (Channel 3) in Clark County on Boulder Highway between Las Vegas and Henderson. Al Cahlan at the R-J had hired a few local people to start the operation in January 1955, but Mr. Reynolds felt that he wanted someone with actual Nevada TV experience to be station manager at KLRJ-TV. Bob Gardner (who did sales and announcing at KZTV) accepted the position and at the same time he offered me the job as assistant to the station manager. (I guess he didn't want to lose my translating his German correspondence.) This meant that the three of us (John, my daughter and myself) also had to pack up and move. John found a temporary sales job with Ed Von Tobel lumber company and we rented a small house in North Las Vegas near a grade school. In Reno, we had bought a

second-hand car, a Dodge, which was not reliable and to cut on travel, we looked for a rental in Henderson, especially since in the meantime John had found a job as mechanical engineer at Stauffer Chemical Co. in Henderson.

Henderson was just a small town then, and before long we obtained a loan to buy a fully furnished house on Burton Street. We became friends with neighbors (the Giles and the Pfeiffers) and with another immigrant couple from Germany (Dr. and Mrs. Hoentsch) (he was also the local veterinarian) and some of my daughter's teachers from Basic High School, especially Mike O'Callaghan. Highlights during the following years were our becoming U.S. citizens and John adopting my daughter at that time. After becoming citizens, we also became active in local politics and NAACP matters and in 1962 my daughter graduated as salutatorian of her class. She went on to college and graduated from Georgetown University in 1966. She had made us very proud, and I hope that she will pick up from here writing her own life history.

Meanwhile, Mr. Reynolds had lost interest in KLRJ-TV, and Bob Gardner quit and a succession of managers followed, and the third eliminated my position as assistant to the general manager. I went to work at a title company, which came in handy as we were purchasing a house on Llewellyn Street in Las Vegas, having sold our Henderson home. In the meantime, John had landed a job with the Clark County Building Department, which prompted our move. One day, while shopping on Fremont Street, I encountered Bill Stiles, who had followed Bob Gardner at KLRJ-TV, and he offered me a position as business manager at Channel 8, KLAS-TV, owned by Hank Greenspun of the Las Vegas Sun. I accepted and stayed until spring of 1968, when the station was sold to Howard Hughes.

Back in 1939 or 1940, while at the Rackow School, my friend Eva and I had fantasized as to which American film star or personality we wanted to meet, and while Eva settled on Clark Gable, I wanted to meet Howard Hughes! Of course, I never did, but I came very close, with him being holed up in a suite at the top of the Desert Inn (from where he could look down to the TV station, which was then "sandwiched" between a motel and the grounds of the

Guardian Angel Catholic Church). During the sales negotiations, I had to deal with Bob Maheu and got as far as the desk in front of the private elevator that went up to Hughes' quarters. And I got the honor to deposit his \$4,500,000 check. In the meantime, John had departed from the Building Department and accepted a managing position in Columbus, Nebraska.

Back in 1966, Mike O'Callaghan was running for the position of governor with Harry Reid seeking the lieutenant governor position. My daughter, who had returned home from college, actively worked at their campaign headquarters, and John and I campaigned in our neighborhood with signs, flyers and "meet the candidates," a rather futile undertaking in a heavily Republican neighborhood. She left for the Peace Corps and returned in 1968 to marry at the Catholic Church on Desert Inn Road. After the TV station's sale, I opted to work with the Greenspun family enterprises and worked with Barbara G. at the Las Vegas Sun credit department and then as accountant for the newly purchased outdoor billboard company before joining my husband in Nebraska.

I don't think I was quite prepared for the difference in everything. In Vegas, through our jobs, we had met entertainers on a personal level, like Liberace, Sammy Davis Jr., Dean Martin, Carol Channing, George Burns, Johnny Carson, as well as politicians like Harry S. Truman, Grant Sawyer, Paul Laxalt, Howard Cannon, as well as some infamous mob figures. The little town of Columbus had one "famous citizen," who happened to be Kit Carson, Johnny Carson's father. More important was the climate. While you hear a lot of complaints about the 100-degree days in Vegas, I loved the dry desert heat and was not prepared for the blizzards and tornadoes we had moved to. From time to time, I still had nightmares of my experiences in the Old World.

My husband wanted a family and thought the move coupled with the fact that I no longer had to work would help in my getting pregnant, but I didn't, and shortly after my arrival I had an accident and had to spend one month in the hospital. The next couple years brought more changes. John's company was sold, and we moved to Omaha, where he found a managing position. While

still in Columbus, we learned to play bridge, which came in handy, joining duplicate bridge clubs in Omaha.

After I was able, I did volunteer work as a sunshine lady in the Columbus hospital, but after the move to Omaha, I was at a loss, and in 1974, John and I decided to divorce. We sold our Las Vegas home and divided the assets. While doing that and deciding on what to do next, we decided to give it one more try, move back together and buy a house in Omaha. I had not changed my name when we divorced and still have it. This lasted for a few years until we separated again. At that time, I found employment as an administrative assistant at Lyman-Rickey (a sand and gravel and ready mix company), from where I retired in 1985.

In 1957, after my father died, we had wanted my mother to join us in Henderson, but she didn't want to leave now that he was buried in East Germany. In 1963, I was able to visit my mother there but was denied a visa when she passed away in 1968. It took almost 20 years to obtain a visa to settle my affairs as sole inheritant. It was 1987 before I received a visa. I was able to go together with my daughter, son-in-law and my granddaughter, who was 13 at that time. All of us were glad that I had made the move to the United States instead of having stayed in the country of my birth. East Germany had become a Communist satellite and was nothing like West Germany.

Upon our return from East Germany, we decided on my future. I did not want to stay in Nebraska and had no luck in relocating to Nevada, nor did I want to join them in New Hampshire. We settled on Florida and looked into real estate deals. I checked out a condo on the East Coast near Fort Lauderdale and a mobile home park on the West Coast in Clearwater and settled on the latter. I bought a double-wide mobile home, which was anchored in a lot at Lakeside Mobile Home Park. It was like my childhood fantasy of living with the Gypsies and their wagons had come true!

When I moved there in November 1987, I signed an annual lease to pay monthly lot rent like the other 200-plus units already settled there and joined the FMO (federation of mobile home owners). When I interviewed to be accepted as a tenant, I inquired about their social activities, especially Bridge,

and found out that they were looking for someone to organize Bridge games, especially during the winter season when “the Snow-Birds” would be in residence (many of them Canadians). Well, this would give me something to do, and for the next 18 years, I arranged sessions for as many as a dozen tables, and on my own time I taught a class of beginners. Shortly after I moved to Florida, my ex-husband passed away in Kansas, ending another chapter in my life.

Besides my “Bridge” involvement, I also worked with our Home Owners’ Association as well as the FMO, and each year we would submit bids to buy the land we were leasing from the company that held the title. All this came to an end in May of 2006, when we were given eviction notices. The land owner gave us notice to vacate our lots, i.e., move our homes, and he would give us \$4,000 for the moving expense. Not only did he break our lease agreements, but such a move would cost a minimum of \$10,000, assuming one had a lot to move to. Through the FMO, we hired an attorney to go to court. After we filed and while waiting for a court date, the Lakeside owners made another offer, “move out before 12/31/06, no lot rent in the meantime, but \$1,000 as a final offer of good will.” Meanwhile, the case went to court, which denied us a jury trial, and we lost and were assessed court costs in addition to losing our properties.

When I lived in Omaha, I had befriended Cindy, whose twin sister Cathy lived in Las Vegas. Both girls wanted to have their mother move to an apartment in Las Vegas and had chosen Carefree on Pebble and given me the address, just in case.

It was like a lifeline had been thrown to me, and I grabbed it, called Pebble, sent the required deposit and became a future resident of a one-bedroom apartment at Pebble on February 1, 2007.