

*Anecdotes
and
Adventures*

Stories of my life

By Helmut Standke

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First, I must thank my daughter-in-law Nita for maneuvering me to the Writer's Class for Seniors by Bernard Selling. The class is fun, interesting and a challenge, thanks to Bernard Selling's personality and background as author, film director, art historian and philosopher about life in general. As the writing progressed, my entire family was editing, proofreading and writing helpful notes at the margin. My thanks go to all of you. Thanks in particular to Magdalene who was the first to hear the many versions of any new anecdote and for her suggestions. Last, but not least, thank you all in Bernard's Writing Class—in particular Bernard—for the contributions at the Dress Rehearsal Readings, and for the constructive comments and suggestions by everybody.

Thank you all! Vielen Dank!

FOREWORD

“Grandpa, what did you do when you were my age?” The grandchildren ask.

“Let me think about it, and then I will write it down for all of you. Sooner or later you all would like to know. I wish I knew how my grandfathers and great grandfathers lived, what good and bad luck they had and what obstacles they had to overcome and how they managed. I do know that they lived out in the country and had a hard life and no future. That is why they moved to Berlin, a bustling city with lots of opportunities. Looking back one-hundred to two-hundred years I think that was a good move! I am glad they packed up and moved to what looked like a better future.

One day my daughter-in-law Nita came over to bring an announcement from the LA school district. A writing class for seniors starts a new semester, teaching how to write ‘Life Stories.’ The timing is perfect; all I needed was a trigger.

Classes are at the former Junior High School, where all our children studied. Now it is our turn.

That was about three years ago. Magdalene and I write our own stories. We went together to the weekly class, and generally managed to write a story per week.

The anecdotes cover the period from the time I started to go to school to the time when I retired.

In my retirement Magdalene and I traveled for ten years to many countries in Europe, the Americas, Asia and New Zealand. Modern technology makes it now possible; I contributed my share to its development.

Traveling is a rewarding experience; it puts your everyday life and surroundings in perspective. We loved it!

*Writing the stories was fun. It brought back memories which seemed to be lost and magically came back to life. It turned out to be longer than originally planned, but it is not possible to know what you would like to read some years from now. Have fun reading *Anecdotes and Adventures, Stories of my Life, Helmut.**

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CHAPTER ONE

School Years

Where Are My Friends? 1925

I am sitting all alone in front of our apartment house in Oberschöneweide, a suburb of Berlin. It is a nice warm day in spring, but my playmates are not here. What happened? We have played together every day. This morning I saw them go to school without me. I wish I was a year older and could be with them.



I am lonely. I don't know what to do. Older people are passing me by and don't even look at me.

I hear horses. A large brewery delivery wagon comes around the corner with four big horses in front. Two heavy guys climb down from their seat high up. They feed the horses so they will eat and stand still, they tell me. I have many questions but they are very busy.

Each one of these guys drops a barrel off the wagon onto a thick pad on the ground and rolls it to basement opening at the pub. Then they climb back up high on that wagon and the horses take off again. I can still hear their little bells ring after they are gone.

I am on my way back to our house, when another horse drawn wagon comes down the street and stops in front of the pub. We only live two houses from it; I have to see what is going on now.

It is an ice deliveryman. He is very busy and does not look at me. He grabs a long and heavy piece of ice from the back of the wagon, wraps a sack around it and takes it to the pub's basement too.

I like horses and like to look into their eyes. They bend their head down and look at me so friendly. I do not like their long teeth. Papa showed me how to feed horses with an open hand. He told me they could not see well close up.

While the iceman is gone for a moment, I feed little pieces of ice to the horses. They like it. I think they like me too.

Mama had told me before she let me go down to the street to be back home at noon for lunch. I look down the street to our church. It is only a block away and in the middle of the street on a large square. The clock on the church is looking right at me. When the big hand and the little hand point to the twelve on top, Mama had told me, it is lunchtime and I have to come home. I have to go now!

After lunch I ask Mama to let me go back to the street again, to see all my friends are back. I am so lonely!

Baby Sister Ingeborg

1926

Something very important must be going on. A strange woman in a white gown and Mama are walking back and forth in the living room. They tell me a stork will bring me a little sister or brother very soon. I have seen pictures of big birds carrying babies.

I ask Mama, "How can the stork deliver the baby, all windows are closed?" It is February and very cold outside. Mama answers that the stork probably will make it through the vent hole near the ceiling in the kitchen, I sit down and opposite the vent hole and keep an eye on it. I think the stork will have a problem. A screen is in front of that outlet. I will keep an eye on it in case I have to help him.

A brother or sister will be okay, I am five and a half years old now. I better keep my eye on that vent hole. Mama keeps telling me I should go down to the courtyard and play. But I don't want to miss something that none of my friends has ever talked about. Boy, will I have a story to tell.

After a while our neighbor Mr. Habuch comes over, and asks me to come for a walk. He shows me a nice red cap he has for me.

I have always liked Mr. Habuch. I can always talk to him and he is very friendly.

After a long walk through the park Mr. Habuch and I have come back.

I ring the bell to get back into our home. The woman in the white gown opens the door. She smiles and tells me, "Helmut, you've got a little sister!"

Suddenly I remember, the stork, how did he get in? I go to the kitchen to check the vent hole; the screen is still there. I am wondering. Something has happened that I can't explain. Maybe Papa can.

The baby is so tiny. "Mama, how long does it take until I can play with her?"

First day in School



I am in front, the third from the left

Today is my first day in school and I go with Mama to my school. She carries a large red and blue cardboard cone, filled with candy and chocolates. We walk along a wide dirt road between gardens. Many other first graders with their mothers and older students are with us.

The school is a large building and Mama has to look around to find my classroom. A white-haired gentleman, Herr Krause, tells us, "I am your teacher," and then he tells me where to sit. All mothers have to leave, and we kids are alone with our teacher. It is very quiet, and we listen to what he has to say.

After an hour the mothers are back. Now we get our candies to keep and can enjoy our first day in school. School is really easy and fun.

Mama and I walk home again. It is a nice walk. Mama tells me that this road will become a street in a few years. But I like it the way it is, with gardens on both sides and lilac flowers on the fences in many of them. It doesn't take us long to get home. Many of my new friends walk with me.

In the afternoon I am with my old friends together again. I tell them that I made many new friends and ate lots of candies.

Firemen's Christmas Party

Over the past few weeks, the firemen of the voluntary fire department of Oberschöneweide have made visits to the local Merchants.

They ask for donations of toys, games, oranges, nuts, apples, chocolates, or anything that can be packed into a large shopping bag as a Christmas present to children. Papa is *Brand Meister* (Fire Chief) and one of the organizers. He has been traveling up and down our community Oberschöneweide.

Papa became a firefighter and a member of the Red Cross at the age of 18 and has been a firefighter ever since. Many people know Papa.

This year the Christmas party is today and in one of the local ballrooms, the *Mittelpunkt der Erde*, (Center of the Earth).

Mama and I get ready to walk to the ballroom. It is only a few blocks from us. Inge is now ten months old and I am already six years. Mama and I push the Kinderwagen with Inge.

Papa is already at the ballroom to make sure everything is ready. Dinner is at five o'clock, and we have to be on time.

When we arrive we see all the firemen in their parade uniforms, decorated with many medals. Papa sees us, shows us our table, and parks our Kinderwagen somewhere.

Two tall Christmas trees are left and right of the stage, where the orchestra is getting ready. It doesn't take long and all tables are full and children are running around the dance floor.

On a long table I see the filled shopping bags. Some of them have a long toy sticking out. At about five o'clock the orchestra sounds the drum

roll and the trumpet to ask for quiet. The parents call us kids back to the tables; we were playing everywhere. I know most of the children from the years before.

Papa walks to the stage. He welcomes everybody and wishes all of us a merry Christmas and lots of fun tonight. Now we all can have dinner.

After a while the firemen come marching to the middle of the dance floor and stand in formation. Papa is saying a few words and the music plays 'Stille Nacht' ... (Silent Night). The firemen sing along, pretty loud, at least during the first and the second verse.

Then most firemen walk back to their families. Some walk to the bar until Santa Claus comes to the middle of the dance floor. He invites the children to come to him and a big crowd forms around Santa. A chair stands in front of Santa and he asks the first child to step on the chair.

Some of the children are afraid of his growling voice and his white beard. An older boy is brave enough to step onto the chair first. "Have you been a good boy this year?" Santa Claus asks.

"Ja, ich war ein guter Junge," (Yes, I was a good boy) was the answer. "Now let's see if you can say a prayer," Santa wants to know.

"Lieber guter Weihnachtsmann..." (Dear Santa Claus...).

Everybody claps and Santa Claus gives him his Christmas present, a large bag full of goodies.

Every child has to stand on the chair and say a prayer to get a present. The very small ones say their prayer in their mother's arms, and some are afraid of Santa and cry.

Santa whips several firemen with a bundle of twigs when they don't pay attention.

"Don't do it again," he tells them. It takes a long time until all children have their presents.

Now the dance floor is ours to play with our new toys. Some children even have a fire truck that runs when you wind it up. My little sister Inge is soundly asleep.

After a few hours Papa is telling me, "We'll take you home now and put you and Inge to bed. Mama and I will come back here. Mama wants to dance a little more and listen to the music."

It takes only fifteen minutes to get home. Mama puts Inge and me to bed, and before she and Papa leave she tells me, "Inge has just been fed

and she will sleep till tomorrow morning. She should be okay. Should she wake up, cover her, and be a good brother to her. If something bad happens and you need help, knock on Uncle Hermann's door next to ours. He knows we are at the firemen's Christmas party for a few hours." Papa then turns the gas light off. It is very dark now and the little buzz the gaslight makes has stopped. I can hear the door close and Mama and Papa have left. I am not afraid, but I feel a little funny being in the dark and alone with Inge. She is fine and I can fall asleep too.

All of a sudden, Inge starts to cry. I call her to be quiet, but she keeps on crying. I get up and walk over to her in the dark. With the noise she is making I have no problem finding her. I put her down again and cuddle her a little bit. But something must be wrong with her. I sniff her diapers; they smell okay. But she pulls herself up again on the crib rail and cries.

"What are you crying for, your diapers are okay, you have been fed, and you have no reason to be so fussy. I put you down one more time and you'll better stay covered or you will catch a cold, our bedroom is ice-cold."

Now she seems to be falling asleep, she is a good baby. I go back to my bed and try to fall asleep.

Here she goes again. This is not normal baby-crying. She is now standing up in her bed and is rattling the rail again and is screaming as loud as she can. How can a little thing cry so loud?

Some moonlight is now coming through the window and I can see her. She may have an earache; she had that before.

I don't know why she is crying, but I know I will not get any sleep tonight if I don't do something. I have to find a quiet place.

Feeling my way around to the moonlit and quiet kitchen, I drop my blankets on the floor. When I close the doors behind me, it is quiet. Now she can scream as long as she wants to. I don't know how long I slept.

The moon has moved across the window and it is dark again. I can hear Mama and Papa coming into the hall. Papa's keys are ringing. Mama and Papa are coming in slowly because the hall is very dark. Papa opens the kitchen door and stops; I think he can see me as some dark thing on the floor.

"Auguste, take a look, what is this?"

"*Das bin ich!* (It's me) I am calling, and I hear Mama say, "My God, what is wrong? Oskar, turn the light on!"

Papa strikes a match and turns the gas light on. Now it is bright as daylight. Mama and Papa are very frightened, and I hurry to tell them the whole story.

"Inge cried all night, I don't know what's wrong with her. She always stands up in bed; I had to put her down a hundred times." Mama goes to check Inge. She is soundly asleep on top of her feather bed.

"Helmut, now you better go to your bed and get warm again. The kitchen is ice-cold."

"Yeah, I better. I am glad you are back, Mama. I sure missed you. I don't know why Inge always cries when I am alone with her."

Orthopedic Gymnastic

Several times during the school year, a doctor comes to our school to check up on us students. He measures how tall we are and what we weigh. He makes me stand up straight and says something about my back, and the nurse takes notes.



Seven Years, 1928

After a few days, we get a postcard that tells Papa and Mama to send me to an orthopedic gymnastic program. I have to bring a pair of kneepads. Mama made them for me, using leftover cloth to make a small pillow, with strings attached so I can tie them to my knees. I have to go to the school gym across the street from our house. There are many children at this gymnastic program and we have a lot of fun. We have to crawl around on our hands and knees with another student riding on the back. We have races; we wrestle and do other games, all on our hands and knees. We are told that this will strengthen our backs. I hope it will do some good, but it is fun anyway.

A Skinny Boy at the Sea

1929

*A*ll is going well in school, but the school doctor does not like my low weight. I am too skinny. He thinks I should spend six weeks at the Baltic Sea in a clinic for children who should gain some weight. The City

of Berlin has one for kids like me at the Baltic Sea. I do need my teacher's okay, because my trip is not during vacation time. Mr. Krause tells Mama that I can go. My grades for a second-year student are pretty good.

After four weeks the time for my trip to the Baltic Sea has come. Mama and Papa have packed what I have to bring along. The Youth Department of Berlin had sent us a list of things to bring.

Papa and I are on our way now to the railroad station down town for my train to the sea. First, we walk to the streetcar stop; it is only a block away.

"We have to wait for the right streetcar," Papa says, "It will take us an hour to get to the main station for your train."

This will be my first train ride, and it will be my first time away from home. It is a strange feeling. Papa can tell. "Don't you worry; you will have a good time. Don't forget to send us a card once in a while. Mama and I will send you a letter every week."

"At the next streetcar stop we will be at the train station, there we have to get off." When we come to a stop, Papa picks up my luggage and we walk over to the train station.

I have never been in a train station before. It is a big hall, and high, and smelly, with people running all over the place.

"Now we have to find the right platform," Papa says.

"Here on the wall are signs which tell us which trains come and go on which platform. Let's see, we want to go to Swinemünde over Usedom, that's platform twelve, that's near the end."

When we come to platform twelve and walk up the stairs, we meet other kids my age. That makes me feel better; everything will be all right. I am now on the platform, and Papa is holding my hand as if he doesn't want to let me go.

But then a young man with a large green card around his neck comes over and tells Papa,

"I am one of the travel guides who will get the children to our clinic on the Baltic Sea."

I have to say goodbye to Papa and he gives me one more of his bear hugs, lifts me off the ground and gives me a kiss. "Have a good trip Helmut, stay healthy and write us a card once in awhile." I shake his hand one more time and watch him go down the stairs.

Our travel guide now looks at the card I have around my neck and says, "Helmut, join the group over there and stay with them until the train pulls in. Wait for my signal."

All the boys are about my age and we are all waiting for the train. It doesn't take too long when we see a big black locomotive pull a long train slowly into the station, puffing steam and smoke. When the locomotive is right in front of me, I can see how big this iron machine really is. It is as tall as a house. It is huffing, puffing, and clicking, and steam and smoke are all over us.

When it comes to a stop our travel guide tells us, "Climb up and stay together all in one car. Don't worry about your luggage; it's in the luggage wagon. You see it again in our house at the sea."

Once on board we all have our noses on the windows to see what is going on outside. Then the railroad stationmaster in his blue uniform and red cap gives the signal.

He yells, "All aboard!" and lifts his departure sign and blows his whistle. The train jerks first, and then it starts to move out of the hall.

We are on our way. After a few hours nobody is looking out of the windows anymore. Our travel guide is playing games with us and is telling us stories. Once in a while I take a peek out of the window. It is always the same, fields and forests. They are getting boring after a while.

Our travel guide tells us, "Call me Walter from now on. I will try to remember your names too. By the way, get ready; we are almost there."

The train slows down, the brakes screech and then we come to a stop. This must be it.

"Is this a train station?" It sure doesn't look like one to me. This must be the smallest train station on earth, and it is in the middle of nowhere. There is a nice forest on one side. I see several horse drawn wagons in the street in front of the station.

"My group, get on this one here!" Walter calls.

I am no longer tired. This is going to be fun. The horses pull us along a dirt road with tall trees on both sides, and up and down it goes. Our driver is an older man with a big mustache, and he is twisting the ends all the time.

"You all look like skinny kids from the city. You need a good time here at the sea. I want to see you in six weeks at least ten pounds heavier."

We have arrived at our house for our vacation. Walter, our guide, leads us to our rooms. "Come down the stairs in a few minutes to the big hall for supper. I bet you are hungry."

"Boy, I am hungry," I tell my roommates. We are sitting around a very long table, and our food is placed in front of us. "What did we get?" I

want to know and lean over to take a closer look. One bowl with noodles looks good, my favorite, and a small bowl with cottage cheese. I try a spoon full.

"Yuck, what is this? It looks like cottage cheese, but it sure doesn't taste like it." Now everybody around me gives it a try.

"This tastes like my favorite cottage cheese I get at home."

"Mine too," others say. Only a few boys agree with me. How can that be?

Nobody really cares whether I eat it or not. I feel that nobody would listen if I would try to complain about how the cottage cheese tastes, probably some boys would make fun of me. Maybe if I try it, I can get used to it, some other boys are eating it.

The following day Walter comes to us and tells us, "This morning we will go to the sea. It is too cold to swim, but we will have a nice walk along the beach. There is no better beach anywhere. You can look for *Bernstein* (amber), and if you find some you can keep it."

We meet in front of our house and take off.

Walter tells us, "The hills in front of us are called sand dunes. You can see the sea when we get over to the other side." It doesn't take long and I am looking at it. I had no idea that any lake can be that big.

"Who can see the other side?" Walter asks. Nobody can. We stand here for a long time and try to find out how big this sea is. The rest of the day we play at the beach. It is only a few minutes to walk back to our house, where we go back to eat during the noon hour.

Every day we walk and play on the beach or in the forest. The forest is full of blueberries. Never in my life did I eat so many. On the beach we look for amber.

"Let's see who finds the biggest piece of *Bernstein* (amber)," Walter is asking us. "I have a pretty good piece, the size of my fingernail. Come and look at it." We all come together to compare.

On Saturday Walter gives us all a post card with the picture of our home. "Let's all sit together and write a card to your parents." Most of us scribble something like "I am fine." Walter makes sure the address is okay. I write, "*I ate sweet cottage cheese here, but I hate it*".

Once a week a doctor comes and looks us over, and we have to step on the scale. "We better eat enough to get fat!" I am telling my buddy next in line to me.

I don't know where the time went, but Walter tells us one day, "Guys, we will have to go home in a couple days, so make sure you've got all your

stuff together, because we don't want to leave anything behind." "I wish I could stay longer," I tell Walter.

"That means you must have had a good time. That's good to hear."

The day to leave has come. The man with his horse and wagon comes again to pick us up to take us to the train station. "You look much better now, kids. The sun and the fresh air did you a lot of good. Have a good trip home."

I wish I would be home already. I did not like that long train ride coming here. Walter tells us not to worry, "You probably will be sleeping most of the time anyhow."

It will take a long time to get back home. I hope Papa is there to pick me up, I am sure he will be. He is always there when I need him. After many hours the train pulls into the big station in Berlin. I can see Papa and all the other moms and dads standing on the platform to pick us up. That was a long time away from home. Papa lifts me off the ground and squeezes me hard. I don't know why he takes his glasses off and wipes his eyes. There isn't that much smoke. The long streetcar ride is much shorter on the way home, there is so much to tell and so much to ask. Papa says, "Mama will be very happy to see you back home again."

I cannot wait to get home and tell Mama how much fun I had at the sea.

Fire Alarm

I am at home with Mama. Sister Inge is asleep. It is about ten o'clock in the morning. Mama is working at home on her sewing machine repairing work clothes for the 'Varta' battery factory. She picks up the overalls to fix them after they have been washed. I help to put the buttons back on. Mama has shown me how to do that.

All of a sudden someone bangs on the door. I open the door and see Frau Sandow.

"Is your father home? We have a fire in our apartment!" The Sandows live on the third floor and below us.

Mama tells her, "No, he is at work. Helmut, you run to the fire alarm down the street and get the fire truck."

I am on my way in no time, taking three steps at a time. My slippers get lost somewhere. Papa has told me every time when we passed that fire alarm on the street corner what to do, should I ever have to.

Papa is Fire Chief in Oberschöneweide, a suburb of Berlin, and he tells me many things about fires and safety. As I am running as fast as I can to the fire alarm down the street, people look at me and wonder. The fire alarm is one and a half blocks away from our house, at the crossing of our street and the main street.

Papa had told me what to do. I use my elbow to break the glass and push that red button. A bell starts to ring and people stop.

"Where is the fire?" they ask. Gasping for breath, I tell them, "Down the street."

Now I have to wait for the fire truck to get here so I can tell them where the fire is.

It takes forever! I wonder if they will ever come. I have to tell Papa about that. After a long time I can now hear the fire truck.

With sirens, horns and bells going it is now coming closer and closer. Now we can see it too. There is a large group of people now, and we are all waving at the firemen.

The fire truck is going past us. What is going on here?

What should I do now? Papa never talked about that. I have now waited near the fire alarm for a long time. I don't know what to do. Now it sounds as if the fire truck is coming back, the siren gets louder again and then the fire truck stops in front of me.

I tell them, "The fire is *Frischen Strasse 28*, a little over a block down the street."

"Hop on board," they tell me, and I am zooming down my street on a fire truck. This I can tell my friends. We are now in front of the house.

"The fire is at the second row of houses on the third floor," I tell the firemen. As the firemen are about to run up the stairs, some of our neighbors come down and say,

"We got the fire out, we got there in time."

The captain pats me on the back, "Good job, your dad can be proud of you."

After checking that the fire is really out, the firemen pack their stuff and drive back to the station.

I cannot wait for Papa to come home from work; it is so exiting. The door opens and I shout, "Papa, Papa, I got the fire truck today. We had a fire in the house and I went to the fire alarm to get the firemen."

"You did?"

"And I did all the things you told me to do, Papa. But the fire truck didn't stop at the alarm and went past me. But when it came back I rode it back from the alarm to our house."

"You did all that? And you didn't panic? You did better as a seven-year-old than many grownups would do. I am really proud of you."

"But why did the fire truck not stop at the alarm the first time? All the people and I at the alarm waved at them."

"Something must have gone wrong. I will find out Helmut. At least the neighbors got the fire out. It could have burned our apartment too. We are all very lucky."

Rowing, Swimming and Rowing

1930

My nine-year old classmates and I are in class. During recess we talk about what we are going to do in our six-week summer vacation. Many dads are unemployed and most boys don't have a plan. We will probably go to our local swim beaches on the river Spree. The beaches belong to the city of Berlin and are well cared for. It is safe for children, rowdies are not tolerated.

Suddenly the classroom door opens and our teacher Mr. Krause brings in a visitor. This man looks strange. He has a full red beard and wears a long Navy blue overcoat. I don't think I ever saw a man with a beard before except on old pictures. His beard is really red.

"This is a good friend of mine, Mr. Schmidt. He is the president of one of the rowing clubs on our river Spree," says our teacher, Mr. Krause.

The class is quiet and we wonder what he has to say. But Mr. Schmidt looks interesting and important.

"I was a Navy officer," he says, "and for many years I have been in many countries of the world. Now, back home, I have started a sport-rowing club for boys up to 18 years. The club is not far from here. You can walk to it from here in less than 20 minutes. If you are interested in learning how to swim, for those of you who still don't know how, we will teach you. Who wants to learn how to row, in a real sport row boat? We will teach you that too. It will cost nothing during your entire summer vacation.

"Talk to your parents and send us a post card to let us know that you would like to come. You have to bring something to eat for the day, swim trunks, and leather shoes with heels for rowing. We will have a lot of boys your age. You will learn something you have never done before. It will be very exciting and you will have a lot of fun. I hope to see you in two weeks. Thank you Mr. Krause, thank you boys, have a good day."

Mr. Krause tells us, "Every year many boys have gone to Mr. Schmidt's rowing club and came back after vacation brown like chocolate. They say that it was great and they will go back a year from now.

After school and at home, I ask Mama, "Can I go to the rowing club during vacation? It is only thirty minutes from here, and it is free."

"Let's talk this over with Papa when he comes home," Mama says.

I can't wait until Papa comes home. Being on a boat all day sounds like a lot of fun. After many hours I can hear Papa coming up the stairs. We live on the fourth floor with three other families. I can tell when Papa is coming up the stairs by the sound of his keys' rattle and how fast he comes up.

Off come my shoes in a hurry before he walks in. He does not like me walking around with my shoes on in the apartment.

"Papa, can I go to the rowing club for swimming and rowing when we have school summer vacation?"

"Is that the Sadowa rowing club with Mr. Schmidt?" he asks.

"Ja, it is Papa. Do you know Mr. Schmidt?"

"Of course, everybody knows him, with his red beard and his funny overcoat he always wears, even in summer. He is a good man; he is doing a lot for young boys. I am happy you want to go. Say hello when you see him. He and I are together in the Red Cross and we took some courses together; he knows me."

Vacation time is here. "*Auf Wiedersehen, Mama.*" She reminds me to be careful when I cross the streets. I grab my bag, run

down the stairs, two or three steps at a time. I am on my way and have to be at the club before 9:00 a.m. I pass our school, which is about half the way, and now I have to watch the street signs because I have never been here before. But it should be easy. In Berlin there are street signs at every corner.

Most of the way is along a highway that connects the suburb of Oberschöne-weide, where we live, with Köpenick, another suburb farther out. The last buildings in Oberschöne-weide belong to the AEG, (General Electric Corp. of Germany).

On the north side of the highway are streetcar tracks and then a large forest.

On the other side, between the highway and the river Spree, are tennis clubs, swim clubs, soccer fields, hockey fields, sailing clubs and several rowing clubs.

I could have taken the streetcar, but that would have cost 20 pfennig, which is more money than I have. But after walking about thirty minutes I am at the Sadowa Rowing Club. Many boys are here and most of them are my age. I also meet several teenagers.

"We will be your instructors in swimming and rowing," one of them says.

The man with the red beard, Mr. Schmidt, is there too. "Hello boys, I'm glad you could come, you will like it." One of the boys calls him Kaiser Barbarossa, I am glad he didn't hear it. We walk through the boathouse and see all the beautiful boats on racks, one above the other, from the floor to the ceiling. As we come out of the boathouse a gentle slope leads down to the water.

"Did you see all those boats?" one of the boys asks me. "This must be a club for rich people."

We are forming teams of eight boys each. Two long rowboats for a crew of eight are in the water for us.

"Line up next to the boats with one boy next to each seat," we are told by our instructor. "You are number one," he points to the boy at the front of the boat. "I am your coxswain. The one in front of me is number eight, he is the one you all look to and follow his beat. I will address you by your number. Now watch me how I get into the boat," our instructor says. "I don't want you to tip the boat over, damage it or fall into the water." We do as he tells us and sit down on our seats, which can roll back and forth. I tie the straps that hold my feet to a board. Our instructor checks us out and then sits down on the coxswain's seat.

I grab my oar and try to handle it. That thing is long and heavy. Someone pushes us away from the landing and to the river so we can bring our oars sideways. It takes a little bit until we all look like we can start to row. The river Spree does not go very fast but we do drift slowly down stream. Our instructor now tells us how to roll towards him on our seats and to bring the oars forward, dip them into the water and pull, stretching our legs to roll the seat back again. After a little while, we get the hang of it and row more or less all together.

After going down the river for a while, we turn around and come back. That oar gets heavier and heavier. I think I have blisters on my hands. I am also not used to sitting that long on the hard wooden rolling seat either.

We are coming close to the landing where we started from, and bring our oars to the side of the boat and glide in. One by one we get out of the boat, trying not to lose our balance or tip the boat. Our instructor is tying up the boat."

"You guys are the best beginner crew I ever had," he says. Boy, am I proud. The rest of the day I am swimming and talking to my new rowing friends. On my walk home, I start to feel my hands and see several blisters. I am tired, but I am looking forward to tomorrow.

Ouch!

Every day I go rowing and swimming. My hands no longer have blisters. The oar seems to have shrunk, and I can handle it quite well. I have no trouble rowing for an hour or more. When we see another boat with boys going in our direction we try to race them. It is fun to be better and faster.

Sometimes it is not that easy, the other boys are trying to do the same. Then our coxswain starts yelling at us, "All together now, pull---pull---pull---", it makes a big difference. The better we get the more fun it is.

I have many new friends, and we are all members of the club now. We are trying to get a good crew together to form a racing team, to go racing in the Youth Group.

One day, we are together in the boathouse and Mr. Schmidt is teaching us old sailor songs. One of them goes, *We sail from Hamburg around Cap Horn and on to Sacramento.*

I look to the water and see a rowboat coming in to stop at one of the landings. I run out to help them in. I have to slow them down to prevent damage to the boat; it is coming in too fast. I reach out as far as I can for the pointed bow of the boat to slow them down and guide them in.

But I am not big and strong enough to stop the boat. My hand gets between the boat and the wooden landing. It all goes so fast. The boat bounces back and I look at my hand. One finger is split open full length. I am scared.

I run back to the boathouse to Mr. Schmidt. "My finger is broken, my finger is broken," is all I can think of. Everybody comes running.

Mr. Schmidt grabs me and puts me down on a cot. "Hold your finger high. I'll have the doctor here in a few minutes." I now start to feel the pain.

"Can you move your finger?" Mr. Schmidt wants to know. I can wiggle it a little. Mr. Schmidt says, "It is probably not too bad and it will heal alright."

After a long while the doctor comes. He takes a look at my finger. Then he sprinkles some yellow powder on it. He stitches it up at three places and puts a bandage over it. It is now hurting like crazy.

"You can go home now and come to my office tomorrow," he tells me. I am walking home now. Today it is a long walk. The pain is killing me. I don't know how to hold my hand.

At home I tell Mama, "Don't be scared. My finger is wrapped up, but the doctor says it will be all right. It is not broken."

Now I show her my hand and tell her, "Tomorrow we have to go to the doctor. He wants to check it."

When I go to bed, I don't know how to hold my arm. My finger is hurting so much; I wish the doctor had given me pills for my pain.

Papa says, "Hold your arm high." How can I sleep like that?

I toss and turn in bed, trying to hold my right hand high. But nothing will stop the pain. I hear our Regulator clock chime every thirty minutes.

Finally, daylight is coming through the windows but my finger is still hurting. I wish yesterday did not happen.

Mama and I are at the doctor's office. It is only a few blocks from our house. The nurse takes the bandage off and I can see how bad it really is. The doctor says it looks okay, but there is something in the tone of his voice that I don't like.

Mama says, "I hope it will be okay." The doctor sprinkles some more of that yellow powder on my finger and the nurse puts a bandage back on.

After another day the finger does not feel right and we go back to the doctor. When the bandage is removed we see the finger is all red and slimy. The stitches have pulled out, and it smells bad. I must bathe the finger every day now in soapy water and change the bandage. Three weeks later, we still bathe the finger in soapy water, and it looks worse. The doctor tells Mama something about amputating.

He wants to cut my finger off? Mama and I are scared.

When we are back home Mama says, "Let's talk to Frau Rogalsky and let's show her your finger."

Mrs. Rogalsky and her husband are from Poland. She knows a lot about herbs, tea, mushrooms and stuff like that. Mama has said that before to see Frau Rogalsky, but I wanted no part of it. I was sure our doctors could heal anything.

But after what I heard from the doctor, I tell Mama, "Let's give Frau Rogalsky a try."

We know Mrs. Rogalsky well. She helped Mama make an herb tea for us when we had a high fever. We went together into the forest to

look for mushrooms. She can tell the good ones from the poisonous ones. We learned a lot from her.

She gave us an onion with long green leaves, and when you cut them they drip a clear juice. We call that plant *Heilbolle* (healing onion).

We make tea from the plant when we are sick; and it really helps. I show Mrs. Rogalsky my finger. It is all red, and the skin around it is all white and dead. The wound is wide open because the stitches pulled out weeks ago, and the finger smells bad.

Frau Rogalsky tells Mama she thinks the *Heilbolle* has a good chance of healing the finger. She is patting me on the back and says, "Helmut, I think your finger will be better in a few days."

I am scared, and I hope she is right. Mrs. Rogalsky puts some gauze over the wound and pieces of the *Heilbolle* leaves. It is dripping wet with the juice from the onion leaves. Mama bandages my finger.

I think Mama is praying.

The next day we carefully remove the bandage and hope for a miracle. It doesn't smell bad anymore. The finger looks much better. The redness is less and it is no longer oozing and is now dry. I start to believe my finger can be saved. In the following days the finger is getting better and better. We are sure it will heal completely.

It did. *Vielen Dank Frau Rogalsky!* How can I thank you enough?

Heimat Kunde (Local History)

"Today we will start a new subject," our teacher Mr. Krause tells us. "It is called *Heimat Kunde*. You are now in third grade and you should know about your hometown and its surroundings. Next year you will learn about Berlin and our province, the Mark Brandenburg.

Oberschönevide is a suburb of the city of Berlin. It is located about 17 miles southeast of Downtown. It is called Oberschönevide (Upper-Beautiful-Meadow). It was only thirty years ago when our area was in fact meadows, forest and swamp, all between the river Spree on one side and a forest on the other side.

"Oberschönevide is about two miles wide and five miles long, all along the river. It became an industrial and housing development in 1907, when the AEG, (General Electric Corporation of Germany), started to build a giant manufacturing facility to produce electrical equipment. In 1910 it was the largest electrical equipment maker in Europe. It is located on the river Spree and over a mile long. The main street of Oberschönevide is in front of the factory. Streetcars connect with the nearby railroad station and with downtown Berlin. The factory itself has a railroad and river barge traffic connection.

"The housing development is between the factory and the forest. The housing is planned for about 100,000 people. You see, we all live in a new city. Our school is only a few years old, and the AEG helped build it. That's why it looks so good with shiny red bricks and large windows. It has steam heated classrooms. One wing is for girls and the other for boys, with a few mixed classes in the middle. We have students here up to the eighth grade. As you know, we have a beautiful auditorium, laboratories for physics and chemistry and a really nice *Turnhalle* (gym). Let us all keep it neat and clean. By the way, ask your parents if they were here during the first years of development in Oberschönevide, then you can talk to us here in class about it."

After Mr. Krause was done telling us how Oberschönevide started, I was very proud to be part of it. Some of the things he said I knew, but most of it was new to me, and I was born here. Parents do not talk much about it. To ask Mama and Papa how it all happened is a good idea. When I find out I can then talk about it in class.

School is out and I am at home with Mama, "Do you know anything about how Oberschönevide got started Mama?" She looks at me and seems to like the idea that she can talk to me about it.

"I am glad you asked, but sit down, it is a long story.

"When I was twenty years old, I lived with my three sisters, my three brothers and my parents in a very small place out in the country, about one hundred miles to the east from here. It is hard to find on a map because it is small. It is a very poor community. The only work one could find was on the bigger farms in spring and during harvest in the fall. Payment was not in cash but in potatoes or whatever grew on the farm."

"But Mama, how could you buy anything without money?"

Then Mama explained, "We really didn't buy much. My dad repaired shoes himself. When shoes became too small we handed them down to the younger children."

"You mean you never got new shoes?"

"Not very often, and then we would only wear them on Sundays for church. Most of the time we walked around barefoot."

"How about books for school?" I ask. I know that we buy schoolbooks from the older students; books do not change much, they can be used for many years.

"Like your schoolbooks, we bought ours from the older students too, and that was simple because we were several grades in one class and we knew the older students who were our classmates," Mama explains.

"Can one learn anything with several grades in one class?"

Mama looks at me, "You'd be surprised, by the time you are being taught a subject, you have already heard it several times, which makes learning easier. But our teacher was good too. With him there was discipline in class, and you wouldn't even think of not doing your homework."

"I know that part Mama! You won't let me go down to play with the other children until I am done with my homework." I know that Mama learned a lot in that village school. Papa is not home when I do my homework, so I have to ask Mama about grammar and how to spell some words. And she knows it all.

"I don't know how you could live in that village with so little money. You got only potatoes, so what did you eat?"

"We had a cow, a couple of pigs, some goats, geese and chickens," Mama continues. "It is a lot of work to take care of all the animals. Everybody has to help.

"We neighbor kids had to take all the geese or all the goats out so they could feed along the road or where ever we could find food for them."

"How did you get any money? It all sounds so strange," I wonder. I know you can get money only when you work.

"It is a lot of work, but we managed. The butter we made we sold and bought margarine instead. We sold most of the eggs, and at Christmas time we sold the geese."

"That all must have been very hard, Mama."

"It was very hard. The worst part was we just had enough to stay alive. We had nothing to show for our work. It would never get any better, we had no future," Mama explains.

"Was it then that you read about the new factories in Berlin, Mama?" I ask.

"Yes, once in a while we could read in our paper about many factories being built in Berlin. One day my three brothers got the idea to go to Berlin to find out what was going on there; if they could find work that paid real money."

"Was it hard to travel to Berlin in those days? Could you take a bus?"

"No, no," Mama answers. "Busses were only in bigger cities. Remember this was in 1909. To go by train was the only way to go anywhere, but getting to the train station at home was a problem. We had to walk or get a ride going to town. But my brothers were determined to change their lives." "Did they get to Berlin alright?"

"They sure did." This is the first time that Mama had ever explained to me about my uncles and what they did. I know she is very proud of them.

"Yes they did, they were so determined. Not only did they make it to Berlin; they found jobs and places to stay. When they came back to our village Steinborn in the county of Schlochau, they told everybody, "We have had it here, we are going to Berlin."

"Not only were my brothers Emil, Albert and Hermann ready to go, my sisters Emily and Alwine wanted to come along too.

"And then my mother said, *when you all go, then there is nothing that will keep me here. I'll come along too. If your dad wants to stay here, that's fine with me.*"

Mama holds my hand and continues, "Then we packed and left for Berlin. That was in 1910, pretty much the beginning of Oberschöneweide."

"Mama, where did you stay when you got to Berlin?"

“My mother, my brothers, my sisters and I moved into this apartment and the apartment next door, where Uncle Hermann, Aunt Ida and your cousins are now.

“When Papa and I married in 1919 we moved into this apartment. You and Inge are growing up here now.

"Thank the Lord you are not in Steinborn." She sits down and rubs my head. "Yes we do have problems, times are not the best right now, but overall things are better here than they ever where we came from. At least we have hope of a better future."

Mama then looks at me, "I am glad you are growing up here. The schools are good, and you will have many opportunities here. Okay, Helmut, now you'd better do your homework."

"Mama, I am glad you all came here and I was born here," I answer, "I think I'll have a lot to talk about in class tomorrow. I wonder what the other boys have to say about how Oberschöne weide grew at the beginning, and where everybody came from.

"All families here came from somewhere else; Oberschöne weide is only a little over twenty years old."

It has to be here

1932

What do I really want for my twelfth birthday? What can I tell Mama? She had asked me a few weeks ago.

I heard my friend Günter play the violin and I wish I could play as well as he does. Günter and I are classmates since our first day in school. We have been sitting next to each other for over five years now and we visit each other often and play together. We only live two blocks apart.

I tell Mama, "I really would like to learn to play the violin. When I visited Günter the other day, he played for me, and he is good."

"Let me talk to Papa," Mama answers.

I haven't heard a word for weeks now, and I would like to know if I am getting a violin. My birthday is in a week. Maybe it is a surprise and hidden somewhere in our apartment. It can't be that hard to find. Mama is shopping and I start looking for the violin. I look in all closets, behind and under anything where a violin could be. Our apartment is not that big and I am almost ready to give up. What did I miss? It has to be here somewhere. The only place I can't get to is our *Hängeboden* (loft), where we store some stuff behind a curtain, in the hall under the ceiling.

Where is our ladder? It is not in the apartment. Why is that? It's always here.

That's one more reason to take a look up there. But how can I get there? We do have an old kitchen cabinet in the hall, almost below the loft. Mama keeps all her sewing material there. The upper half is filled with pieces of cloth.

Let's see! Without the ladder I could open the cabinet doors and then climb up on the shelves to get on top of the cabinet. Then I can climb over to the loft and take a look behind the curtain.

With a chair in front of the cabinet I start climbing up. It is not that easy to get to the top of the cabinet, and when I am stepping on the cabinet shelf the upper half of the cabinet starts to wiggle. I'd better be

careful. I manage and like a monkey I climb over to the loft. What is under that blanket? A violin box and my violin, I knew it!

It's crowded up here on the loft and I bump my head on the ceiling. I take the violin out of the box. How did Günter hold that thing? Then I try to play and it sounds awful. I wonder how long it will take until I learn to play like Günter.

My head is getting hot and my face is all red. It's time to climb down. Careful now! The cabinet starts to wiggle again. But everything goes well and I am down again.

How can I share the good news with someone? How about my cousins next door? When I knock on their door, Cousin Hilde opens.

"Would you like to see what I am getting for my birthday, Hilde?"

"What is it? Show me! Let me get Elli too," says Hilde.

Both are coming over and I tell them, "It will only take me a second to climb up that cabinet and to crawl over to the loft." I am now so good at it I no longer need a chair.

I show them the violin and they want to know, "Do you want to learn to play it, like Erhard?" Erhard is my cousin, Hilde's and Elli's brother.

"Of course," I said. Before they left they reminded me, "It's not easy, we wish you luck."

I hide my new violin in the loft and start to come down. I am still up on the cabinet. As I search with my feet for the shelves, the upper half of the cabinet tips forwards and falls off the base. I hit the floor and the cabinet comes down on my legs. I am lucky; because the cabinet doors were open, they hit the floor first. I am now pinned down by the heavy cabinet and covered with Mama's sewing material. Are my legs broken? They hurt a lot. But I can move my feet. I lucked out.

After I crawl out from under the cabinet, I look at this mess. The cabinet is on the floor, the cabinet doors are pushed into the cabinet, and Mama's stuff is all over the place.

How can I get the cabinet back on top of its base so Mama will not find out I was in the loft and found the violin?

The cabinet is now empty. If I get my cousins back, maybe we can get it back on top of the cabinet base. Hilde and Elli heard the bang and have come back to look. "Helmut, are you all right?" they ask.

"I am okay, but please help me get the cabinet back up on the lower part." They look at me and shake their heads. "You are a lucky kid; you could have broken both legs."

"I know, I know, stop giving advice and give me a hand!"

Hilde and Elli are four and five years older than I am and together we get the cabinet back up.

I am by myself now and try to make things look as if nothing has happened. I have to fix the cabinet doors. The hinge pins are bent; I will bend them back so the doors can close again. But how do I get Mama's sewing material back into the cabinet. It was all folded neatly but I have no idea how it was. I never paid attention to Mama's stuff. I do the best I can so I can close the cabinet doors. Most of it falls out again when I open the doors all the way. What can I tell Mama when she opens the cabinet? I hope she will never look for anything in that cabinet again.

Weeks later Mama did open the doors; of course half of her stuff fell out. I didn't dare to tell her the whole story when she asked what happened. I only told her I was looking for something and it all fell out.

Mama then asked no more questions; she did not have to. She did not put me on the spot; I will always remember that, thank you Mama.

Aunt Klara's Birthday

"At three o'clock we will go to Aunt Klara's birthday, after I take my nap," Papa reminds us. Aunt Klara is Papa's oldest sister.

"Helmut, don't go down in the street and forget about it."

"Oh no, Papa, I will teach Inge how to count." Inge is only six and as a twelve-year-old I am her big brother. She looks up to me, some of the time.

It is noon and Mama, Papa, Inge and I just finished lunch. "Let's see Ingemaus, if you still can count to twenty."

"No, I don't want to count now!"

"Okay, then you are on your own; let's see how long you like it." That's when Mama looks up. She puts down her Sunday paper *Morgenpost*, and tells me, "Let's do the dishes now, Helmut, you can dry them."

I hate drying dishes more than anything. I wish I had been busy teaching Inge how to count. I have to be more careful what I say next time. Now I know what Papa means when he is telling me, "Think before you open your mouth."

Papa's nap is over and we all dress up to see Aunt Klara, Uncle Willie, and Rudy, who is one of my favorite cousins. Rudy is the oldest of us cousins, and we boys like to talk and listen to him. I am sure my other cousins will be there too. The whole Standke clan gets together on birthdays, often on the following Sunday. We will have fun. Because of little Inge we take the train, we used to have a nice one hour walk. By train it is a few minutes to Adlershof, Papa's hometown. Some of our relatives still live there.

"Happy birthday, sister," Papa greets Aunt Klara. I give her the bouquet of flowers, which Mama just handed me a few minutes ago. "Helmut, you grew a lot since I saw you last," Aunt Klara remarks before she disappears in the kitchen. She always makes a big thing out of a birthday, like dinner, cake, coffee. The works. Uncle Willie asks, "Who wants to hear the radio I built?"

"Let's see it," Papa answers and lights a fat cigar. Uncle Willie puts the radio on the table, connects the four-volt battery and the one-hundred-volt dry cell battery, and the vacuum tubes start to glow. It all seems a little spooky.

Everything is mounted on a board, shiny wires, tubes and coils. Uncle Willie is turning the knob that moves the coils and listens on his headset. "Hear it, hear it, Oskar," and he hands Papa the headset.

"Really, some music, and so clear. Remember the crystal set we used to have? We spent hours on it and hardly ever heard anything. It got a little better in the evening. I wonder if they ever can make it loud enough like a gramophone, so you wouldn't need these clumsy headsets."

"Probably not," says Uncle Willie. My other uncles, Karl and Paul, think so too.

Papa ads, "I don't think it is going to happen!"

"Dinner is ready! The five older children can sit around the kitchen table," announces Aunt Klara. Great, we are better off by our selves. Who wants to listen to this silly grown up stuff?

"Remember Werner, when the grownups were telling each other the latest jokes we heard a year ago?" Werner is my age and when we talk, we understand without much hoopla. We boys sit down and make Aunt Klara happy.

The soup is served.

We all are busy telling stories.

When we are done Aunt Klara asks, "How did you like it?" We all agree it was *wunderbar*. After she had left, none of us could remember what the soup tasted like. Aunt Klara announces, "Today you get something very special, chicken fricassee."

"What's that?" I want to know.

"What's that?" Now all my cousins want to know too. Aunt Klara takes our plates and fills a big spoonful of this chicken stuff on our plates.

But I see no potatoes. I see no meat, and no veggies. I have no idea what it is, and something seems to be crawling. I like to know what I eat. It all seems to float in mayonnaise, and I hate mayonnaise. I have never eaten it in my life, and I am not going to start now. I start to get goose pimples when I look at it, I shudder and my stomach wants to turn over. I try not to look at the plate in front of me.

"I can't eat that," I mumble, and I feel like crying.

I hear it four more times, "I can't eat that," from my cousins. All mothers look at each other with embarrassment.

Then Aunt Klara and all the aunts come over to our table. They try to talk us into eating this, this good and expensive chicken fricassee. I shudder when I hear the word chicken fricassee.

"No way, I can't!" Is all I can say.

Mama then tells me, "But you have to eat something." The mothers and Aunt Klara then have a good idea to end this chicken fricassee standoff.

"How about the soup you liked before with potatoes in it?"

"That's a good idea," we boys agree. We are now back talking our stories while we are having our potato soup, again.

On the way home Mama turned to me with an angry voice, "Why did you say you can't eat the chicken fricassee, Helmut?"

"Because I got sick looking at it. It looked like mayonnaise, and you know I can't eat that either."

"Aunt Klara will never forgive you, you know how she is."

"I can't help it, Mama!"

Papa seems to understand, "Let's talk about something else. How did you like the radio, Helmut? Do you think we should build one too?"

"Great Papa! You bet we can!"

Papa's Bike

1933

Papa's pride and joy is his bike. It is almost a racing bike, with 28 inch diameter wheels, 1.0 inch red tires, a racing handle bar, a racing seat and brakes that grab the wheels, not the tires. He uses it only to go to the fire station for fire duty, day or night, rain or shine, sober or happy, when he is at home. He takes it along, whenever he can, in case the fire station siren comes on, just in case. Even when Papa is at his regular job at the post office they let him go to a fire. The fire siren is the only way to get all volunteer firemen together. They hurry to the station first to get on the fire truck. Papa has been told a telephone will be installed soon for him, because he is the Fire-Chief of the voluntary fire station in Oberschöneweide. He can then race on his bike to the fire or accident directly or to the fire station. His acetylene bike lamp is all charged with acetylene rocks and filled with water, ready to be turned on. He has to turn the water on to let it drop onto the acetylene rocks. Within a few seconds he can then light it with a match to get a very bright light for hours.

To have people make way for him in the street he mounted a big siren above the front wheel. When he pulls a string the siren wheel is driven by the bike's front wheel. Boy does it make a racket then! We keep the bike in the living room, the only place we have that is large enough. I don't have a bike but Uncle Karl taught me how to ride one when I visited my cousins. I sure would like to take Papa's bike for a spin. I hinted once if I could try it.

"Absolutely not! One of these days you will have a bike of your own."

When I asked him, "When will that be, Papa? I am thirteen years old now, and you have been telling me that for a long time."

"It is too dangerous, Helmut. Cars and motorcycles drive like crazy. Believe me; I see these accidents all the time."

One day, when Papa is at work, Mama asks, "Helmut, I have a small birthday present for Aunt Emily. Do you think you could ride on Papa's bike and take it to her? "

"I would love to, Mama, but we better not let Papa find out. I don't know what he would do."

But Mama answers, "He doesn't have to find out, just make sure everything is back in place."

Mama gives me the parcel and I check out the bike. The air pressure is low in front. I know how to take care of that.

"Okay Mama, I am all set." I wave Mama Good-bye, put the bike on my shoulders and carry it down the four floors without bumping into anything.

Off I go. What a ride. Papa is so worried about traffic; it is no problem at all. I can react faster than the old guys behind the wheel can see. It is really not that big a deal.

Papa, Mama and I walked this road to Adlershof many times before, to birthdays of uncles, aunts and cousins. Papa was born and grew up in Adlershof. It takes about an hour to walk. Most of the way goes through a beautiful pine forest on a smooth dirt road. I meet only a few hikers and bikers.

Aunt Emily is surprised that I come on Papa's bike.

"Did your mother tell you to deliver the present, Helmut?"

"*Yea Tante* Emily."

"Helmut, you better not stay too long. You need to be home before your dad comes home." I know what she means.

"*Auf wiedersehen Tante* Emily, say hello to everybody, especially cousin Reinhold."

I like that bike ride home again, and how fast I can go. I think I can make it in fifteen minutes. I try the siren in the forest. Boy, it gets everybody off the road.

"You must have been flying," said Mama, when I knocked on the door again.

"No problem Mama, anytime you want me to deliver something, I am ready."

"Ja, Helmut, now I really know that you can handle it. I wanted Aunt Emily to get her birthday present today and I didn't know any other way.

"It's okay Mama. Do you think I should let some air out of that front tire again, in case Papa knows that it was low?"

"No, no, Helmut, thank you for going."

"I had fun doing it, Mama, I'll go anytime."

A Substitute?

"What happened to Mr. Meyer? This is the first time our teacher is late." I am wondering. We are in the seventh grade now and the class is getting a little worried, and louder. Then the classroom door opens and a new teacher comes in.

"I am your science teacher today. Mr. Meyer is in a different class today. My name is Mr. Kueper. What is the last thing Mr. Meyer was teaching you?" he asks.

"He was going to start *Electricity* and talk about conductors," I answer.

"Hmm, let's start then with conductors."

We love Mr. Meyer and wonder about this substitute.

"There are conductors and there are nonconductors. There are also semiconductors, but that is a very special kind," Mr. Kueper says. He goes to the blackboard and makes one list of conductors and another one of nonconductors.

All this time my friend Günter and I are exchanging airplane pictures, until I see Mr. Kueper writing down water as nonconductor.

He is wrong! I know that firemen do not spray water on electrical wires because water conducts. Papa is a firefighters' captain, and that is what it says in one of his instruction books. I read these books all the time, because they are full of very interesting stuff, like motor pumps, ladder wagons, and diesel and gasoline engines, inner tubes and solid rubber tires.

I stand up and wave my hand. "Mr. Kueper, there seems to be a mistake. Water is a conductor and not a nonconductor. I know that for sure." No wonder he is a substitute teacher.

I would have never said that to Mr. Meyer, who is not only our teacher, he is our pal, he thinks like us. But this new Mr. Kueper turns red in his face and insists that water is a nonconductor.

Then the bell rings and Mr. Kueper leaves the classroom during intermission. "Helmut is that really true that water is a conductor? " "I read it in the fireman's instruction manual, it must be right."

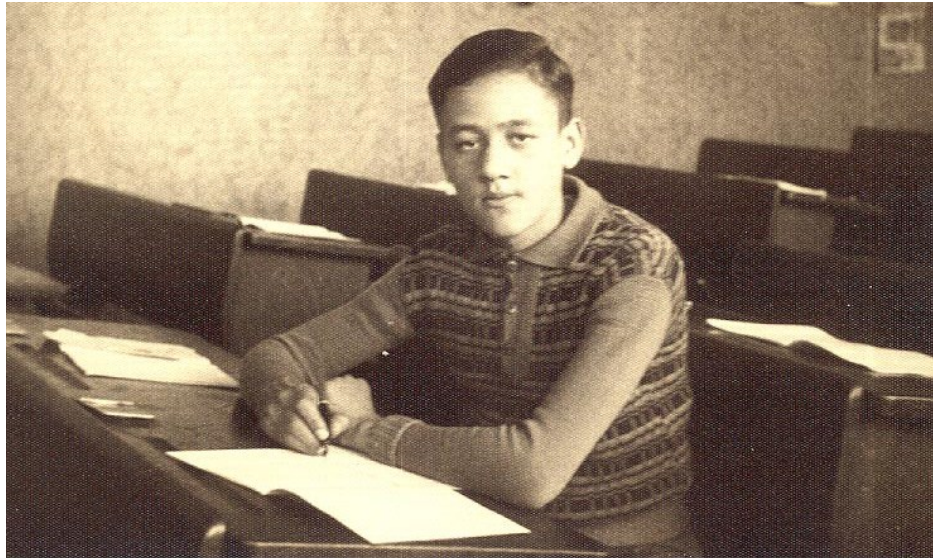
Rudi Gass, the shortest in the class, takes a piece of chalk and writes on the blackboard, "*Water does conduct!*"

When Mr. Kueper comes back in the class he reads what's on the board.

"Who wrote this?" he asks. Nobody admits it. Kueper keeps asking and asking and then Rudi answers, "I did!" Mr. Kueper's face turns red and I can see the swollen veins on his forehead.

Then Rudi suggests, "Let's put water in that empty aquarium glass over there and put in two wires from that 220 volt outlet. Mr. Kueper will you put your hand in the water to show us that water is a nonconductor?"

That does it. "You come here," he says and points to Rudi to come to the front. I wonder what is going to happen now.



I don't believe Mr. Kueper is the guy to *cane* anyone of us thirteen-year olds. He is the one who is wrong. We *have* to speak up.

"Where does Mr. Meyer keep the cane?" Mr. Kueper asks. Almost all teachers in the boy's classes have a cane as a sign of authority, but rarely use it to punish students.

"Mr. Meyer does not have a cane," Rudy tells him and we all repeat it and lie to him. Mr. Kueper looks at us, and he knows we are lying straight to his face.

Then, all of us hear a knock on the door. Mr. Kueper calls, "Come in!"

A girl comes in and asks, "Mr. Meyer sent me to get his cane."

"There is no cane," Mr. Kueper tells her. She leaves without a cane but is back in a minute.

"Mr. Meyer sends me back to bring the cane. Mr. Meyer says student Peschmann knows where it is." Peschmann is the oldest and biggest student in our class. He has to do the seventh grade over again and he is full of the dickens. He walks over to the cabinet in the class's corner and gets the cane from the upper shelf where it was hidden behind some of Mr. Meyer's books. Peschmann hands the cane to the girl before Mr. Kueper can get his hands on it.

Rudi and Mr. Kueper are both standing still in front of the class, looking at each other. What now?

The bell rings, giving Rudi the signal to run back to his seat and out of reach of Mr. Kueper who stands there, red faced and shaking. He leaves the class without saying a word. During the intermission the girl brings the cane back. We boys look at each other, where are we going to hide the cane now? We cannot put it back in the cabinet.

"How about burying it in the sand box," Rudy suggests. "He is not going to dig around in there."

Peschmann raises his hand, "How about putting the cane on a string and letting it hang out of the window. We have done that before."

"I think I have a better idea," I speak up. "It will do more than just hide the cane. I don't know if Kueper will fall for it, but it will be a lot of fun if he does. Listen!"

It has never been that quiet before in class. "What is it, let's have some fun!" I am told.

"We take the pointer rod and put it on top of the big picture on the wall behind us and let only the thin end stick out a little.

Kueper cannot see the rod behind the picture frame, only a little of the thin end will show.

Wouldn't it look like we did a lousy job hiding the cane up there? When Mr. Kueper comes in, let's look back at the picture once in a while to give him a wrong clue."

It takes only a few seconds for Peschmann to place the pointer behind the picture with the thin end showing an inch or so. The real cane is buried in the sandbox. The class can't wait for the bell to ring.

"We have something to finish," Kueper storms into the class.

"Rudy Glass, come to the front." I can see Kueper's eyes searching the room. "Did the cane come back?" he asks.

"No, it didn't Mr. Kueper," Rudy answers. I have been watching Kueper's eyes. He must be wondering why we look back behind us. Suddenly he stares at the wall, high up at the picture.

We boys look at each other, did he take the bait? Our eyes follow him as he walks to the back of the class. Then this elderly man climbs up on the seat to reach from the seat across the walkway to the top of the picture. He must be very angry.

With one hand against the wall and the fingertips of the other he can touch the tip of the pointer. I don't think he recognizes yet that what he sees is not the cane.

We boys are so excited we hold our breath. Kueper, trying to keep his balance with one hand pulls out the pointer with two fingers of the other hand. When he got it halfway out he can tell this is not the cane. He knows by now he has been *had* and tries to come down.

Thirty kids clapping and yelling and laughing to celebrate a triumph is too much for this *ersatz* teacher. He made it down from the seat all right and stormed out of the class.

School is over; and I am on my way home. The road goes along the unpaved future street. Until now, no houses have been built and gardens are still on both sides. It is a nice way to walk. Today I don't feel like talking to my friends, or kicking empty tin cans all along the way. I can't get Mr. Kueper out of my mind. I feel sorry for him now. I should not have talked to him like that. However, he was wrong, was he not? He looked like a very sick man when he left the classroom. I hope he doesn't die.

Today we have science again; I hope Mr. Meyer is back.

"Good morning, class, sit down. I am glad I am back with you today, my favorite class. How far did you come with Mr. Kueper in electrical basics?" "We started on conductors and nonconductors, Herr Meyer." I answer. "But Mr. Kueper marked water as a nonconductor and I know that firemen are not supposed to spray water on electrical lines. It doesn't add up.

"Yes, that is peculiar. What we have here is a case that requires more information," Mr. Meyer answers.

"Let's get the encyclopedia, the book which teaches everybody every time. This thing is big, isn't it?" Mr. Meyer places the heavy book on an empty seat in front, next to Rudy. "I am looking for water. There are several pages on water. If you like, I will read it to you after class if you want me to. Here is lots of good stuff. But now we want to know about conductivity. Very interesting!

Listen class! "Tap water is a conductor because it is enriched with minerals when it comes out of the ground. Pure water, like distilled water, is a nonconductor. I am sure we all will remember it for a long time. It is not a simple case, class. I think we settled that! Let's go on!"

BB Gun Practice?

Helmut, how good are you in shooting?" Günther asks me during the intermission at school. Günther is my really good friend and we have been sitting next to each other for almost eight years now. He talked me into learning to play the violin a few years ago. He is very good at it and wants to play in the Berlin Philharmonic when he grows up. Why is he asking?

"Yes," I answer, "I have shot an air rifle at some shooting galleries at the county fair, it was fun and I did okay. Why do you ask?"

"Don't tell anybody," Günther explains. "I got a new BB-gun, a really good one, but I haven't had much of a chance to shoot it. You can't walk along the street to the forest with it, that thing looks like a real rifle. There are too many people everywhere. My parents aren't home today, and I am eager to try it out."

"Are you trying to shoot in the apartment?" I wonder.

"If I open the doors of two of our bedrooms, we can shoot BBs from the end of one across the hall and to the end of the other bedroom to a target. That should work! Can you come over today, Helmut?"

I have wished for a BB-gun for years, but Papa wants no part of it. It's too dangerous, he says. When guns are not handled properly they can kill somebody. Even a BB-gun can shoot somebody's eye out; that's final. Basta!

"I would love to Günther, how about right after school? We can walk home together."

The bell rings at two o'clock, school is over, and we are on our way to Günther's apartment. It is on the fourth floor and has a nice balcony. I have been there many times. The balcony is beautiful, covered all around with wild grapevines. One can sit there, inside a green room and dream of Hawaii.

"What do you think, Helmut, isn't this a beauty?" Günther is petting his gun. Then he hands it to me.

I handle it very gently, I know he loves it. I weigh it; I balance it with both of my hands, and then practice aiming at the crystal chandelier.

In the meantime Günther is setting up a board with the target, at least thirty feet away. He also brings a scorecard. He is really serious about this.

Günther and I are busy shooting and walking back and forth to the target to read the score. It is a lot of fun.

After half an hour of shooting and walking back and forth to the target, we get bored. While we are taking a little rest, I hear the kids in the street having an argument with someone. Günther steps out to the balcony and peeks through the leaves and down to the street to find out what's going on. I follow him and see a woman on the other side of the street yelling from her third floor window to the kids playing ball in the street.

The kids don't know what she is complaining about, they shrug their shoulders and continue to play. After a while she stops yelling, shakes her fist and closes her window.

Günther and I have been watching her from our fourth floor balcony. We can see her hiding behind the curtains, spying on the children in the street. The two of us watch her for a while until she gives up her place at the window. Günther loads his gun with a BB.

"Watch me," he says, and then-- ZAP. He shoots at the window. We shoot at an angle from here and the window doesn't break, but it sure makes a bang.

"I bet she is yelling at the kids again," I whisper behind our green curtain. We see that woman yanking open the window, and yelling to the innocent kids again. By now they have probably determined that she is nuts, not to be bothered with. Günther and I hurry off the balcony to laugh. That was fun. "What are we going to do now?"

From the balcony, we peek again through the leaves back down to the street, "Do you see anything special, Günther?"

"Look across the street! See that guy painting the roof of the shack? The office of a coal and firewood merchant is in there. He is a mean character, always complaining about kids playing in the street. There is no traffic in this street, and it is not his business anyway."

I can see him now, a short fat man, who seems to have trouble bending over to tar the roof. His pants are really too tight when he bends down.

"What do you think, Günther, how good a shot are you?"

"I don't think either one of us can miss that one! Let's flip a coin."

I win. Günther hands me the BB gun. I load and Günther and I take positions on the balcony again. The guy is still on the roof. He deserves a break. I poke the barrel through the leaves and take aim. I can't miss. It is

actually too easy, but he should have been nicer to the kids. I hesitate a little, but then--ZAP. His brush takes off and he jumps three feet straight in the air, unbelievable! Who would have guessed he could jump that high? He looks around, at the kids in the street first, but they are at least fifty yards away, and they are playing ball. There is nobody else there.

He is rubbing his behind like mad. It must have stung him pretty good. He leaves his tar bucket on the roof-- the brush has gone into the bushes--he comes down from the roof, still rubbing his behind.

After Günther and I get off the balcony and we close the door behind us and laugh our heads off.



Graduation at eighth grade 1935
I am in the back row the fifth from the left

CHAPTER TWO

Technical High School

1935 to 1939

Now What?

“*H*elmut, in a few weeks you will be graduating from grade school, and we have to sign you up for the next phase of your education.” Papa and I are on the way to my cousin Rudy's birthday party. Papa and I love to walk through the winter forest on the frozen dirt road. I can tell by Papa's voice that he is concerned about what to do next after I graduate. Papa and I usually walk by our self, which gives me a chance to ask him a million questions.

He continues, “Our new government determined that youngsters, who are not enrolled in school or have signed up for an apprenticeship have to work for a year on a farm after grade school.”

“They want me to waste a whole year on a farm for nothing, Papa?”

“That's what they are telling us, Helmut. Don't ask me why. I think it is outrageous. It worries me.

“Would you be interested in going to the Technical High School that the Knorr-Bremse Company is running, Helmut?”

“I have heard about it from Rudy, Papa. I'll talk to him again when we are at his birthday party.” I also heard good things about the school from Reinhold, my other cousin, who goes there too. Both say it is very difficult to get in, and it means doing a lot of homework.

“I would like to go there, Papa. Can’t you talk to Uncle Willie? I know he works at the Knorr-Bremse, he can probably find out what we have to do to get me into the program.”

The whole Standke family has shown up for Rudi’s sixteenth birthday. All aunts, uncles and cousins have dressed up and are here.

Aunt Klara prepared a fancy dinner, as usual. It looks very formal.

I had to promise Papa to keep my mouth shut and not talk again about Aunt Klara’s cooking, no matter what.

I wish I could make everybody forget my dumb talk about the chicken fricassee she had served, years ago. I guess people never forget certain things. I'm thinking about saying, “I am sorry!”

The dinner went well, the dads all light a cigar and mothers have coffee.

Werner and I surround Rudy, who always is in the center when we meet. He is about two years older than Cousin Werner and I. He is our teacher in many ways, and Werner and I look up to him.

”Rudy, how do you like your Technical High School? Did you say it is very hard work, lots of homework?” I wonder if Rudi changed his opinion about his school after attending it now for almost two years.

“Helmut, come over here,” I hear Papa calling; “Uncle Willie has something important to tell us.”

I always liked Uncle Willie. He is always a nice guy. He never shouts. He is never angry, and he knows a lot about electrical stuff. That’s why he built that radio once and that’s why the Knorr-Bremse A.G. made him *Meister* (foreman). He told me once he is building electric motors and other electrical equipment. Even Papa asks him for advice once in a while.

Uncle Willie helped Rudy enroll in the Technical High School his company is running.

“What do you think Willie,” Papa asks, “could Helmut apply for a place at the Knorr-Bremse High School?”

“Yea, I think he could, if it’s not too late for this year’s classes. The semester starts in early April, immediately after grade school finishes.”

“Dear God, I hope its not too late,” Papa interrupts.

Uncle Willie continues. ”The school has two classes per year with thirty students each. I understand they have tested seven hundred applicants so far and have almost filled both classes. Let me find out tomorrow Oskar.”

“I hope you can get us an application, Willie.”

I add, "Rudy has told me a lot about this school. I will be a good student, I promise."

"I believe you Helmut, too bad we don't have a telephone, so why don't you come over on your bike tomorrow. If we have any luck I'll bring an application. Then we can also talk about the test you have to pass to be admitted, okay?"

"I will be here when you come home from work, Uncle Willie. I already feel I have been rescued from a one-year prison farm. And this government claims it is for ordinary people!"

I had better find out about that test. "Rudy, what kind of tests do they have? Is it math and geometry?" I am good at that. "Or is it history?" I will need a lot of luck then.

Rudy tries to remember, "There was geometry, math, but no geography, and some basic German history. But watch out for the test instructions; follow them. They also observe you. Say 'Please', wait your turn, be courteous, and stuff like that."

"Uncle Willie, I hope you can get an application for me tomorrow and that there is still a place for me. I wish we had come to you sooner."

The birthday party is over and Mama, Papa, Inge and I are saying "*Auf Wiedersehen*." Uncle Willie pats me on the shoulder and wishes me good luck, "Hang-in-there Helmut, I hope I can get an application for you, cross your fingers. I'll do my best!"

"Hop on your bike tomorrow and be here by six or so in the evening. My guess is we are going to make it."

"Thank you, thank you Uncle Willie; I hope it will turn out OK. *Auf Wiedersehen*, I'll see you tomorrow!"

The day did not start out too well when Papa asked me about my future. Now I think I will be all right.

I Hope and pray!

It is noontime and my ears are ringing. Uncle Willie must be getting the application for the Tech. High School now. I hope he will get it. What will happen to me if he doesn't? Go to the farm and work for free?

Working on a farm must be ten times worse than working in the garden. Papa once ordered a load of cow manure from the dairy. I helped Papa dig it under on our potato patch. To move this stinking, heavy stuff around with a long pitchfork was very hard work. It was bad enough to do it for two days, and they want me to do it for a year? It gives me the creeps.

Why did Papa not bring this Technical High School thing up months ago? Maybe I should have talked to Uncle Willie. I think I will do a lot of things for myself from now on. This will be a lesson for me. I hope it may turn out all right after all. I wish, I hope, I think it will.

I am going over the tests in my mind. Rudy said geometry is one of the subjects. That's my favorite, I can't miss on that. I know all the formulas for volumes and surface areas of spheres, cylinders, and pyramids--you name it.

How about trigonometry? Same thing, no problem here either.

But Rudy mentioned *Basic German History*. I never liked history. Maybe our teacher had something to do with it. Some of those guys are not so hot.

Let's see what I do know.

Deutsches Reich (Germany) was founded in 1871; Bismarck had a lot to do with it and was the first chancellor. The kingdoms of Bavaria and Prussia and a bunch of little provinces and cities joined and called themselves Deutsches Reich.

Then there was World War One from 1914 to 1918, and Germany became a republic after that. Inflation was in 1923, when the price of bread was over a million marks.

A depression was in 1929 when Papa lost his job.

Street fighting started then in Berlin between armed Communists and armed Nazis.

Hitler's party got 37% of the total vote because many people thought of him as the lesser evil than they thought of Communists. Many also hoped he would turn the economy around, which he had promised. Many people believed only he made an effort to stop Communism from making us a Colony of Russia. After the election Hitler formed a coalition government in 1932, three years ago, and when President Hindenburg died he made himself chancellor and president.

I hope the test will not get deeper into that. One of these days I really should get more familiar with German History.

My God, what time is it? Five O'clock! I better go to Uncle Willie. "Mama, I am taking off to see Rudy and Uncle Willie. I hope he got my application for the High School. Keep your fingers crossed!"

For the last few weeks I was busy assembling a bike from two old ones which Papa and Uncle Karl gave me. It comes in handy now.

I hop on my bike and off I go, zipping around corners and scaring a few people in the process. I have never crashed, yet.

I am now racing through the forest. The road is frozen and hard, perfect for bike riding.

Uncle Willie said something about what to watch out for in the test. I will ask him again. He also said I should mention that I play the violin. Actually I quit a year ago, but he thinks that it is in my favor to mention it.

Rudy had a few more things I should keep in mind; courtesy was one of them. I have to ask him again. I have to make it!

I am now through the forest and enter Adlershof. Some of the streets are fairly old and paved with cobblestone. That's rough on my bike. I have to slow way down. It is not allowed to take the sidewalk.

I am at Aunt Klara and Uncle Willie's place, and chain my bike to a tree. I have to get to the fifth floor and I am getting nervous. I better be lucky in the next few minutes. I ring the bell and hear steps coming to the door. This is it!

The door opens. I can tell it is Rudy, but it is too dark to see the expression on his face to give me a clue.

"Come on in, Helmut!" But after I walk through the dark hall I see Uncle Willie, with a broad smile on his face.

"Congratulations, Helmut, you are accepted to participate in the test. We were very lucky. If I had come a day later it would have been too late. We lucked out."

Then, as Rudy and Aunt Klara join us, Uncle Willie explains what happened today.

“I went to the school office to talk to the school office manager about an application for the acceptance test. I was lucky to meet the director, Dr. Helsig, who happens to know me. We met during the last school Christmas party, when we had a little conversation about how Rudy was doing in class.”

“Go on Willie. Then what?” Aunt Klara is eager to know the rest. I can't wait either.

“Dr. Helsig then explained to me that the next and final test for the year will be in two days.”

“Did you get that application, Uncle Willie?” I ask.

“Yes, Helmut, right here,” he answers, and he waves it in front of me. “They made an exception. This test is for the A-Class students with a 12-years-or-over education, but they let you participate. Don't let it bother you to be with 18 year olds and maybe even some foreigners. This school is highly sought after.”

“No, Uncle Willie, that doesn't bother me at all, I can hold my own, you'll see.”

Aunt Klara is now sitting down with us again. Today she is really sweet; I really like her. Yesterday, in the big crowd, she was all wound up. It's funny how people can be so different from one day to the next.

She looks at me and says, “Helmut, I am positive you can handle it, you are a Standke! You can do anything you put your mind to!”

Then Uncle Willie hands me the *Application to Become a Student at the Knorr-Bremse A.G. Technical High School*.

“Here are a few points that will help you to get through the test alright. Remember that for the sixty students the school accepts in a year, they have tested over seven hundred applicants so far. The competition will be on your heels. Rudy gave you some good advice yesterday, here is more.”

I don't dare to move so I will not interrupt or miss anything. I am absorbing all Uncle Willie says. I do not want to miss a word.

“The test consists of two parts, one practical the other theoretical. It will take about four hours each.

A tough one goes like this, ‘Go to room 721 and ask for *Herr* Mann. Ask for the Civil Law Book, go to page 816 and read the last sentence.

Okay so far, Helmut?”

“I remember every word you say Uncle Willie.”

“What that means is: The room is on the seventh floor, you can take the elevator and go to room 721. Should the door be closed, knock and wait until you hear, 'Come in'. If it is open, walk in and wait until someone talks to you. Do not interrupt!

"Ask, 'May I please talk to Herr Mann?' Then talk to him and ask for the Civil Law Book. Don't forget to say 'please.'

“Go to the page and read and remember the sentence they want you to read; every word of it. Hours later in the classroom you have to write it down. Be very polite and courteous, you are being watched and someone takes notes.”

“I am glad you told me Uncle Willie. I might have missed that in the excitement.”

“Yea, that's a trick question. It's good to know about it. One can argue if it's fair or not, but that's the way it is.”

Then Aunt Klara comes with cookies and milk. ”Willie, let Helmut have a break.”

Rudy joins us, “In the practical part, in one of the tests you get a bundle of old fashion keys and a lock. You are to find the right key that fits the keyhole. When you look and compare the keys to the keyhole you can probably get the right key on the first try, that's good. Don't try one key after another, that's bad.”

Uncle Willie reminds us, “It is getting late and it takes Helmut at least thirty minutes to get home. I made a little map for you to help you find the school. Wear your good suit. When you fill out the questionnaire write down you play the violin. You never know, when the points of two applicants are the same that might make the difference. The school has a large orchestra and they play well.”

“Thank you, thank you Uncle Willie for all the good advice and the application. I'd better be going now, *Auf Wiedersehen!*”

As I go out Aunt Klara hugs me, “Good luck, Helmut.”

"Vielen Dank, Tante Klara."

On my ride home I think about today. It was exiting and had a good ending. And Aunt Klara, I think I have been wrong about her. I owe her an apology.

First Solo Train Ride

1935

Good news! I have been accepted to do the admittance exam at the Technical High School at the Knorr-Bremse A.G.

Uncle Willie also brought me the application, which I have to fill out and bring along tomorrow.

"Mama, can you look this application over and tell me how to fill it out?" I am fourteen years old but I have never filled out an application. Mama always says, "It doesn't hurt to ask."

"Yes, I could, Helmut, but you better wait until Papa comes home from work. He is a legal secretary by profession and has done secretary work for the fire department and the Red Cross for at least ten years. He knows these things inside and out."

"Okay, Mama, I will brush up on geometry and math first."

Papa comes home late today. They had a fire department drill at the Kodak Film Company. He is the Fire-Chief there, and this is what Papa likes to do and lives for.

"Papa can you help me with the application?"

"All you have to do is fill in above the line what is being asked below it, do you want me to do it?" I actually wouldn't mind, since his handwriting is so perfect.

Papa's handwriting looks as if it has been printed. I have been working on my handwriting since I started school. And the best grade I ever got was a 'so-so'.

"No, Papa, let me try it myself. I think I can manage."

Today is Wednesday; the admittance exam is today. I have to be at the Knorr- Bremse A.G. at eight a.m. Today will also be my first solo railroad trip.

The train is the modern, clean and fast electric commuter train, the *S-Bahn* (Schnell-Bahn)

I never paid much attention to all the details on what to do when one goes by train, but Papa wrote some notes to follow. Uncle Willie also wrote notes on how to get from the station to the Knorr- Bremse, which entrance to go to, and how to find the right elevator when I am inside.

"I better be going now, Mama and Papa, I can't afford to be late."

Mama takes another look at me, picks up a little fuzz off my jacket, and then says, "Helmut, all of a sudden you are almost a grown-up. The long trousers probably do that. I wish you good luck."

She then turns around; I guess I am not supposed to see a tear in her eye. Papa is ready to go to work too, and is in Fire-Chief's uniform. He really looks impressive in it.

"You got my and Uncle Willie's notes?"

"Yes, Papa, I got it in my shirt pocket, so I can check them as I go."

"Okay then, and don't be nervous, Helmut. Remember, you prepared yourself and planned ahead, what can wrong?"

"Thanks, Papa, keep your fingers crossed."

We live on the fourth floor, and I am used to taking two, sometimes three steps at a time. It takes seconds and I am in the street. I don't have a watch, but I check the time as I pass the big clocks some stores have along the way. I know I have to catch the Spandauer Train on Platform 2 at 7:16 a.m.

Papa cautioned me that there might be a line on the ticket counter; this is traffic-time in the morning. I make sure I'll be there early, just in case. I can't afford to make a mistake today.

There is no problem. Most people at this time of the day have monthly passes; it's cheaper I am told.

I am standing on Platform 2; and it is barely seven a.m. The signal says the next train is a Spandauer. Mingling with the crowd I feel almost like an old timer. The train pulls in and the doors open fast. People scramble out and in, because within thirty seconds the doors slam shut again and the train starts moving. No wonder everybody is in a hurry.

All is well, I think. But to be sure, I pull my notes out of my shirt pocket and check what the next stop is. Everything is okay. On the next stop I have to get out. I do what a lot of people are doing; move toward the doors. We have to be out in seconds.

I am following Uncle Willie's notes and have no trouble finding the right entrance of the Knorr-Bremse. I get into the proper elevator and go to the sixth floor. Signs near the elevator direct me to the classroom.

I actually can't miss it. It is filled with young people, but all of them are at least three years older than I am. I am glad Uncle Willie told me that I would take the test with applicants older than I am.

Suddenly I have the feeling that I am an outsider. Everybody is looking me over, and I can guess what these guys are thinking, 'Go home, little guy, you don't have a chance'.

'Don't blink, smile', I am telling myself. I find an empty seat and look around.

Some of them are very well dressed and speak a foreign language. I don't understand a word.

It is almost eight o'clock now. I am okay. Actually, I feel more confident by the minute.

The Acceptance Test

Eight o'clock sharp, a well-dressed gentleman comes into the classroom. Everybody sits down and all talk and milling around stops.

It is very still in the class. Only a little hum in the background reminds me that this High School is run by and located in a large factory.

"Good Morning, my name is Dr. Helsing, I am the director of the Knorr-Bremse Technical High School, and I welcome you to our school."

After we all mumble something like "Good Morning," he continues,

"It looks like everybody who was scheduled for the test is here, but let's have a roll-call first."

I shudder and got goose pimples all over. I just remember that Uncle Willie had arranged for me to be here only two days ago and I hope the paperwork has been brought up-to-date and I am on the list. What

would happen to me if something got mixed up? Do I have to go home again and it is all over?

Dr. Helsig calls all the names; it takes forever. But then I hear Standke, Helmut. I yell '**Here**' and start breathing again. I don't have to spend a year on the farm. If I pass the test.

Dr. Helsig then gets into the details of the four-hour practical test and after lunch the four-hour written test.

All of us applicants receive a list of the tests, and we walk from the classroom over to a gym hall. About twenty test stations have been set up. I take a peek at my list and spot several tests that Uncle Willie has talked about. The test with that Civil Law Book is one of them.

Let them come, I am ready!

On one of the tables I spot a bundle of keys and a lock. Here is another one. I can't lose!

Dr. Helsig announces, "Follow the list for the tests; there are no further instructions for the practical test. You have till twelve o'clock. Good luck to all of you!" Dr. Helsig waves his hand at us and we are off and running.

I am on my way to the office for the law book test. Actually the classroom is next to the office, and we came from there on our way to the gym. But this area looks strange, I think I am lost.

"Excuse me please, can you tell me how to get to room 721?" I ask a worker I meet on the way. He gets me back on track in less than a minute.

I finish the test ahead of time and am confident I did well. It is twelve o'clock, lunchtime. All applicants are escorted down six floors. After walking a block across the company property we go up six floors to the cafeteria. We applicants stick together and talk about the test on the way. I have great confidence that I did well. I no longer feel I am the little guy in the class.

The cafeteria is very large. It serves most of the five thousand workers of the company. It's no wonder; the lunch is good and a lot of workers come. It is almost like home.

We are back in class for the written test. Everybody gets a list again. I am telling myself, 'Let's take the easy one's first, all basic math and geometry.' Then there is history, what do they want? I am not so sure on some of the questions, so I have to trust my good luck; I am doing well today.

Last question, what is the sentence of the Civil Law Book you read in the Morning? As I write it down, I wonder how many applicants messed that one up.

I am at the last item on the test:

Write a short essay on tools.

What can I know about tools? That's what I want to learn here. That is a dumb question. But I have to write something.

How about Stone Age tools? I have seen ancient Stone, Bronze and Iron Age tools in the museum. I think I can write a little about those; that will have to do.

It is past four o'clock and Dr. Helsing says, "It looks like you all have finished; let me collect your work. Within a week, you will be informed whether or not you have been accepted as a student. School will start beginning of April 1935; details will be in the mail.

Thank you for coming!"

A week has gone by. "Helmut, Helmut, you have been accepted by the

Knorr-Bremse High School." Mama cannot wait to tell me the good news. I am still standing in the stairway coming home from school. Mama is hugging me and is holding me tight. She probably understands better than I do how important this is.

First Day in High School

I feel great, grown-up, sort of. The admission test a few weeks ago-- with all the *Angst* of passing or not-- is behind me. The time in grade school was about a hundred years ago. A new chapter is beginning today.

I will have to get used to getting out of bed before six o'clock in the morning. I guess that comes with being grown-up.

What will my teacher be like? I met the director, Dr. Helsing; he was a nice guy. He told us he was an officer in the Imperial German Navy and has seen much of the world. I hope he is going to tell us more about it.

Our classroom is full, thirty students in all. We are chatting and introducing ourselves. All of us feel that the next four years will be important in our lives.

I know from cousins Rudy and Reinhold, who are a couple years ahead of me, that there will be long hours of home work.

At seven o'clock sharp Dr. Helsing enters the class. It feels good to see a person you know.

"Good morning class," he starts, "I will make you familiar with our school, what we offer, what is expected of you and a number of things how we will accomplish our goal.

"This High School is registered and authorized by the City of Berlin. Because we include in our school an apprenticeship program for several metalworking trades, we are also registered and authorized by the Chamber of Industry and Commerce.

"The program will consist of two days classroom and four days shop instructions, altogether 48 hours per week. Instructions will be Monday through Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and on Saturdays from 7:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

"Your class will be called the 1935 B class; you will graduate in four years from the Knorr-Bremse Technical High School and will also graduate as a journeyman in your trade, provided you pass all the tests, of course.

"For your information, in the twelve years this school has existed no student has ever graduated with less than a "B", a GOOD grade."

Dr. Helsing lets the words sink in before he continues, "Classroom instructions will include iron and steel metallurgy, all metal fabrication--including machines and tools for all fabrication methods, mathematics, physics, technical drafting, industrial standards and shop safety.

"Your classroom teacher is *Herr Dipl. Ingenieur* Freyer. He will give you an extensive tour of our High School Machine Shop in the afternoon. He will also show you where you will start your shop instruction two days from now."

Dr. Helsing senses that some of us are no longer focused on him, so he addresses us, "Are you still with me? I am sure you are. This program will build the foundation for your future profession. It may interest you to know that in the past about 70% of our students went on to study and became engineers."

Now he has my full attention. Uncle Hermann has for years been telling me to become an engineer. He wished he had had the opportunity when he was a youngster, but where he grew up that was not possible. I would fulfill his dream.

I catch myself daydreaming.

I am back listening to Dr. Helsing.

"In your first year you start with eight pennies per hour. Depending on how well you do in class and in the shop, you may earn an extra penny or

two per hour. In the shop your respective Leadsman-Instructor will write a weekly report card. It includes punctuality, work performance, orderliness and manners; in class, the tests and homework will be graded.

"In your first year of basic shop training you will work in the school machine shop. In your second and third years you will work in the company's research facilities, fabrication departments, heat treating facilities, blacksmith and forging shops and in the large production machinery overhaul department.

"In the fourth year you will get your final polish. You will be back a fair amount of time in the High School Machine Shop to do advance work and perform tests to teach you to be experienced in performing work under pressure. At the end of your fourth year you make your journeyman piece. The choice of the piece is yours.

"You will design the journeyman piece, make all manufacturing drawings, and make all parts yourself to your own drawings.

"A committee of the Chamber of Industry and Commerce will inspect all parts and the final assembly of your journeyman's piece.

"The Knorr-Bremse Technical High School wants to make sure that you do well. Our reputation is at stake. This is it for the moment, good luck to you."

The bell rings,

"Meet Mr. Freyer here in this class at 12:30. I will see you tomorrow, let's have lunch now."

Because we have only thirty minutes for lunch, we hurry down the stairs like a mob. None of the workers on the lower floors dares to enter the staircase when our class is racing down. We better get good at it; we have to do it for the next four years.

After lunch we students wait in class for Herr Freyer. I keep looking at the clock on the wall. I bet he will come in on the dot.

Here he comes. He's a fairly skinny tall man in a formal business suit. He has a poker face and seems to look at the ceiling when he walks. He is all business.

"Hello class. Let's start our tour through the school machine shop. Pay attention; I will explain things as we go, only once."

As we enter the shop we see lots of workbenches. They are organized in bays on either side of a hall with ten vises per bay.

“There are lots of workplaces,” Herr Freyer continues. “You will start your shop program here two days from now. Each of you will have an assigned workplace. There will be a group supervisor for each bay. Two days from now punch in at the time clock over there before seven and be at your workplace no later than seven.”

We go through the shop, and everybody greets Herr Freyer and smiles at us as we walk through.

“Let’s go through the machine section. We have over sixty lathes of all sizes and types and any other type of metal cutting machine that exists. You will learn to work on all of them.

Let’s go back to class.”

After we sit down it is quiet. I too am overwhelmed. The school shop with its machines and workplaces is probably larger than many businesses.

Herr Freyer, after giving us a little time to absorb what we have been exposed to, starts a new subject.

“Who wants to play soccer? We have several teams and we play against other schools. We have sport on every class-day from two to four; bring a sport outfit to class tomorrow. For your shop days, you need a blue machinist outfit. You have to wear a cap or net for your hair in the machine shop. There will be more on the subject of safety.

"Now something else entirely. During the vacation in summer the company and the school close down. I am arranging a tour for my classes during the vacation period and plan to go to the Alps this year. We stay in youth hostels. They are good, inexpensive, and we always have lots of fun. I will be your tour guide. Give it some thought. You will know more about it in a few weeks.

“For those of you, who indicated that you play an instrument, bring it to class next week, so we can find a place for you in our student orchestra.

“Okay, class, why don’t we have a short break and then I will start with the introduction to Iron and Steel Metallurgy.”

P.S. I ended up playing the violin for four more years in the student orchestra for graduations, Christmas parties and nation wide competition programs between student orchestras.

A Long First Day in the Shop

“Over here! Over here, Helmut.” I am looking for my place in the many rows of workbenches after I punched in at the time clock. We are a crowd of thirty students. My classmate George Struck, sitting next to me in class, is already here and has found our places. Because of our names we are probably going to share much during the next four years together. I like George and I think we have a lot in common.

The supervisor of our group of ten students sits on the workbench. You can tell he is the supervisor. He is dressed in a gray and worn shop coat and is much older than us fourteen-year olds. Besides, we are all dressed in a brand new blue machinist’s outfit. He is at least twenty years old, probably in his last semester.

His feet dangle casually. He is watching us as we fill the workstations one by one.

Seven o’clock, the bell rings. Does that mean childhood is over? The group supervisor is jumping to his feet, “Let’s all come together here.” The ten students of our bay gather in front of him.

“My name is Herbert, but calls me Herbie. I am about to graduate as a journeyman tool and die maker and will also graduate from Tech. High School. I will be the instructor of your first course and will be your mentor into the world and life of a craftsman.

“In your next four years you will learn the skills to be a craftsman and learn the meaning of *Craftsmanship*. More of that as time goes on. This course will teach you some of the basics of the metal working trades. It is a boot camp of sorts, but you all look like you can handle it. The first few weeks will be a little hard on you fourteen-year-olds, but take my word for it, in three to four months you will be a proud craftsman. You will have a lot

accomplished by then. Any questions?" George and I look at each other, pull our shoulders up like saying, *There is really nothing to ask, when is the next break*, maybe. But let's not rock the boat.

Herbie is all business. "Stand in front of your vise and look in your right drawer. You will find all the tools you need during this basic course.

"I am handing you now your machinist square and your vernier caliper. Check if your engraved name is spelled correctly. If you treat these instruments gently they will last a lifetime."

I play with my caliper; really do not know what to do with it. Standke is spelled correctly.

"Let's continue guys! As your supervisor I have to write a weekly report card for each of you, so make sure that I can write a nice one every time. Pick up the blueprints for your first part now."

George and I try to figure it out. I had some technical drafting in eighth grade; it comes in handy now.

"Come together again," Herbie calls, "Bring your caliper along." He picks up a hand size piece of iron and shows us how to use that caliper. "In your right drawer you find a similar piece of cast iron. Measure and record all dimensions like I am doing now, and tell me what you get."

Someone says 80 millimeters. I find that too on my caliper.

"That's correct!" says Herbie. "When you look at the drawing in front of you it means that you have to file three millimeters off to finish that part at 77 millimeters."

"Look at me now and do as I do!" Herbie looks around to make sure we all follow his instructions. "We file a fine finish on the large flat surface first, everything else comes later." He clamps the cast iron piece in the vice, flat side up. Then he grabs a long file, balances it on the part. He plants himself in front of the vise, and forces the file over the part, pressing it onto the part and holding the file horizontal all the time. I watch how Herbie holds the file and how he leans into it. On the cutting stroke forward he puts a lot of force on the file to do the cutting. On the backstroke, he almost lifts the file and moves back fast. Herbie goes from student to student, improving, correcting, and explaining what we try to accomplish. It doesn't take long and all of Herbie's students are filing away on their first part. Except for the ten minutes break in the morning, we are at it until the bell rings at noon. In the cafeteria, George, a few more classmates and I sit at one table. We don't say much; we are tired and disappointed. I look at my hands and at my blisters. No wonder they feel sore. On another table, Paul

Witwer tries to cheer us up, his way. “You guys look like Napoleon at Waterloo.” There is no response; we are just too tired and sore.

However, we do not have too much time to feel sorry for ourselves and have to hurry back to our workplace. I am back at my vise and filing on my cast iron part, concentrating on my job.

Somehow, it is four o’clock, time to go home. But first I have to clean up. My hands and arms are black. All my classmates are in our wash-and locker room trying to get clean. Herbie is there too. “That cast iron will do that to you, it has a lot of graphite in it. Try my lava stone soap, it works best.”

He helps us to get over that first day; he knows how lousy we feel. I made it back home and sit at the dinner table with Mama, Papa and my eight-year-old sister Inge. Papa looks at me, “Are you okay, Helmut?”

Am I dreaming or am I awake? I hear Mama calling, “Wake up Helmut; it’s time to go to work.”

“What happened? How did I get to bed yesterday?” Mama smiles, “You fell asleep at the table yesterday, Helmut, during dinner. I put you to bed. You were sound asleep.”

This is terrible. Is this going to be my life from now on? On the second day in the shop I am still filing the first surface of my cast iron part. I try not to think of my blisters and the Band-Aid. I do know that my cousins Rudy and Reinhold survived this course, and they are now happy after all. **I will survive too!**

First Pay!

Herbie comes back with a handful of envelopes. "Your first pay," he yells. All of us surround him as he hands out the envelopes. I had figured that at eight *Pfennig* per hour at 48 hours should be 3 Marks and 84 *Pfennig* (pennies).

"Something is wrong here," I tell George next to me. "It should be 3 Marks and 84 *Pfennig*, and it is only 2 Marks and 67 *Pfennig*. He checks his envelope; it is also 2 Marks and 67 *Pfennig*."

Herbie is watching us; he has anticipated our confusion.

"Look at the paper in your envelope. That will make it clear to you." Yes, there is a piece of paper in the envelope. I look at it and it does say:

Earned pay 3.84 Marks and it has a long list of deductions.

Income Tax 0.38 Marks

Church Withholding 0.04 Marks

School Supplies 0.25 Marks

Personal Shop Instrumentation 0.50 Marks

Net Pay 2.67 Marks

I was robbed! After a while I simmer down. Herbie lets us stew for a while, and then he calls us together.

"I know how you feel, but everybody has to pay taxes to run the country. The 50 *Pfennig* is for your caliper until it is paid off and the 25 *Pfennig* is for whatever you receive in class, like the writing booklets and pencils."

It does seem to make sense, but what is left almost totally goes for the train ticket to come here.

"Look at it this way," Herbie continues, "If you have good grades, in six month or so, you can make ten *Pfennig* per hour, that's a 25% raise. In four years as a journeyman, you make about 0.93 Marks, and if you are really good at piecework, you can make 1.44 Marks. Doesn't that sound much better?"

It does, but it still bugs me that the government deducts so much money from kids like me.

Learning to be a Craftsman

"Herbie, can I borrow your straight-edge?" I want to do a better job than I can do with my standard tools. Herbie has a Hairline Straight Edge. Being a toolmaker he made it himself. It has an almost knife-sharp straight edge and shows in much more detail how straight and flat a surface is. Herbie encourages us to use his straight edge.

"It also helps to get better points when your parts go through inspection," he says.

"Let me see Helmut." I hand him the case of the lock I am working on. All edges have to be very straight, he tells me. "It actually has little to do with the function of the lock, but it shows the craftsmanship of the man who made it. Chances are if you see a well-made part, and judging by its looks, more effort has been made to make it an all-round better part."

I start to understand the meaning of *craftsmanship*.

"Let's all come together," Herbie calls all of his ten students. "This is a good time to talk about craftsmanship." All of us surround Herbie now as we have many times for the last three-months.

"You are about done with your basic course, and most of you are working on your last project, a fully functional useful lock. I am just telling Helmut how important it is that the lock looks like it has been made by a master of his craft, a craftsman. Here in the school shop, you also get points for a good finish. Although looks has often nothing to do with function, it gives you a clue of the overall quality of the part.

It is like a piece of art. A good looking and well performing part makes you proud. In the old days a craftsman would proudly identify the part he made by marking it with his name. You are stamping your student number on it; it's the same thing. After a while your name means *This is a quality part.*"

All of us students nod our heads. I doubt that we will ever forget Herbie's words. I am extra careful to stamp my number, **1250** straight, upright and each number of equal depths. It is like my name.

How to Succeed!

“How did we do, George?” Georg Struck is in front of the crowd and studies the list with the test results on the bulletin board. I came in a little later and have a bunch of students in front of me blocking my view.

The quarterly shop test -- we have to make a precision part in the shop -- accounts for many points that determine our total rating.

George and I think we have done well and perhaps will get a penny per hour raise. We started with eight pennies per hour in April, got a raise of a penny after six-months and we hope to get ten pennies after nine months. We think we have done a good job and have learned to get along with everybody, especially our group supervisor. These guys write our weekly report cards.

George has backed out of the crowd now and tells me. “We are not on top, but not too far from it. I am fourth and you are fifth, and that should do it for the extra penny, I am sure.”

We shake hands. We think we did it.

“By the way, when do you start in the school lathe department, Helmut?”

“I am scheduled to start there next Monday, George, why do you ask?”

“I have gotten some tips from Heinz, he started there last week.”

“Tell me, one can never learn too much.”

“Your first supervisor will be Herr Noack. He is actually a nice guy, neither a Communist nor a Nazi, but Heinz thinks he is not the brightest.”

“Yes, George, I heard that too about him.”

“Listen, Helmut, this may be important. On Monday morning he will give you the tour of his section of the lathe department and show you the first lathe for you to work on, an old clunker. During the conversation, he always says *I am not a great mathematician, but on the lathe I can outperform anybody.*

The thing to say at this moment is, *But Herr Noack, I heard that you have solved complicated math problems on some of the work you did.* That will probably go a long way for a good report card.”

“Thanks for the tip George.”

It is Monday and I am getting the tour from Herr Noack. I am assigned to work on that old big lathe to rough-out cast iron pistons for locomotive feed pumps the company makes. Then I hear Noack's comment about his math capabilities. I have to work on myself to comment, "*But Herr Noack, I heard from other students that you have solved difficult math problems.*" That brings a happy smile across his face. He pats me on the shoulder and remarks, “You are an observant young man, you will do fine.”

At noon time several of my classmates and I sit together in the cafeteria. “George, Noack did exactly what you predicted.”

“And what did you do, the smart thing?”

“Of course, what good would it do to make him feel bad?”

“Paul, tell Helmut what you told old Noack when he told you he is not the greatest mathematician.”

Paul has been sitting on his hands, not really paying much attention. But now he comes to life.

Paul is an interesting guy; he cracks a lot of jokes, is lively and appears to be very superficial. After I got to know him better I found that he looks at things differently. Sometimes he has an interesting point.

“When Noack told me that he is not the greatest in math, I told him, “Everybody knows that.”

“Paul, why in the world did you do that,” I wanted to know, “I bet you blew your one penny raise. It doesn't make sense.”

“I know, I know! But I wanted to see his reaction when somebody agrees with him, telling him something he does not want to hear. You should have seen his face! It was really funny!”

A Bicycle Trip to the Baltic Sea

1936

"I am starving. Let's stop and have breakfast, Heinz. What do you think?"

"*Ja*, I am starving too. We can sit on that hill over there."

We stop and put our bikes down. I shake my legs and stretch like a cat to limber up a bit.

"How are we doing, Helmut?" Heinz, my travel companion wants to know. Heinz is my classmate and we are on our way to the Baltic Sea. I talked him into this trip, sort of. I still remember how much fun it was to swim in the sea a few years back when I was nine years old, being lifted up and thrown around by big waves. I have been waiting to do this trip for years, and I was determined to come here again. Heinz Klewer is a really good friend, and he is good in school too. He also comes to work on his bike, plays soccer on our class team and is in good shape. We better be. It is 250 kilometers (155 miles) from Berlin to Zinnowitz on the Baltic Sea and we want to make it in one day.

"How do you feel Heinz?" I hope he is okay. I feel really good.

"I'm doing fine, how are we coming along?"

"Hand me the map please, Heinz." I study the map, looking at the highlighted roads we plan to use.

"We just passed Eberswalde, which means we traveled 60 km so far in a little less than three hours."

It was still dark when we started at 4:30 in the morning. Heinz lives about three kilometers north from my place, pretty much on the way.

We saw a wonderful sunrise at five o'clock. I am normally asleep at that time and never get to see it.

It is wonderful to travel at sunrise.

Green fields are on both sides of the road. Living in the city I don't see large fields very often, but being surrounded by them and pedaling between them feels great.

"Heinz, we have to make 20 km per hour (12.5 mph) minimum, and we just made 20 km/hr. That's a little slow. There are 190 km more to go. We have to make up for it by having a shorter lunch than we had planned."

"Then we better get going, Helmut, we have to be at the youth hostel before six p.m., remember!"

"I think we are okay, Heinz. We have ten hours to go 190 km, that's not too bad."

We have to sign in before six p.m. as noted in the booklet *Deutsche Jugendherberge Pass* 1936. Heinz and I are both fifteen years old and can stay at youth hostels without an adult. That booklet lists over two thousand youth hostels throughout Germany and we can stay in any one of them for fifty *Pfennig* a night.

Heinz and I travel now side by side, except when we pass a horse drawn wagon once in a while, or another bicycle. There is almost no traffic on these country roads. We have not seen a car for an hour.

"Why didn't you go to the Alps with the class last year, Heinz?"

"Money, I wanted to, but I didn't have the money, I just couldn't afford it. That's why going by bike this year with you Helmut is great for me. I have never seen an ocean before, so this trip is perfect."

"What do you think, how much money do we need for the two weeks Helmut?"

"I went over that too, Heinz, and I came up with about 1.20 Marks per day. I figured it is 20 Pfennig (pennies) for 8 sourdough rolls, 30 for lunch at the youth hostel, 20 for margarine and jam, and 50 to stay at the youth hostel for a day. That would total 16.80 Marks for our two-week trip."

"I brought twenty Marks along to be on the safe side." Heinz looks happy.

"That's what I have," Heinz, "I am sure we will be okay."

I better concentrate on the road. We pedal and pedal and stare down at the road.

"I didn't know there are mountains north of Berlin." Heinz and I am huffing and puffing to make it up the hill.

He is out of breath, "I wish I had a bike with gear shifts, like racing bikes have, but there is no such thing for ordinary bikes." He adds, "Let's push the bikes up the hill, it is too steep."

Now it goes downhill, and we are picking up speed.

"Yippee! We are doing great!"

Until we come to a small town with bad cobble stone streets.

"This is terrible, we better slow down before we break the bikes," I yell. "We can't take chances, without our bikes our trip would come to an end."

Our bikes are okay, for their age. I have put mine together using the best parts of two hand-me-downs. It has a hairline crack in the frame, and I keep a wary eye on it. It doesn't seem to get any bigger, but I don't want to push my luck.

We go slow but still catch up with a rickety wagon, drawn by a cow. It goes really slow on that cobble stone street. To pass it we have to speed up, almost loosing our bags we have strapped to our saddles. The houses in this little town are small and look old. They seem to belong to small farmers who have only a little farm and have to work in town too to make ends meet.

"There is the yellow road sign again telling us this is the end of the town. The street should get better now, Heinz."

"It is twelve o'clock; what do you think, should we stop for lunch Helmut?"

"Yeah, let's do that and take a look at the map again to see how much time we have."

"How about resting in the shade under that old oak tree ahead of us? That's a big one, I bet its a thousand years old."

I lean my bike on the tree and settle down in the shade. "We have been lucky with the weather Heinz; beautiful sunshine, not too hot, just right."

Our plan was to go to the youth hostel in Pasewalk for lunch, in the next town ahead of us. But that would take too much time to find, because youth hostels are always off the main road. The last sandwiches I brought from home will have to do.

The road sign in front of me reads Pasewalk and I am looking it up on the map. "Heinz, we have come a long way so far, 140 km, but we have to go another 110 km in less than six hours. It will be tight!"

We make our lunch break fifteen minutes only and are back in the saddle. "The next city should be Anklam, 70 km from here. I hope the hilly country is soon behind us, then it should be easy, Heinz."

I try to sound encouraging. Heinz is awfully quiet, he hasn't spoken much the last hour, and he seems to be struggling. I hope he is not in trouble.

When I looked for a companion for the trip I made sure to pick a friend who is good and tough in sports. Heinz and I ran the 10,000-meter in school together. We both came in at 45 minutes, which is not too bad. He also has a '*can do*' attitude.

It is a long trip to the Baltic Sea, but I think it can be done, with some effort. I hope I am not wrong on that one.

Heinz is getting tired, and my left ankle doesn't feel right, it hurts every time I push the pedal down. I hope it will not get any worse. It is a boring stretch of scenery to Anklam; very few trees are along the road and only a few villages. The fields on both sides of the road are larger now. They must belong to big landowners.

We don't say much anymore. Maybe we talked about every thing there is, or we are being worn out. It is four o'clock and Anklam is ahead of us. It is another forty kilometers from here to Zinnowitz--our destination.

"Helmut, let's rest for a moment." Heinz pulls over, and gets off his bike before I can say anything he lies down, flat on his back. I sit down next to him and massage my ankle.

"How do you feel, Heinz?"

He hesitates to answer, "I hate to say it, Helmut, but I feel rotten. I can't go on any more; let's stop right here and continue tomorrow morning."

That's not what I want to hear, but I pretty much expected it during the last hour. I am tired too, and my ankle hurts. I wish we would be in Zinnowitz now, but I am not quite ready to quit.

"Heinz, we are almost there, another lousy 40 km, we can make it in two hours. Then we can goof off, go swimming in the sea for two weeks and have fun."

"I wish, Helmut, but my legs just won't do it any more."

"Let's take another look at the map, Heinz. I remember there was a little road; I think that would be shorter. It is about 10 km shorter, let's take that one. It also gives us a little more time to get to the youth hostel before 6:00 p.m. What do you think? The two of us have never quit, right? How about giving it another try? It is a small road, but I am sure it is okay for bikes."

"I don't know, Helmut, give me another five minutes. I'll give it another try."

Heinz and I get back on our bikes and keep on pedaling. Heinz is really trying. I keep calling out that it is only another few more km.

"How are your legs doing, Helmut?"

"To be honest, I wish we were there, but its only ten more km, another 30 minutes, let's keep going."

I am stomping on the pedals like a robot, again and again. We will get there, all we have to do is hold out.

"Look down the road, do you see the sign *Zinnowitz*. Heinz, we did it!"

"Yes, Helmut, and ten minutes to spare!"

"What a big lake, the Baltic Sea, did I exaggerate? You know what, Heinz; let's go swimming tonight."

At the Sea

Heinz is speechless for a long time. "What a big lake! It paid off to suffer for a few hours!"

I enjoy standing near the Baltic Sea again, hundreds of miles long and many miles across.

It is a wonderful sight. Heinz and I are standing high on the sand dunes. We are looking over the beautiful, clean, white, sandy beach, and across the water, all the way to the horizon. I am happy. We accomplished what we meant to do, never mind a few glitches.

After signing in at the youth hostel we sit down in the dunes and let our eyes wander back and forth over the scenery.

"Heinz, what a day! We can be proud of ourselves. I don't think any of our classmates could have done what we did today."

Let's go down to the water for a swim. The sea is calm. At this time of the day only a few bathers are in the water.

"I am going, Helmut!" and off he goes, no longer tired and worn out. We swim for quite a while, but the water could be warmer. I guess it is only eighteen degrees Celsius.

"That is great, I finally swam in the ocean, let's do more of it tomorrow, Helmut."

It is only two blocks to walk from the beach to the youth hostel. We can go swimming several times during the day tomorrow, no problem.

We buy some rolls, jam and margarine. We haven't eaten for hours.

On the way to our room we meet a bunch of girls in the hall, followed by an older lady who looks like their teacher. What is she giving us that dirty look for? We just got here. What a nut! I now notice that some girls--they are about my age--are smiling at us. I hope I don't blush; I am not used to that. One girl asks, "Are you coming down to the assembly hall too?"

"We have to eat first," I am telling her.

I now notice that some girls--they are about my age--are smiling at us. I hope I don't blush; I am not used to that. One girl asks, "Are you coming down to the assembly hall too?"

"We have to eat first," I am telling her. "You can do that down there, everybody does. Why don't you come down with us? Are you new around here?"

"Yes, we arrived here an hour ago. We came by bike from Berlin, in one day," I answer as Heinz and I pick up our bag and go with the girls to the assembly hall.

It is a large room with long tables and benches; it all looks like an old farmhouse. A great number of young boys and girls have their supper here now, and everybody is talking. Most of them are about eighteen years old. Heinz and I are some of the younger ones here.

A group at one table has a guitar and starts to sing old folk songs. More and more youngsters are joining them, until just about everybody is singing along. A small group from Denmark sings one of their songs and then a group from the Netherlands follows.

When a few boys from England sing, *it's a Long Way to Tipperary*, *it's a Long Way to go* --, everybody seems to know it and sings along.

What a day! What an evening! At ten it is *Lights-out* and we get back to our room.

Heinz and I now find that we are dead tired. But the twenty boys in our room have a lot to talk about, mostly jokes of all kinds. I don't remember when I fell asleep, but I think it was early in the morning. Heinz and I had parked our bikes when we checked in and promised each other not to get close to them, for at least three days. Three days is the maximum time one can stay in the same youth hostel. We will then travel along the coast about fifteen kilometers to the next youth hostel.

But for now, we are enjoying the beach at Zinnowitz. We are early; we want to swim all day.

"Heinz, it is almost twelve o'clock. That's lunchtime at the youth hostel. So let's go back and see what's to eat."

A crowd has shown up for lunch. They must know the kitchen and it smells good.

After lunch I remember that I'd better write a card home. I had promised Mama I would write when I get here. She shouldn't have to worry about me, I promised.

Then it's back to the beach to ogle at the girls and work on my tan. I am looking forward to the evenings when everybody is singing old folk songs, even in other languages.

The girls are on their way too and we meet them in the hall again.

"Did you find amber pieces on the beach?" A cute blond with a terrific smile and dimples asks me.

"Can one find amber pieces on our beach?" I am curious.

"You bet, let me show you the beauty I found. Come on in!" And she invites me into their room. I am not sure about going in, boys are not supposed to do that.

"Don't be shy; the other girls won't bite you." What the heck, it is broad daylight and at least ten girls are in the room.

She shows me a good size *Bernstein* (amber). "Look at it, isn't this one terrific?"

Before I have a chance to look at the amber piece, her teacher enters the room. As I stand there--frozen and speechless--she yells at me.

"What are you doing in here? This is a girl's room.

Boys are verboten!"

"I only looked at a *Bernstein*, what's the big deal?"

"I will report you to the management. That will teach you a lesson, you---you---!"

Taking another good look at that old bag, I left in a hurry. I observed that she stays by herself in a separate room at end of the hall. At ten o'clock, when all the boys were back in our room, I told them what had happened to me earlier. Now, that I think of it, I do not have to take that from that **old bag**. I did not do anything!

All boys in the room agree with me, and we decide to teach *her* a lesson. We sneak around the hall to find some useful tools. In the broom closet we find a long push broom, it will do. I place it upside down with the bristles up against the teacher's door, and my compatriots put half a dozen cups with water on top of the broom. Everybody is back in our room when I knock on her door and run back to our room too.

We hold our breath for a while, then,

KABOOM, BANG BANG BANG...!

Then a yell, "Help! Help! Somebody is trying to kill me!"

We can hear the girls open their bedroom door, and after a little moment we can hear them laugh themselves silly.

Another perfect day!

When the girls ask us about it the next day, we grin and tell them that we didn't see anything and we didn't hear anything.

"Are you ready to travel again, Heinz?" After three days at Zinnowitz the time has come to move on. We had breakfast and it is still early. It is only fifteen kilometers down the coastal road to the next youth hostel, which will be an easy trip.

I hope that the crowd at the next stop will be as pleasant as this one was, but I can do without that old bag.

We are traveling east; the shiny sea in the morning sun is on our left and a pine forest on the right. What a way to travel.

"Look at the guys in front of us, are they not the Hollanders?"

"It looks that way, Helmut, let's catch up with them."

Yes, it's them, all four of them. When they talk between themselves it sounds as if they speak *Plattdeutsch* (Low German). Many words are the same or are similar.

"Where are you guys going today? Are you going to Bansin too, like us? We sure liked your folk songs and your guitar playing."

"No, we go on to Ahlbeck for a few days, and then we have to turn around and get back home again. We make this trip every year," one of them tells us in good German.

"We go to Ahlbeck too at the end of the week. *Na denn, gute Fahrt!* (Take care, bon voyage)."

The road sign reads Bansin, we have arrived. That was a short trip.

As Heinz and I check in at the youth hostel, we are told that all rooms are taken and we have to stay *im Reservequartier* (in the overflow quarters). That is a fancy name for a barn. It is laid out with straw and we learn that's why the book tells us we must have sleeping bags.

Except for sleeping in the barn, we can use all the other facilities at the youth hostel.

The Bansin beach is also wide, clean, white sand. A promenade goes parallel to the beach along the top of the sand dunes. It opens up a beautiful view of the beach below and the sea farther out.

Hundreds of wicker cabanas are on the beach above the high tide. Bansin also has a pier and a concert shell on the promenade. It is quite a fancy place.

"I wonder what it costs to stay in a hotel here, Heinz."

"I am quite happy to stay in the youth hostel for 50 Pfennig a day. The water, the sun and the beach are the same."

The evening in the youth hostel assembly hall is pretty much like the one in Zinnowitz. We bring our rolls and find a place next to a group of boys from Cologne, a lively bunch. They try to teach me the carnival hit song for the next season. I wonder how they know. It's supposed to be top secret until it comes out at the next carnival, and that is at 11/11 at 11 o'clock, the next fall. We will see.

Every group sings its favorite songs again and we have another nice evening.

At ten o'clock, it is *Lights-out* again and the *Overflow crowd*, about fifty boys, settles down in the barn, the upper floor. Except, a crowd of fifty boys does not just *settle down*.

I hear one joke after another; every joke inspires two new ones. It is early in the morning when all boys finally fall asleep.

What a life! We go to the beach when we feel like it; we come back when we feel like it, we goof off all day.

All of a sudden, we make a great discovery. *Girls*. We are new at this but we start paying attention where we sit down on the beach. Now I now what it means *Location, Location, Location!*

The two girls in the cabana, not far from where we sit in the sand, look our way a few times.

"Heinz, when the two girls over there go swimming, let's go too. They are kind of bored, like us. I think now they noticed that we talk about them.

"Look, here they go!"

"That's the signal, let's go too!" Heinz is getting eager to meet them. He is first to catch up with them in the water.

We play ball and have a good time together. The girls are from Berlin too, from the well-to-do Zehlendorf area. Heinz and I all of a sudden speak our best German, not the vernacular we usually use.

"I hope you will be back tomorrow, at our cabana," the taller girl is telling me, "We have to be at the hotel this afternoon."

"Yes, we will be back."

We have only one more day here in Bansin, then we go on to Heringsdorf. Heinz and I look forward to meeting the two girls again, and we arrive early on our last day here. It doesn't take long and the girls show up too. They are really nice girls; we talk a lot, swim a lot and kid around a lot. But it is our last day here; we have to promise to get in touch with them in Berlin. However, they live in the West and we live on the other side of town; it will be difficult to get together. It takes over an hour on the commuter train.

We were in Heringsdorf and in Ahlbeck and are on our way back to Zinnowitz again. It is only a two-hour ride.

"What do you think, Helmut, wouldn't it be better to make it home in two days instead of one, the way we came?"

"Absolutely! Why kill ourselves."

It is Saturday morning and we really must leave now. We must be at work on Monday and have a long trip ahead of us.

"Are you ready, Heinz?" I am asking after we finish our last breakfast at the sea. "Then let's check out." That is only a formality. To stay over night is paid in advance and lunch is paid on the spot.

Good-bye Zinnowitz! Good-bye Baltic Sea! For now at least. I will be back!

Berlin, I am coming home! We are in Anklam in two hours, which is pretty good. We should be in Ferdinand's Hof in less than two hours, at 1:30 or so. It will be just right for lunch at the youth hostel.

We get to Ferdinand's Hof in decent time, but it turns out the youth hostel is deep in the forest, ideal for vacation, but not for us.

"Forget about it, Heinz, let's get some rolls and munch them on the road."

It takes a long time until we find a tiny bakery in this village; all they have is bread. It will do.

At three o'clock we are back on the road.

"Thank goodness we are not in a hurry today, Helmut, we traveled seventy kilometers in five hours, that's nothing to brag about."

"I know. Let's hope the rest of the trip goes smoothly." It better, otherwise it takes us another thirteen hours on the road. I am thinking, if we pedal until dark, that is about nine o'clock--with only a short rest on the side of the road in between--we will only travel 160 km today. That leaves us with 90 km for tomorrow. Why did we do so much better on the way up here? How come?

"Heinz, we don't have a choice, we have to be at work on Monday!"

And we become pedaling robots again, hour after hour. It is getting dark when we make a short break and eat bread, nothing on it. At least we have plenty of it.

At nine o'clock we stop. My ankle is also acting up again; Heinz seems to be okay. We passed Pasevalk about an hour ago; we are about where I figured we would be. Wheat and rye fields are on both sides of the road. It is actually pretty if we wouldn't be so worn out. Sometimes the road is lined with apple trees and once in a while, we see a big oak

tree. Heinz suggests, "Helmut, why don't we spend the night under that big oak tree over there, in case it starts raining; with our luck today?"

"I am ready."

The ground under that old oak is nice and soft, and on a level spot we rest and try to sleep.

It is still dark when a mosquito wakes me up. It takes me a while to be fully awake and to realize where I am. The mosquitoes have found us. It gets worse by the minute. I am starting to slap my neck and face when Heinz wakes up and is doing the same.

"We are being eaten alive, Heinz, let's get out of here." As fast as we can we hop on our bikes and continue our way home. I try to ignore my ankle. Let's just move on.

It is a beautiful sunrise again, and so refreshing. I am no longer tired as I was in the dark.

"Heinz, look, we are in Eberswalde. That means only 60 km to go. We should be home in four hours at the latest. We made it!"

On the way to the sea we averaged 19 km/h, back home we averaged about 18 km/h, but we stopped often. The sunrise and knowing that we are home in four hours really gets us going again.

"We don't need a stop any more, Heinz, let's get it over with." Heinz and I are going as if someone is watching us. It is fun again. At almost noon, we come to Karlshorst, where Heinz lives.

"Good-bye, Helmut, I made it!"

"See you tomorrow at work, Heinz. Another three kilometers and I am at home too."

"See you then, Helmut!"

I am alone, but I am at home soon.

What's that funny noise? I don't have to look very far; I can feel it now. I have a flat tire. Why now? I am almost home. I turn my bike over and find a good size nail in the tire. Patching my inner tube and putting the tire back on the wheel takes only a few minutes. I think I am back on the road in no time. As I am inflating the tire--in my mind I am already at home--I hear a loud **POP**.

The inner tube has come out below the tire, formed a big balloon and blew up. It is now in shreds.

Now what? I could walk and be home in about an hour. But how can I explain to all my friends and neighbors when they see me pushing my bike in the street. How can I tell them I am coming from the Baltic Sea? I am positive they will be in the street. Also, I need my bike to go to work tomorrow.

I am walking and pushing my bike along the street, when I see a sign *Schmidt's-Fahrräder* (bicycles). But it is Sunday and all shops are closed. Maybe, just maybe, the guy lives next to his shop? Sometimes that happens.

Leaving my bike outside I walk into the apartment building and look at the names on the doors. *Schmidt*, what do you know! I hope somebody is home. When I hear teenagers making a racket behind the door, I am pretty sure I am in luck. I ring the bell and a boy opens the door.

"I am in trouble and need an inner tube. I need size 28x1 1/2. Can you sell me one?" (It is against the law to sell anything on Sunday, but it is not that uncommon).

"How much would that be?" One of the boys comes back from the store with an inner tube.

"Two marks," and he hands me the package. Do I have that much left after I overspent on that bread yesterday? I just make it. I think the boys need money to go to the movie.

This time I pay attention to what I am doing. I install the inner tube and tire very carefully, making sure it is seated correctly on the wheel before I pump it up. I am on my bike again to make the last couple miles home.

Turning into our street I show off my tan and can brag about the long trip to my friends. Good thing I got that new inner tube.

"Mama, I am home," I shout when I hear her coming to the door. Mama is hugging me and tears are running down her cheeks.

"I am so happy to see you back home, Helmut, safe and sound." I didn't know that she had worried about me. Papa is interrupting his

Sunday afternoon nap, "How was the trip, Helmut, did all go well?" "Yes, it did, but would you believe I had a flat and than a blow out three kilometers from here. Then I got a new inner tube and the bike is ready for tomorrow. But am I tired."

Rowing Again

1936

*A*s usual, I am back on my bike and on the way to work. The bike is okay but I am still sore.

I slept like a log from yesterday afternoon till six in the morning. Work starts at seven and I am running late. I can't afford to be late; it shows up on my time card, so I better get out of that vacation habit. A truck is coming up on me from the rear. I developed an ear for it. Usually they go only twenty miles per hour. The trick is to get behind them and pick up speed fast enough and not fall behind. Then I can take advantage of the drag behind the truck and it is easy to go at twenty miles per hour.

Boy, this was a tough one; I am huffing and puffing. But now I am behind it and in the drag. I am really moving and will be at work on time.

In the locker room everybody is talking about what happened during vacation, but we all hurry, we must 'punch-in' *before* seven.

"Helmut, let's get together at noon, I want to talk to you about our rowing club." Werner Bock, a classmate, and a sporty and athletic guy is telling me. His ambition is to become an engineer. He found out, that if he enlists in the German Army as a gunsmith, that he would be entitled to go to the Army Engineering College. I'd like to know more about that.

Back at my lathe I have to chuck up the part I was working on before the company closed down for vacation, but my mind is still at the Baltic Sea. Old Noack will show up soon enough and get me out of that mood in a hurry.

What does Werner want to tell me about his rowing club? I know a little bit about it. Mondays Werner tells me where he went with his rowing team, how much fun they had camping overnight and coming home late on Sunday. He mentioned that their youth department is trying to get new members. They are looking for boys under eighteen.

It is finally lunchtime and I meet Werner on the way to the cafeteria.

"Would you be interested in taking up rowing again, Helmut?"

"Yes, I was thinking about it."

"We got a bunch of nice teenagers in our club, but one is not too reliable. We planned to take some trips and he didn't show up, which means we couldn't go. We wasted a weekend!

"Usually we take a *vierer* (four-oar boat); including the coxswain that takes five guys. But you know all that, Helmut."

"Aren't you in the *Brandenburgia* Rowing Club Werner?"

"Yes, do you know where we are? Why don't you come and see us this Saturday after work. Maybe we'll row a little to refresh your rowing skills."

"Okay, Werner, I am looking forward to it." A handshake makes it final.

It's Saturday at two p.m. and it is quitting time. I am in a hurry to get home, eat and then meet Werner at the rowing club. But showering and scrubbing hands and arms always takes time. Traffic is no problem. On my bike I can always sneak through. Maybe I can catch a truck. Then I can go up to twenty miles per hour or more, which would help a lot. I wish the street would be asphalt; I hate bumpy stones and rails that go diagonal across the road.

No problem getting home today. I eat in a hurry and am now on my way to the rowing club. I should be there around three thirty as I

promised. Werner will be there to let me in and introduce me, I am sure. They don't allow strangers on the property.

"Hello Helmut, come on in." Werner is already opening the gate. He was waiting for me. As we walk through the boathouse I see at least fifty beautiful rowboats. Some are top of the line eight-oar racing shells; the pride of the club.

Werner has organized things and several other youngsters are there too. After I met several of them I have the impression I will fit in well.

"Helmut, what are you doing here, starting to row again?"

It is Heinz Zöllner, a former classmate. I haven't seen him since we finished grade school.

"Heinz, what a surprise, glad to see you. We have to get together again. I'll see you in a little while."

Werner introduces me to other club members. All are very friendly; the youth group seems to have a good reputation in this club.

Then Werner shows me the large locker room and my locker, "That's yours, Helmut, hopefully for years to come."

Werner is organizing a team of five and we take off. I am a little rusty, but overall I am doing fine. We only go up the River *Spree* to *Köpenick* and then up the River *Dahme* to the *Frauen Insel* (Women Island). Laundry women are hanging the laundry up to dry on this small island. The island looks funny with all the laundry flopping in the wind. Werner explains, "The Frauen Insel is our typical rowing target during the week when we don't have much time, but it gives us about an hour and a half of rowing exercise. It's fun!"

"How did it go, Helmut?" Everybody wants to know after we came back. "Better than I thought." I inspect my hands, but find no blisters. Working in the shop has taken care of that. We lift the boat out of the water and put it on blocks to rinse and dry, before we take it back to the boathouse and put it on its rack.

"Do you feel like coming back tomorrow?" Werner asks. "We will have a team of five together (four-plus-one) to make a day-trip up the Spree, across Lake *Müggel* and beyond a little bit. On the way back we'll stop at the lake for a swim and then relax during the noon hours. We should be back at four or five."

I actually planned to do my homework tomorrow. I will have to get more done during the week if I join the rowing club.

"That sounds fine. When do we meet?" Werner looks around at our team. "How about no later than eight, is that okay?" All agree. That is it. Werner then shows me around to see the rest of the club.

"This is the club restaurant with dance floor and a bar. Here we celebrate Christmas on the 26th of December, New Years Eve, the Brandenburgia Rowing Club's birthday, Carnival, you name it. Our club meetings are here too.

"All new members are introduced officially to the club members at these meetings," Werner continues, "every member present stands up with a full glass of beer along with the new member applicant, and with "Hip Hip Hurray" and drinking bottoms-up it is official. You will like the *esprit de corps*."

"It sure sounds like it, thanks for inviting me."

"By the way, do you smoke?" Werner asks. "That is pretty much a no-no here. They don't say much normally, but you can't join a racing team, smokers don't have any stamina, their lungs are damaged. They run out of breath, become unconscious and might even fall out of the boat during a race. It has happened."

"No, Werner, I tried it once and got very sick. I also saw a classmate of mine once miserably failing in a 400 meters run after he had started smoking. He used to be the best in the class and now I can beat him easily. That did it!"

"Okay Helmut, this was a fine day, see you tomorrow."

It is almost nine o'clock when I am on my way home. And am I hungry.

I had eaten breakfast before I went to work, then at nine at work I had two sandwiches, at twelve in the cafeteria I had a full lunch, and again at three at work I had sandwiches. Then there was dinner at five at home. Mama knows that I will come home hungry and will have sandwiches prepared for me. I could eat a whole bread right now but have to hold out a few more minutes.

To store my bike in the basement slows me down. In the dark I have to maneuver my bike down into a cubbyhole of a basement.

The apartment house was wired for electrical power ten years ago, but not the basement. The landlord is afraid it may cost him too much money when people don't turn the light off when they leave the basement. It is not really a problem. I know every inch down here in the dark.

"Mama, I am hungry," I greet Mama and Papa as I come into the apartment. Mama has it all prepared, my sandwiches are covered to keep the flies away. It's the dairy behind our apartment house where they come from.

I peek under the cover, and see Mama's marinated herrings on my sandwiches, one of my favorites.

"Mama you make the best." I look at her, but she only smiles.

"How did it go?" Papa wants to know as I sit down.

"I will join the rowing club; I had a lot of fun. We did row around the *Frauen Insel*. It went so well that early tomorrow we want to go up the Spree and across the *Müggelsee* and come back late in the afternoon. Mama, can you make tomorrow's lunch for me? Something I can take along on a day trip?"

"How about potato salad and pork chops? You can take it along and eat it cold."

"That would be great, Mama, *danke schön!* I met a nice bunch of boys, my age, we will be together as a four-oar boat crew for some time, I think. That will be real fun."

Rowing, the First Day-Trip

Werner, three other new friends and I are ready to put the boat into the water, sign out in the logbook, and take off. It is just about eight o'clock.

"What position do you prefer, Helmut, port or starboard?"

"It doesn't matter to me, either side. I was on place three yesterday, which was okay."

"Then let's keep it that way. Then I can see you better and give you some hints. I will be the coxswain until we stop."

We had discussed going past Lake Müggel to Little Lake Müggel; that's about twelve kilometers. So we should be there at a little past eleven.

"Okay, guys, today we take it easy. We don't care if some other boats pass us, agreed? It will take a little time until we form a good team," Werner suggests.

"Yes, today we will take it easy," I hear the others mumble.

We are off. We allow a tugboat and five long barges--on even longer cables between them--to go west, to downtown Berlin. We gradually move over to the other side of the river to go east. We don't want to go too close to the shore and stay out of the *dead waters*. It is hard to believe, but one can tell that it slows the boat down.

The scenery is beautiful. On our left, on the north bank of the Spree are sport clubs. There are tennis courts, handball fields, volleyball fields, swim clubs, field hockey fields and public swim beaches. Forty years ago this was all forest and swamp. On the south bank is some industry, but mostly boathouses and beautiful villas on landscaped properties. All have a landing and a small boathouse for the private boats.



We are in a casual rhythm and are moving right along. Werner is the coxswain and he is watching the traffic, all is going well.

I am comfortable too, except the rolling seat is quite hard. I will have to get used to that again.

Several excursion steamers have passed us on this early Sunday, taking tourists from downtown Berlin to restaurants on Lake Müggel. They stop at several places on the way to take on more passengers. Many passengers wave at us and we smile back, we have to hold on to our oars with both hands.

We have been an hour on our way, at a nice and very leisurely pace.

"Werner, turn around! Isn't that a four-scull boat coming up on us?" Werner is turning around, and after making sure what he sees he tells us, "That is a *Vierer* alright, with sculls, that means they are girls." Using two smaller sculls, one for each arm, is considered better for girls. The larger oar--one for both hands--is which men usually use. For the same effort, scull-boats are faster than the same size oar-boats.

"Why don't you try a little harder to keep them from coming up on us," Werner is thinking aloud. We rowers keep an eye on the other boat, they are gaining on us. Gradually we have been increasing power and pace.

We will do whatever it takes. After a while the situation has stabilized, the girls apparently realize they cannot get us. As we come to the entrance of Lake Müggel, we stop at a lake restaurant's pier and change coxswains. Everybody will be coxswain for a time.

We lost the girls. Maybe they stopped too. After a few minutes we get back in the boat and cross the lake, taking a look at the storm-ball as we pass it. Lake Müggel can become quiet treacherous in a hurry. You do not want to be in the middle of the lake when the ball goes up. We allow an hour or more to cross. It's still fairly early and not too many boats are on the lake. Most of them are paddleboats and quite a few have sideboard motors, stinking up the air with the gasoline-oil mixture.

We have to watch out for sailboats. They often irresponsibly insist on their right-of-way. We find it is better to stay a couple hundred yards off the south shoreline. There are fewer sailboats, fewer stinking outboard motors and one can enjoy the scenery. The shoreline is about six kilometers of forest; many restaurants have a landing for the steamers and sandy beaches for the swimmers. We also can be on shore in a hurry should a storm come up. I prefer to row on a river, there is more to see and one has the feeling of getting somewhere.

It is past eleven when we cross the Müggel and enter a little side creek to get us to Little Lake Müggel. It's a small lake with beaches almost all around, some forest, and very few boats. It is the ideal camping site. We move our boat slowly to the shore, climb out of the boat and pull it up on the beach. We earned a break to rest, swim, eat and drink mineral water and talk up a storm. Maybe we made a mistake to row too far away from the girls. It would be fun now to sit together.

The End of the Rowing Season

1936

Rowing and going to the Tech High School doesn't allow me to do much else. Weekends and Wednesdays are rowing days, and in between I have to do my homework, often until late at night. The competition in class is fierce. If I louse up one test my rating goes from near top to near bottom. Being prepared is a MUST. So far I am doing all right; but it is a never-ending hard effort. I am proud of my near-top position. It also pays.

After months of training and traveling, the rowing club has come together for the official 'End of the Rowing Season Day 1936'. It is the beginning of November 1936 and today is *Abrudern* at our rowing club Brandenburgia. The club has come together, and we are ready to row to an outlying restaurant to celebrate. Even club members I have never seen before and seniors are here today.

At least thirty boats are participating and the whole armada goes upstream on the river Spree. Every boat shows the Brandenburgia red eagle flag and everybody wears the club cap. That makes it official.

We arrive at the restaurant in about one hour, tie up our boats, and get seated.

The club president reports on club business during the last season and what is planned for the winter season. We have to stay in shape and work on our rowing techniques and endurance. Once a week we will go to a club that has a rowing exercise hall. A simulated boat is in the floor with a pool of water on either side to place the training oars. The coach can walk from rower to rower and refine the rowing stile and technique.

We also will participate in cross-country running, with twice-weekly training and a race once a month.

Herr Steinmann, our club president, points out that the German rowers did quiet well during the recent Olympics in Grünau, which is only a few miles from here. However, other clubs and countries are getting better too, and we want to get our share of wins.

The youth group situation is improving and has potential, he announces. I think we are the potential.

A new rowing group for women is being considered to broaden our club base, to put our facilities to better use and to utilize all the boats we have. A smaller boathouse with facilities is on the club property and could be used. But there are members in the club who consider rowing a masculine sport and believe it should stay that way. Even some girls are afraid they would look like weight lifters in time. I think that is nonsense; some club members have their own boats in the boathouse and are rowing with their wives. Their wives don't look any different than the other women.

I do not know what all the fuss is about. Actually, I think it would be fun to have girls in the club.

Herr Steinmann waves his hand to stop some holdouts from starting a discussion, "Nothing has been decided at this point and a new discussion and a vote on the matter will come up at the next club meeting."

In conclusion he announces, "The rowing season 1936 has officially been closed, and we hope for another successful year in the next season. Everybody, *Hip Hip Hurrah!*"

We all take our beer and answer "*Hip Hip Hurrah*" (bottoms up).

All club members go back to their boats and row to our clubhouse for more *social togetherness*. My teammates and I are standing around, not quite sure what our role would be now that the rowing season is over.

Our coach, Herr Dickmann, must have observed us and seen that we are lost.

"Okay team, before you even think of retiring for the year; let's have a few hours training next Saturday. As long as we have no ice coming down the Spree let's keep on rowing. We can practice cross-country running after we come home or on the following day. What time shall we meet?" That takes care of our lack of directions.



Cross Country Running for Rowers in Winter

5.0 kilometers

I am second from left and came in third

Stories of my life By Helmut Standke
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Easter 1937 Rowing Trip

"**A**re you sure you want to go?" I am asking my teammates early in the morning on Easter Sunday. It is cold, very cold. However, no ice is drifting on the River Spree; so we can go. It is up to us, how tough do we want to be, or like to appear to be?

Rowing has been going on pretty much all winter with the exception of a few weeks around the New Year. We are up to it, no question, but do we want to row today, Easter Sunday?

"Yes, we are ready, so let's go," is the general opinion. "Who is going to be the first coxswain?" And probably freeze to death sitting still. I pulled the short stick. While the rowers wear a sweat suit, I put an old WW1 army overcoat over my sweat suit.

The rowing season has not officially begun, but we have wanted to see the western part of Berlin--as seen from the water--for quite some time. We believe that our eastern half of the city is much prettier. We have many more lakes, rivers, and forests than the West. But we'd still like to see it. We have been advised to avoid the Spree through downtown with its many narrow turns and shallow points and take the Teltow Canal instead. We have also been told that the canal is boring, there is no scenery, and concrete walls are on either side the entire length. It is a narrow channel.

The boat moves down the Spree, it doesn't take long to notice that more and more industry is located next to it. The AEG (German General Electric) begins three miles from our clubhouse and is over a mile along the river Spree.

Every time we come to a bridge--and there are lots of them--people wave at us. After an hour we enter the canal. It is easy to miss. The entrance is partially covered with shrubbery and is very narrow.

I am not comfortable in the canal. It is so narrow that with our oars out and in position we need more than half the width of the canal. Fortunately we are the only boat on the canal.

The Spree River and the canal run into the Havel River, maybe we can get there today. One day, I don't know when, I want to row north to Lake Müritz, but that is several hundred miles and would take an entire vacation. Some rowers have rowed to Lake Müritz, and they talk a lot about it.

I am shivering and hope that I can soon change places and the next guy will be coxswain. Today, being coxswain is the worst place in the boat.

While I am dreaming, suddenly I see a tug with several barges in tow coming toward us. They are in the middle of the canal, and that won't leave us enough room to continue rowing. I steer the boat as close as I can to the canal wall.

That is not good enough. I call out "Oars long!", which means to bring the oars next to the boat. Now we are sitting ducks. We are still moving a little, and I can steer the boat closer to the canal wall. My crew turns their heads around and sees the tug coming close and is almost next to us. A bunch of barges are on long cables behind it.

The tug misses us by a few feet. We are dead in the water. The bow-waves of the tug bounce off the canal wall and push the stern of our boat toward the middle of the canal, under the cable and in front of the next barge. It is a long cable and two to three feet above the water. The stern of our boat with me sitting there is right under the cable. In seconds the barge has come within a few feet right where I am sitting with the barge top towering above me.

We have just passed a bridge and a lot of people look down at us and see what is going on. People have gathered by now and start screaming; realizing a disaster is in the making.

The water is too cold to swim and the canal walls too steep to hold onto, and much less to climb.

I grab our little boat hook a coxswain can use to hold onto a landing. I try to dampen the blow when the barge is within inches and about to hit us.

My boat hook slips right off the steel hull and **BANG**, we get hit. It almost throws me out of the boat. I am debating in my mind whether to get rid of my overcoat in case I have to swim.

I can't believe it! Our boat did not brake up, we are still upright, we are not sinking and nobody fell into the water. Only the stern of our boat is scraping along the entire barge as it passes us.

The tail end of our boat again is slowly drifting under the next cable and the next barge is coming up on us. We are still sitting ducks.

People on the bridge near us start screaming again. Bang, here we go again. Our good *Schutzpatron* is again watching out for us. Nothing bad really happens as far as I can tell. It repeats itself two more times. We get hit by every barge, and can do nothing about it.

The tug and the four barges are gone now and we are not sure about anything. I am looking at our boat hull where I sit and where we got hit. I don't see any damage. I could swear I saw our rudder in splinters as we scraped along the barge.

"Look around guys; has anyone seen my boat hook?" It had disappeared; I have no idea how. I know it floats, but it's gone and we can't find it.

"What do you think guys, should we call it quits and turn around?"

"Yes, we've had enough excitement for the day!"

"Maybe there is a party going on in the clubhouse. We don't want to miss it, right?"

We find a spot where we can stop and someone else can be the coxswain. I want to get warm.

At home we inspect the boat thoroughly. There is nothing wrong with the boat that a little rubbing with spit could not fix.

You have to be lucky!

The Real World

What a day! It couldn't be worse. It is raining hard as I ride my bike to school. Although my poncho is keeping my violin and me reasonably dry, the storm is almost blowing me off my bike. I had to bring my violin today; we practice every Monday after school. But all that is not unusual.

What is different today? I start my six-month tour in the Machine Overhaul Department of the company. It is a large single story building with about one hundred experienced machine fitters and machinists of all ages and political persuasions, and about twenty students like me. I have been forewarned that the older guys often argue about what did and didn't happen in the last few years and what should and shouldn't be done in *Deutschland* (Germany) now. Sometimes these guys come nearly to blows.

"Don't get involved with them, you can't win," is the advice I get from other students and from Papa. I remember what Papa used to say after Hitler became chancellor in 1933. He was convinced that Hitler would not last, sixty-three percent of the voters had voted against him. However, Hitler mobilized the country and it happened that the economy got going. Autobahns are going criss-cross Germany, the French are out of the German Saarland again and no longer stealing our coal. Everything is humming.

The press and most folks look the other way when the original coalition of right-of-center parties pretty much have become one party, one by one. But it actually looks good all around.

I have never been inside this machine overhaul building before. I remember Papa always says that, the first impression is the most important and it is lasting. I am trying my best. I enter the building and look around. The big hall is stuffed with little and giant machines, surrounded by a lot of craftsmen working on them.

I have been told that some of these machines have been producing parts for fifty years or more. They will function like new and will look like

knew again after the rebuilding is complete and the final coat of paint has been applied.

I have to see the Meister (foreman) and I am looking for the distinctive oak Meister-Office cubicle. I cannot miss it; it is two feet off the ground and has windows all a round.

"Herr Schulz will be back in a moment," his secretary is telling me. She doesn't offer me a seat. I guess students don't count much here. I hear you.

This must be Meister Schulz, storming into the office. He is a big guy in hurry and all wound-up. His sleeves are rolled up and I can see his hairy arms. Running this department is probably not easy. After he sits down he looks at me with a friendly smile on his face, and then he is reading the paper in front of him.

"You are Helmut?"

"Yes, Herr Schulz."

"Come along, I think George Richter will be a good lead man for you. He is at the end of the hall."

We walk between all the craftsmen and machines to the end of the large hall.

"Today Richter will start to overhaul a big milling machine, which will be perfect for you, Helmut."

As Meister Schulz introduces me to Herr Richter, a team of men manipulate the overhead crane to this area and gently set down that big machine.

"That tired monster has made railroad brake parts for over fifty years. It will be like new and humming again and may well run for another fifty years when we are done with it," Herr Richter explains.

I think the next six months will be fun.

Lead-Man Richter

"H^elmut, go down to the Gypsy and tell him the machine is here and we need him. You can't miss him down the hall. He is that little guy in the middle of a dozen pans filled with kerosene.

"Try to get chummy with him so he will start our jobs first. Offer him a cigarette, which helps. Do you smoke Helmut?"

"No, I don't, I do a lot of sports and will start racing in my rowing club." Richter looks down to the floor.

"I wish I could say that. I tried to quit many times. I just can't do it. Don't start to smoke, promise!"

"I can promise that, Herr Richter, I won't. I'll go to the Gypsy now and try my best."

Finding him is no problem; he sits between pans filled with parts and what smells like kerosene.

"Good morning Sir. Herr Richter sent me to let you know that the milling machine has arrived."

"Yes, I know, I saw it on the crane moving to your place." He is getting up from his stool and wipes his hands dry. He is a short fellow, but slender and wiry, mid forties I guess.

"Doesn't that kerosene bother your skin?" I wonder.

"Yes, it does, but what can I do? I am really a show man and usually perform in a circus."

I like people with an interesting background.

"You do? Were you performing, on the trapeze?"

"Yea, I was, until a few years ago. But there is lots of other work to do in a circus."

"Do you miss circus work?"

"O yes, that is my life, but right now times have not been good for us Gypsies," he says. "In many cities we are no longer allowed to stay in caravans. We have to register in the city and stay in specified places, and we have to have a postal address."

"Where do you live now?" I start to feel sorry for him. I do know that Gypsies are traveling folks and live in big trailers, which they call caravans. Not having an address has advantages. You don't pay taxes and avoid the draft into the military. That's over now. Begging has been outlawed. Gypsies did a lot of panhandling. Because of all the new regulations and the upturn of the economy crime has been reduced to a fraction. Everybody likes that.

"I am Helmut. What is your real name?"

"Call me Gypsy, everybody does, and I am proud of it. It's okay, but my real name is Laszlo. Let me get my stuff together and I'll be right over.

"By the way, Helmut, I have a great collection of costumes I am using on my other job. If you want to rent something for Carnival or masquerade parties, come on over, and I will show you what I have. I live not far from here."

"Thank you, Laszlo; I'm sure the time will come for that. It was interesting to talk to you."

Richter has started to take some of the parts off the machine so Laszlo can clean it better. In some places old grease and chips are an inch thick. It will take Laszlo a long time.

Richter explains to me that Laszlo will do preliminary cleaning first so we can start the disassembly. He will then clean all parts thoroughly. After the machine is reasonably clean Richter and I continue the disassembly. With the heavy parts we need help.

"Kurt, can you give us a hand for a minute?"

"Sure can!"

"Kurt, this is Helmut. He will be with us for the next six months."

"Hi, Kurt!" He is the right man for the heavy stuff. I can see his muscles under his shirt. His arms are thicker than my legs.

Richter has told me that Kurt is an old-fashioned Communist. He is a mixture of a confused dreamer and a misled Socialist activist, who knows how to bring heaven to the working man as soon as he can find enough capitalists or rich people to pay for it. According to Richter, Kurt still thinks-- in time-- Germany will be Communist and Hitler will be a dreadful history.

"Don't worry about him," Richter tells me, "he is actually a nice guy, so don't let his talk bother you."

The three of us pull the big spindle out, with all the heavy gears that are mounted on it. "Watch your fingers, Helmut, safety first!"

We manage to pull the spindle out and lay it on the bench, all of us huffing and puffing. Nobody got hurt. We look at ourselves, saying nothing, appreciating each other's effort.

Although the three of us are different in many ways, for the last few minutes we could not have been more one-and-the-same in our effort. "The rest will be easy," Richter comments. "By the end of the day all moveable parts should go to, --- what's his name? You know, the Gypsy. That will get him started."

My first week in the machine hall is over in an hour. It is Saturday noon and I am coming back from the cafeteria. Some of the machine fitters sit around a long table during lunch and talk. The *Kaffee-Frau* (coffee woman) does not only brew our tea or coffee; she will also get us mineral water, tea or beer at very low prices from the company supply room. Some of the workers do drink beer.

We students clean up the place during the last hour while most workers stay out of our way and talk. I pay no attention to what else is going on. I'm just doing my chores. The green lampshades are Meister Schulz's specialty, they better shine.

The workers are getting louder. I can hear Kurt's voice now. Knowing that he has a Communist background I wonder what he is saying.

"You brag about what this government has accomplished, I tell you they are spending us into the poorhouse. Do you know that IOU's have replaced your savings? That is why you cannot withdraw any money from your savings account without difficulties. Anybody can create jobs spending that kind of money! Wait until everybody is out of money."

My lead man George Richter comes over to me with his index finger over his mouth. "Listen to them and analyze what they are saying, but don't get involved. They will probably leave you alone, but just in case. If you want me to, I can sort it out for you when we have some time." I keep cleaning my green lampshade, pretending not to be interested. Now I hear a worker arguing with Kurt.

"You *Kommie*, why don't you go to Russia, you practiced saying *Heil Moskau* for years, you'll fit right in. Why don't you ask the Russian farmers after they lost their land to the state-run collectives how they like it. Stalin starved twenty million of the Russian farmers to death."

The bell is ringing. It is two o'clock. All workers pack their stuff and will be gone in a minute. We students look at each other about what we just witnessed. We thought the voters had settled all this years ago. Our newspapers never write anything that these different viewpoints are still being discussed and argued about.

An Ancient Machine Will Be Like New

My rowing crew and I had a busy weekend. We were rowing sixty miles. The sun has given me a dark tan I can show off on Monday morning at work. My lead man Richter, a soccer fan and a passionate angler, is an outdoorsman too. That makes two of us and I feel good around him. He is teaching me a lot of things in his friendly voice. He reminds me all the time to do things in a safe way.

"Watch your fingers," I hear it all the time.

"Go to Laszlo and see if the spindle and the main bearings are clean. We will start with them. Place them on our layout table.

"We have to determine, Helmut, what wear and tear has taken place, and then we have to decide if we can rework the part or if we should replace

it. The two bearing sections on the spindle can be reground, that's no problem, but look into the tapered bearings, especially the larger one."

I am getting familiar with all these parts and start looking at the bearings. They look and feel pretty good, except the insides have several deep grooves at the inner bearing surface.

"Let's see." Richter takes a look too. "The spindle is not too bad; write down what we want the shop to do on the spindle."

I can see the areas where the bearings glide on the spindle; they look a little yellow and have a few shallow grooves.

"The cylindrical grinder takes care of that.

"Write down, Helmut, *Clean up bearing sections only; ream Morse cone I.D, clean up only.* Write down the work order number on the tag, so the grinder can charge his time to it. That will do it for the spindle."

I finish the tag and tie it up on the spindle, looking at Richter, waiting for new instructions.

"Take it to the cylindrical grinders over in the machinists section. You can watch and learn how they go about it, Helmut."

Then Richter picks up the two bronze bearings.

"Let's look at them. We usually replace bearings. The bearing material is nowadays silicon bronze, the oil grooves are of a better design now. The bearings probably will not fit the reground spindle anyway.

"After fifty years of service there is no adjustment margin left in the bearings. But let's wait until we get the spindle back to get the new dimensions."

"Do we have to make a drawing for the lathe operator to make new bearings?" I want to know. "That's what is done in the Student Machine Shop. I know Helmut, that's good for training students. But we have very experienced machinists; they can make a new part when we give them the old one we want to replace. It is a better way and is much faster. You will see. We will give the machinist the reground spindle and the old bearings and get the new bearings back, with a little stock in the main bores for us to do the fitting. We can then fit the bearings to the spindle when we do the assembly.

"Here is another thing, regarding screws and threads in general, Helmut. Because the machine is that old, the threads on these machines are made to the English Whitworth Standard. We will use the existing screws if they are still usable. If not, we will retap those threads to the Metric Standard, up to eight millimeters. The larger screws will remain Whitworth; and we will have to order them with the Meister's approval.

"Let's have lunch and then we can go on, Helmut," Richter suggests. Okay with me. I really enjoy working with this man. Meister Schulz did me a great favor in letting me work with Richter. I don't care for some of the other machine fitters that some of the other students have to work for. I lucked out! I am back early from lunch and look our project over. It is amazing that this machine worked for fifty years and is really not in too bad shape. On some sliding surfaces one can still see the original checker-mark hand scraper finish, at least at the ends of the sliding beds. Many machines in our factory work twenty-four hours a day; this one may have done that too. The bell rings and Richter joins me. "Let's look at all the smaller spindles and lay them and their bearings on the table, Helmut. We will look at them the same way as we did the main spindle and determine what can be reworked and what needs to be replaced." At the end of the day we are done. I tag all spindles and take them to the shop to regrind the bearing surfaces. The spindle for the cross slide and the large nut have to be replaced.

We identify them with a red tag, *Replace*. One spindle has a long thread that is worn in the middle, where most of the work takes place.

"Tomorrow we look at the cast iron sliding surfaces on the machine body, the main table and the cross table. The two of us will do the rework of all sliding surfaces. The process is called *scraping*. Look around, and you'll see that most machine fitters spend most of their time scraping." Early in the morning, before anybody else can tie up the crane, Richter and I move the crane to our area. We lift up the machine body and lay it down on its side, with the sliding surfaces flat up and horizontal.

"That's the easiest way to work on it," exclaims Richter. "The body probably has not worn much; the main table hardly ever moves up and down. Let's see. Come along, Helmut, I'll show you the tool crib where we get our *master flat plates*." The one we take is a cast iron bar about five inches wide and three feet long, with braces on the backside. It looks like a little bridge. The *master* straight side is ground flat and polished. A wooden cover protects this surface. Richter and I carry the straight edge to our workbench.

"Let's place it on the machine's sliding surfaces and see if we are in luck." He is trying to wedge a very thin blade--which he calls a feeler gage--between the master plate and the machine's sliding surface.

"It looks like we are in luck. There's not much wear here, so let's go over it once with the scraper to get a nice clean surface, then I will show you how to use the master plate and the *Prussian-Blue* paste."

Richter shows me how to sharpen the scraper, how to hold it and how to push it over the bearing surface to remove a very thin scraping of the cast iron bearing surface, about a quarter of an inch square. This process is repeated over and over the entire bearing surface. It is a very tedious process. After we finish it once over the entire bearing surface, it has a tiny checkerboard pattern; it looks pretty.

"The next step is," Richter continues, "to rub a very thin coat of the blue paste on the master plate. Give me a hand to place the plate on the scraped surface, blue side down."

After moving the plate back and forth, we put the master plate back on the bench. "Look here, Helmut, the blue spots on our bearing surface are the *high spots*, we have to scrape them off until the entire surface has a nice blue checker board pattern, then it is really flat."

Dreaming 1938

*L*et's look half-way decent, guys; it is only another five hundred meters."

The coxswain is right; our boat is almost within sight of our rowing club. We straighten out and increase our strokes. Nobody at the club should see that we are tired from our long weekend trip. At least once a year many boats from our club make a trip to Lake *Teupitz*, about thirty miles from here.

"Oars long!" I hear the coxswain, and we move the oars length side and coast another couple boat lengths to the landing. It was another great trip on a beautiful weekend, the best in 1938. The team spirit between us youngsters is great.

It was fun to listen to the stories of the elders, mostly about races they won or could have won if something unfortunate hadn't happen.

"All together now!" The coxswain yells as the rowing team lifts the boat out of the water and carries it to the front of the boathouse for cleaning. This cleaning is a ritual. Never, ever is a boat taken back to the boathouse without hosing it down. It doesn't take long; we all know what to do.

"Let's get this thing over with. Maybe we can go to the *Blumengarten*, (the fancy nightclub a mile down the street). I heard Benny Goodman is back." Our coxswain knows them all. But the last time we were there they didn't let us in. How did they know we don't have much money? Because we walked and didn't come in a chauffeur driven automobile?

I have just picked up the garden hose to rinse the boat down, when I bump into Heinz Zöllner. "Helmut, I am looking for you, I have been waiting for you all weekend."

Heinz is a former classmate of mine, and he is also a member of the rowing club.

"What is the good news?"

"Why don't we meet in the gazebo near the water when you are done with the boat and have taken a shower. Bring a beer along to celebrate."

"You are right, we are almost done."

A beer to celebrate? I can't imagine what he wants to tell me.

I can see Heinz from here; he is in the gazebo shuffling some papers. What is it about?

The two of us have similar interests. Heinz and I have talked and dreamed about how we can manage to become engineers, somehow. We both determined that our parents couldn't afford to pay for it. So what are we are going to do? We both go to Tech. High Schools. Siemens runs his, and it is also a very good school.

It seems like it takes forever to get ready. I get a beer at the bar and run through the boathouse to meet Heinz in the gazebo.

"Look here, Helmut."

That's all Heinz says. He puts a large paper in front of me. It is a colorful Glossy, with the picture of a German Cruiser in Honolulu, Hawaii. Hawaiian beauties are standing on the pier and are waving at the sailors. "Look at the inside, Helmut, that's the important stuff." It reads in bold letters

Join the German Navy, and travel to far-away places.

"You may qualify to go to the Navy Engineering College, if you have four years of technical training!"

"That's exactly what we want," I turn the page and read on; "*You may qualify to join the Navy at eighteen years of age. Applicants may apply at seventeen years of age.*"

"I think we should go for it, Heinz, this is meant for us."

"I agree; we are seventeen now and will finish our four year Tech. High School next spring.

Farther down on the page it advises us to go to city hall with our fathers and fill out the *Request to become a Volunteer in the Armed Services, sign up for Navy.*

"Heinz, I am pretty sure my dad will go along with this. He will like the idea that I join the navy. He was in the army and served in Russia in WW1. I heard him say many times that he hopes I would never have to go through that.

"Heinz, can I borrow these papers to show them to my dad? Then he can inform himself."

"Sure, go ahead, Helmut. My dad and I pretty much settled it; we plan to go to City Hall next week to sign up."

"I am so excited; I don't know what to say Heinz! I agree with you, this is the way to go."

"Helmut, it is like the old days, we dream and plan again. Remember in the eighth grade, when we planned and dreamed what to do next? And you got into Tech. High School at the last moment?"

"Sure do, I made it at the last moment!"

We agree that we live at the right time. The economy is humming again, and almost everybody can have a car in the future or at least a motorcycle. The streets are getting crowded with cars.

Our good future has started now. Engineers are in demand.

"Let's go for it!"

Four Weeks Later Heinz and I received another form letter from the *Kriegsmarine* (German Navy) to select our technical careers, after having passed a physical and a written test.

Heinz has come over to our apartment and we are sitting at the kitchen table with our papers in front of us.

For Heinz and me the choice is between an Artillery-Fire Control Technician and Torpedo Technician career. We really don't know much

about either. I can't even imagine what fire control possibly stands for. Artillery, yes, every ship has a bunch of little and big guns. That ought to be nice clean work, if you can call it work at all. No more being a grease monkey, working on old and dirty machines. A little maintenance on guns after shooting exercise cannot be that much work. "I am going to sign up for torpedo technician," Heinz tells me.

"You do? You want to sign up as a Torpedo Technician? It requires only three years of technical training. Artillery-Fire Control technician require four years.

"It is a clear cut case, Heinz! Why in the world would you volunteer for something less? We both will have four years of technical training shortly, so why would you go for the Torpedo Technician career?" Heinz knows logic is not on his side. He is twitching and scratching his head, but he doesn't want to change his mind. Why can't he see the obvious?

"Helmut, I like torpedoes because I read up on it. A lot of precision machinery is involved, propulsion, gyro controlled steering and depth control, let alone the warhead. Besides, what we really want is to go to the Navy Engineering College. Which career to start in is not that important, I think."

"Yea, you've got a point there. What else do they want, Heinz?"

"We have to mark which Fleet we want to go to, North Sea or Baltic Sea Fleet?"

"I think we should sign up for the Baltic Sea Fleet with the home in Kiel. It is so much closer to Berlin than Wilhelmshaven, the home of the North Sea fleet. In a few hours by train and we are home in Berlin." Heinz nods his head, "We agree on that. I think that'll do it Helmut! Kriegsmarine, here we come!"

We sign our documents, drop them into the post office mailbox and take off for the rowing club. Both of us will be eighteen in a few months and will probably start our navy careers a few months later. With a little luck the two of us will be on the same ship. I hope so!

Rowing 400 Kilometers (250 MI) During Vacation, 1938

"So what! Two hundred kilometers in a week is not that much." I try to assure David. He is about my age, but I don't know him very well and I have not seen him rowing very often at the club.

David, Werner and I are sitting in the *Gazebo* at the rowing club; the River Spree is below us. We are discussing whether we can make a rowing trip to Lake Müritz in our two weeks vacation. It would mean going two hundred kilometers each way. Will we be able to manage?

Werner is my old friend and classmate. I am still thankful that he introduced me back to rowing again. What a wonderful sport. Werner had told me that he thinks David would be up to it, and he is a lot of fun to be with and easy going. I guess that sounds all right, I trust his judgment. Several club members suggested making the trip down-stream on the Havel River to Lake Müritz.

It would be not as scenic from what we normally see on the East Side of Berlin, except the canal, which goes to the Havel River.

It means bypassing the center of Berlin by going along the Teltow - Canal, a concrete channel fifty kilometers long. It connects the rivers Spree and Havel and is bypassing downtown Berlin. That will take us one full day. The only *scenery* will be a hundred bridges that cross the canal. But at least the kids will be waving at us.

Herr Dickmann, our racing coach, is casually coming over, a beer in hand. He comes to hear what we are discussing. He is not only our coach; he is our role model and is always there with help and advice. His name is on a number of big trophies in our club display case. He is a muscular and a tough guy with a heart of gold, especially for us youngsters.

"So you want to go to Lake Müritz?"

"Yea, we are thinking about it, Herr Dickmann. Is there anything we should be watching out for?"

"How much time do you have?"

"Two weeks is all we've got."

"That will do. Here is what I suggest you do. Take along a list of rowing clubs along the way, where you can stay overnight for free. All rowing clubs will take care of traveling young rowers. We do it too. I'll get you a copy."

"*Vielen Dank, Herr Dickmann.*"

"I'm not done yet. Allow yourself plenty of time for the last sixty kilometers south of the Müritz, because you have to pass thirty-three locks. The trouble is that in summer each lock can be operated only once per hour, sometimes only once every two hours to conserve water. Other than that I don't see any problem. When are you leaving?" He looks at me, so I answer.

"Sunday in a week, our company closes for vacation then."

"Okay, boys, have a good trip. When you are back, tell me about it," and he slowly walks back to the boathouse.

"That was good advice, we should have asked him in the first place," Werner comments.

"What boat are we taking?" I ask my companions.

Werner answers, "I think we take the *Mary*, the *Zweier-Mit*, (double scull boat with coxswain), that is a sturdy boat, good for touring. That reminds me, we have to put a *Request for a Boat* in, to make sure the *Mary* will be available when we need it. That has to be done a week ahead of time."

David is raising his hand to get Werner's and my attention.

"What are we going to take along? We can't take too much stuff. The *Mary* is not too bad, but we can't take along very much."

I wait a little with my answer. I don't want to speak for anybody but myself. Werner is also hesitating.

"We really don't need much in two weeks, because we will be pretty much living in the boat. Two rowing shorts maybe, a *Brandenburgia Rowing Club* T-shirt when we have to be *formal* to go ashore to another rowing club. We need a sweat suit of course. I think that's pretty much it. An extra pair of shoes maybe?"

"I think that's what I will have," I agree.

David adds, "I bring a *tee-pee*, so we have a place to stay over night, when we can't find a rowing club."

"I think that's it, we are set to go!"

Rowing, Rowing and Rowing

1938

Not much is going on this early in the morning at the rowing club.

But David, Werner and I are ready. Everything is packed and the club pennons with the red Brandenburgia Eagle are up. Suddenly Herr Dickmann shows up. He always has a big grin on his face. He takes another look at us, and then looks the boat over.

"Hop on in," and then he pushes us off. "*Hals und Beinbruch!*" (Break neck and leg) he shouts after us to wish us a healthy trip. I am the first coxswain for the first third of our tour today. We planned to make at least forty kilometers each day and try to do more if possible.

"What's the problem, Werner?" I can tell something is bothering him. We are face to face; he is rowing right in front of me.

"Let's hope we don't meet a tug and barges in the canal today, like you did a year ago, Helmut."

"Werner, don't be so pessimistic. Today is Sunday, so that makes it unlikely. But I don't think you have to worry about it anyway. I thought of this problem a lot and I figured out what to do at a time like that."

"Tell me," Werner asks.

"We have a scull boat today, we need much less room. Two sculls end to end are so much shorter than two oars end to end. We can also make *sculls long* but only half-way, then we can *crab* our way along at low speed and still maintain control of the boat, trust me!"

"Okay, I buy that!"

Werner and David have been rowing for a few hours now; I think my time as coxswain is over. "This must be about fifteen kilometers, who wants to be the next coxswain? It's too early to have lunch. We could stop at the restaurant over there at the bridge, and then only change positions and go on."

"It doesn't matter to me," answers Werner, "What do you like David?"

"I don't care, its fine with me, let's go on."

"I give you credit for the extra time I sit here as coxswain," I answer.

“We have to put up with this canal for another thirty kilometers, but then we have open countryside.”

"Look at it this way, guys, the beauty of rowing is the same, ha, ha, ha..."

"Let's keep going now and get this canal over with," says David, "In Potsdam, at the end of the canal, we can look for the Potsdamer Rowing Club and stay overnight."

Werner and I agree.



Werner, David and I

Days Later

Nothing too exciting has happened during the last few days on our trip to Lake Müritz. David has turned out to be what Werner has said about him; he is easy going and has a good sense of humor.

That sounds good for two weeks together in a small rowboat. The last few nights we slept in our tee-pee, on the grass next to the river and our boat.

We met a number of tugboats and barges, loaded with bricks and gravel. All are going down to Berlin and other cities south of here, to where we come from.

Traveling with us are three smaller boats and a fancy sailboat. Sailboat people are not like us rowing or paddling guys.

They sit there in their white linen suits, drinking and smoking cigars. They are using gasoline engines to get to the lake in a hurry, stinking up the river with blue smoke we have to breathe.

I mumble, "I bet they even call themselves sportsmen."

We all catch up with each other again at the lock. Before we go into the lock, we small boats move ashore, and we get out and walk around a bit.

"I'll check what the operating schedule is for the lock," says David, walking over to the bulletin board.

The downstream lock gate is open. Because we want to go upstream, we could go in now.

I turn to Werner; "Did you notice that these sailboat guys have never bothered to come out of their boat to help operate the previous locks? Never once did they turn the crank?"

"That's right, it never occurred to me. What a bunch of snobs, what are we going to do about it?"

David just comes back, "The lock can be operated at ten o'clock, that's in halve an hour."

It starts to bug me that we have been taken advantage of by an over-dressed arrogant bunch, pretending to be sportsmen. The sailboat, being less maneuverable is moving right into the lock without stopping, holding onto a ladder at the lock wall.

We small boat travelers gather ashore and do a little conspiring. The other boats people also observed that the sailboat people never operated the locks. A manual labor thing, I guess.

One of the paddlers suggests, "Why don't we all move into the lock shortly before ten and then pretend we don't know what time it is. Let's just sit there and wait, 'cause we got lots of time.

"To make the wait enjoyable we can watch the sailboat. I bet it will be fun. If they want to get to the lake in a hurry let's put them to work, in their white suits, all by themselves."

That's about what I had in mind too. At about ten we get into our boats and move into the lock, as far away as possible from the sailboat. It is now ten and we make small talk about how scenic the travel is, and how peaceful and quiet it is now when no stinking noisy motor is running.

Out of the corner of my eye I can see that the guys in the sailboat are arguing, so they must smell something by now. They look at us, but we pretend we don't notice and keep talking.

They boxed themselves in. Being on the bottom in a lock, all they can do now is climb up that dirty algae-covered ladder in the lock wall, in a white suit, with a dozen spectators looking on with *Schadenfreude* (malicious joy).

After quite a commotion in the sailboat the youngest of the *sailors* is climbing on deck and up the lock ladder to the top of the lock. He is reading the instructions on the cranks to find out what he is supposed to do. It is about time! But then he does turn the crank to close the lower gate. Then he walks over to the upstream side to let the water into the lock.

When the water is at top level, he manages to open the upper lock gate, hops on board the sailboat with his now green algae covert polka dot pants. Off they go. Good riddance!

I wonder if we'll catch up with them on the next lock. Maybe we can put them to work again?

After going through thirty-three locks, we come to Lake Müritz. It is very large.

After traveling for about half an hour on the lake, with little to see except some tall reed grass on shore, Werner voices his disappointment.

"This is boring, let's turn around!"

"We have to be back in a week; we might as well start now," I add. David must have been thinking along the same line, since the boat turns around within a few seconds without him saying a word.

We are south bound and are going home again. We earned the bragging rights to say, "We rowed to Lake Müritz." I wish we had the thirty-three locks behind us. They are a pain in the neck.



It is time to look for a place to put up the Tee-pee.

Beginning the Last Semester

The last semester in Tech. High starts today. We are in class and I wonder, "George, do you think Freyer will give us some hints about what we should be concentrating on at the final test?" I ask my classmate next to me.

"I doubt it," he answers, "That man never gives you a hint. That's just the way he works."

All students in the class agree that our teacher, Herr Freyer, was a great teacher the last three and a half years, and we do not doubt will continue to be in the final semester.

Herr Freyer enters the class, gently closing the door behind him. We hear what we heard the last three and a half years, "*Guten Morgen Studenten,*" and we think we know what comes next.

The tall well-dressed man stands next to his desk, with his left hand leaning on it. Back and forth he looks over the familiar faces of the class.

After a pause we hear, "The four years are almost over and you are nearing the end of your High School education. Today is the beginning of your last semester. You will also finish the practical part of your education and you will become a journeyman of your trade.

"In class we will continue to teach what you need in the shop and beyond. We will also give you a head start for engineering college, should you decide to continue your education in that direction.

"Also, start reviewing the subjects you were taught in the past years, some of it will come up in the final exam. So much for that!

"Let's go on to our subject, *Technical Drafting.*"

He turns around, grabs a piece of chalk and develops views and projections of machine parts on the black board and how they should be dimensioned for fabrication. Somehow he manages not to get the white chalk on his blue suit. I always wondered about that.

I am busy making sketches and taking notes and have to hurry to keep up with him. That's nothing new. In the school shop we machine-fitters and tool and die makers have been assigned to several groups of machine overhaul and tool and die making groups. We also work with younger students to teach and guide them.

My classmate George and I are together again in the same group. He has a quick mind and we have been kidding around a lot with other students.

"What have you planned to do after we graduate?" I ask.

"I applied at the Beuth College to study machine design. I did not hear from them yet, but I expect to be admitted.

"What are your plans, Helmut?"

"I am accepted to join the *Kriegsmarine* (German Navy), and I hope to go to the Navy Engineering College there, and do some traveling around the world. I don't know exactly when they will call me, I hope soon after we graduate here."

George suggests, "Since we don't know exactly when we go on, we should probably look for a job here at this company, as we know this place inside and out."

George has a good point. I can think of several places.

"By the way George, is it not very expensive to go to Beuth Engineering College?"

"It is not cheap, but when you can stay at home it is actually not as bad as you think, and I am sure you could have done the same. If you work for a couple of years you can probably save enough money to pay for it on your own."

Why didn't I look into that?

Last Semester Tech. High School

Preparations for the final High School tests in class and the Journeyman Test in the shop are never ending. In the shop we had two tests the last eight weeks, and each one was a two-day affair. We had to make two match-fitted steel precision parts with hand tools only. It was difficult to finish in the given time but we learned a lot in the process.

Herr Freyer informs us that the Berlin Chamber of Industry and Commerce will conduct the Machine-Fitters Journeyman Test in our student-shop. Maximum time will be two days.

The written test will be a one-day affair, also conducted in our classrooms here.

Now I know why most students here--since the founding of this school in 1923--finished 'very good' and none worse than 'good'. Who wants to be the one to ruin that record, not me?

George had a good point; I too think it is time to look for a job. We will graduate at the end of January 1939.

A year ago I spent several weeks in the development laboratory to develop pneumatic pumps for aircraft. That was precision work. The production assembly of these pumps is starting not far from our student-shop. I have to talk to the Meister there. I think I'll go there after lunch. People are in a better mood after lunch, I found out.

When I walk over there the secretary tells me that Meister Horst will be back soon.

"Are you looking for a job here?" She asks, with a friendly smile. She is young and good looking; I have to smile back.

"Yes, I will finish the school here in five weeks, and then I'd like to work here." At that moment Meister Horst shows up.

"Looking for a job young man?" I am in blue working clothing and he can tell I am a student.

I tell him that I will be available in five weeks and that I am familiar with the pumps his department is assembling.

"Good timing," he answers, "I prefer our students here, all are good workers and they can do anything you give them."

"You will not be disappointed, Meister Horst, I will do anything!" "I like that can-do attitude. Take these applications and bring them back tomorrow, but you are in, as far as I am concerned."

"Vielen Dank, Meister Horst, I will be back tomorrow."

That takes care of the job. I didn't tell him that the Navy might call me up, but I really don't know when.

It is the end of January 1939, I graduate with "*Sehr Gut*" (Very Good), thanks to all the preparations the school had arranged for and the hard work at home.



*High School Graduation April 1939, Class 1935
I am in the last row on the very right*

P.S. In April 1945 when the Russian Troops occupied Berlin, the Knorr-Bremse--which employed over 5000 people--and the Tech. High School were undamaged during the war. All machinery, all laboratories, offices and the entire inventory was ripped out and shipped to Russia.

The company and the High School never reopened.

CHAPTER THREE

Life as a Craftsman

My First Job

"Guten Morgen, Meister Horst, I'm reporting for work." I am in Meister Horst's cubicle at seven in the morning. It is on a Monday in February of 1939.

After signing a few forms, I find out, I will make 93 *Pfennig* (pennies) per hour. That beats 20 pennies per hour I made last week when I was still a student. A lot of people don't make that much. Meister Horst explains to me how things work around here.

"I make the work assignments," he tells me. The assembly of air pumps--you mentioned you worked on them during your time in school--will start here shortly. And that's where you come in. Get all the drawings and make yourself familiar with them again."

Then we walk over to the long work-to-be-done table. He is scratching his head and mumbles,

"My God, we are late on so many things. I have to do something about it. I hope you can help to get a lot of this stuff done here."

The work is classified as *A*, *B*, *C* or *D*-work; *A* for very skilled labor and *D*-work for low skilled labor.

The classification is actually for piecework labor. I do not care if some work will not be class *A*; I am paid by the hour. However, I prefer class *A* work; it is more of a challenge.

I order all the pump drawings to bring me up to date on the design configuration, but I am pretty familiar with them. I have done development work on them in the engineering test laboratory.

In the lab only the supervisor himself assembled these pumps, because he considered the work too critical to allow anybody else to do it. I know that he made 1.20 Mark per hour, but he was a senior man with twenty years experience. I will be a long time in the Navy and have seen the world before I make 1.20 Mark per hour.

I start out overhauling and updating pumps that were in service. They are the size of a one quart tin can. They are called vane air pumps and are used in aircraft control.

After reassembling they have to pass a performance test. If they don't pass I get them back for further rework.

A bundle of paperwork comes with each overhaul pump, covering each work process and the time allotted for it. Who cares, I work by the hour.

It is finicky work, lapping some parts and hand fitting the thin phenolic vanes. I tried grinding them once on a precision grinder, but they distort and I finally I gave up grinding them. But fitting them by hand is time consuming.

I am in Meister Horst's department now for two months. We are about thirty craftsmen; many of us are tool-and-die makers. Most of the work has to do with aircraft controls. I am happy as a lark, whistling the latest tunes while I work.

Suddenly Meister Horst shows up.

"Herr Standke," the formal tone gets my attention. Did I do anything wrong? I was punching nails through a one and a half-inch board with my bare hands. One of my fellow toolmakers taught me how to do that.

"The company management has decided to do the fitting and assembly of the pumps in 'piece work'. The cost for each operation has been established some time ago and management wants piecework implemented now.

Look it over, Herr Standke, and let me know if you like to continue this work. If you do not like piecework, someone else will then have to do the fitting and assembly work of the pumps.

I stopped whistling. I don't like it! Old timers say *Akkord ist mord*, (Piecework is murder).

I am shocked; I didn't think this could happen. I like this kind of work. How can they mess it up for me?

I was thinking all weekend about what to do at work. Should I do piecework?

Maybe there is money in it? On second thought, I better take another look at it.

I look at the paperwork that comes with the work. After I add up times and money for all operations I start to think. Let's get a pencil.

I am getting 0.93 Marks per hour now and I am shipping six pumps per week. That makes it 7.44 Marks per pump.

Going over the assembly paperwork with a fine toothcomb, all operations add up to only 6.28 Marks per unit. This is less than I am making now. **No way!**

That's not all. If I am at piecework I want to make top money, 1.45 Mark per hour. I have heard this is the upper limit. If you make more, the timekeeper would cut the rate.

How many pumps do I have to ship to make at 1.43 Marks per hour? It doesn't take me long to figure this out. Eleven pumps? Double what I ship now? How can anybody make this happen?

But it would be 69 Marks per week. That's a small fortune. I can buy a first quality bicycle for that. While I am going over the numbers, Meister Horst comes.

"What do you think Herr Standke?" He sees my slide rule and the notes in front of me. I think he likes the idea that I don't just say it can't be done.

"Let me explain a few more things to you Herr Standke. If you need tooling, you have the option of making them yourself, since you are a certified journeyman. I order the material from the warehouse and we have all the machinery you could possibly need here in the department. You have a choice. If I pay you for making the tooling out of my tooling budget, 93 pennies per hour, the tooling has to be identified with a part number and is stored in the tool crib. Everybody can withdraw it then.

"But, if you make the tooling on your own time, during your regular work, you keep it at your place here. That means you pretty much will be *prima Donna* in fitting and assembling these pumps. Consider that too."

"Thanks for the information, Meister Horst, I am thinking about it. I just figured out I would almost have to double my shipments to get my hourly rate where I want it to be."

"More power to you, Herr Standke. If you make lots of money, I am shipping lots of parts. That will make it a win-win situation. It will be good for both of us."

I am back looking at my numbers. Instead of eight hours per pump I have to do each one in less than four and a one-half hours. How can I complete a pump in such a short time?

On the other hand, I have taken it easy so far. Nobody has complained that I ship only six pumps per week. Why kill yourself? However, for money, that is another story. I will make a few things happen.

Let's see! I bet I can develop a method to grind those vanes, maybe by supporting them better in the machine-vice and clamp them less tightly to eliminate distortion. For eleven pumps I need forty-four vanes. That should not take more than two hours. That's eleven minutes per pump, a saving of about two hours. I am already half way there.

Putting those forty studs in the pump body by hand takes the better part of an hour. I have to make an installation tool for that, and then I can do it with the drill press using a little reversing transmission in the drill press chuck. If I install the studs in all eleven pump housings in one batch, it should take less than three hours, about fifteen minutes each.

I really have to make all operations for all pumps as one batch to save setup time for each operation.

Goofing off at least one hour per day talking to my friends has to stop; it cuts into making money. **I think I can do it**, making 1.43 Marks per hour. And it will get even easier as I go along.

Come to think of it, I'm pretty sure I can make a killing!

"Meister Horst, I think I can do it. I will make a list of materials I need to make a few tools. It will be nothing big, and I will make them on my time and it will not interrupt what I am doing now."

"I was sure you would say 'Can Do!' Good luck to you Herr Standke!"

Working Smarter

I deliver my assembled eleven aircraft pumps to inspection; making top money and I am in heaven.

I pass Leo, my older colleague. "*Wie geht's, Leo?*" I don't really expect an answer, but I slow down when Leo looks at me and puts the heavy casting down he is working on.

"How come, Helmut, you always get the good jobs? I break my back with these God forsaken housings and barely can feed my family."

I am surprised! I have never heard Leo complain about anything. Something must really be bothering him.

"Can I help you with something, Leo?"

I have been making the best money in my life, but I also have been watching Leo struggling and I feel sorry for him. He is also doing piecework.

Leo is an elderly tool-and-die maker. He is married and has three kids in school. He is a very friendly and nice guy. He does not socialize much with other workers and sticks to himself most of the time. I am probably the closest he will ever come to anybody here. I've got to help him. I watched him. How can I tell him he is doing a lot of things wrong with his present job without hurting his feelings? He is so much older than I. I think he is crying out for help.

"Leo, why do you make only one housing at a time? The setup-time per housing is over two hours. It is done over and over again. That's killing you! Why don't you make several housings at a time? Make as many as ten at a time.

"Then I have to carry them back and forth, Helmut, my back is already killing me. Feel how heavy these housings are."

They must be heavy; they are pretty large, about two by two by three feet.

I go over to Leo and pick up the housing he just had laid down. My God, it is much heavier than I thought.

"Get one of the carts we have here, Leo, the housings are heavy."

"I tried, but nobody wants to give me one. Everybody says they need the carts themselves."

I think Leo is really the wrong guy for the job. He is too slow, and you've got to be fast and resourceful to make out at piecework. ***And you have to speak up.***

I have tried to help others before, suggesting how they could improve their operations-- work smarter--but it does not sink in. They keep right on doing what doesn't make sense and doesn't make them any money.

What is wrong with these guys?

I also wonder how Meister Horst is coming along with the housing shipping schedule when Leo is not finishing enough units. I know, he will do something about it, he has too.

I am back at my pumps, almost feeling guilty that I make money and Leo does not. At least he will get his guaranteed hourly wage.

A week later Meister Horst comes to see me. Normally he leaves me alone. I ship and make money and he is on schedule. We say "*Guten Morgen,*" to each other and smile. Everything seems fine.

"Herr Standke, we are ahead of shipping pumps and we are finishing the present work order in a couple of weeks. But Leo and the housings are in trouble. He is constantly complaining to me that he can't make a decent living working on them. And he gets me in trouble with my shipping schedule."

I pretty much saw it coming and have been thinking what I would do if it were my project. Meister Horst continues, "I hate to bring it up, but would you consider taking this program over and bail Leo and me out when the pump job is done in two weeks?"

"I am not really crazy about it, Meister Horst, knowing how Leo is struggling. How much money does one get per housing, Meister Horst?"

"For all operations it is 13.80 Marks. You can make a killing if you make five per week."

That's sixty-nine Marks, that's what I am getting now, 1.43 per hour, my magic number. The lot size has to be bigger to reduce the set-up cost per unit.

"I think I can help you, Meister Horst. Leo is doing a number of things wrong, in my opinion."

"Speak up, Helmut!"

"Leo works one housing at a time, that doesn't make sense. I think that we have to make ten at a time. If we want to get on schedule, we have to talk numbers!"

"Leo told me the housings come only one at a time. To get this program going, I need a set of ten before I start, Meister Horst, I am sure you can arrange that."

"You got it, Helmut, anything else?"

"Yes, Leo told me that his back hurts lifting these heavy housings all day long. To move the housings around and cut down on lifting and carrying them I need ten of the carts that we have here in the department. That will really help things a lot, and we will get back on schedule."

"You are right, I like your planning. Take ten carts, we only have twenty, but take ten for this program."

I figure now is the time to negotiate with Meister Horst, because when he is back on schedule I no longer have any leverage.

"Meister Horst, did you say to start in two weeks? I'd better make a few tools and get some equipment from another department."

This is now my fifth year with the company, and as a student I have been in many departments. I have observed many things and seen a lot of special equipment, which knowledge comes in handy now.

Meister Horst is getting warm, "I am happy that you will take over this program. If you need help let me know, I have to get back on schedule." He even shakes hands with me and he calls me by my first name. He really must be in trouble. Meister Horst is about to leave, so I'd better emphasize it again, while I have his attention.

"Meister Horst, make sure we have ten housings, I can't start with less."

"Okay, okay, I see to it that we have them for you in two weeks." I walk over to Leo to bring him the good news.

"Thank you Helmut for taking that housing job. You are doing me a great favor. Can I buy you a beer?"

"No, no, Leo, don't thank me too much. I think it will be all right. But you can wish me luck, Leo!"

"*Vielen, vielen Dank*, Helmut, now I can live again. I had it on my mind for weeks."

I actually intend to make a killing, but I do not have the heart to tell Leo that this is even a possibility. From the material warehouse I pick up the tool steel that Meister Horst has ordered for me and I get the little five-to-one transmission to multiply the slow drill speed of that big machine. It is a discontinued company product and a few units are still around. It will make a big difference when small drills run at one thousand rpm instead two hundred.

I am busy collecting ten carts for the housings. It is as Leo has said; nobody wants to give them up. I am not making friends by telling my coworkers that this is the Meister's order. **Sorry, business is business!** On Saturday I have all housings sitting on my carts, ready to show my coworkers and Meister Horst next week how this job should be done.

It is Monday and I am standing in front of my ten housings, which I have parked at the very end of our assembly hall, all in straight line. I am proud of my program so far. I think the rest is easy.

"It better work out, or I'll have the entire department laughing at me." I am only kidding. I do not intend to lose money; it is not even close. **I'll see to that!**

Manufacturing these bodies is a limited production run and the available tooling is so called temporary tooling. For some of the operations there is no tooling at all. Holes have to be scribed and center punched the old-fashion-way. However, performing the operation on ten units in a single batch saves a lot of time, and time is money, **My Money!**

I finished scribing the ten housings on day one. The housings are too large to use a smaller and faster drill press. To minimize lifting all the housings, I set the drill press table to the height of the carts. I only slide the housings over and do not lift at all. Since the templates happened to be hardened steel I drill pilot holes right through the templates, eliminated moving the heavy table on this old machine.

Leo showed me what not to do. By using different length drill extensions, I can drill all holes in the housings without moving the table. Leo will be surprised when he sees it.

It is Thursday in the second week, and I am almost done with all ten housings. I'd better slow down. I do not want to make over 1.45 Marks per hour; the timekeeper would cut my hourly rate.

Leo is shaking his head. He cannot believe it.

Vacation after Graduation

With Money in My Pocket 1939

*D*uring company vacation time, I decided to go with two rowing club friends on a bus tour to the mountains. The newspapers write about trouble in German territories, which are now in Poland. Maybe I have to go to the Navy soon. I had better get my vacation while I can.

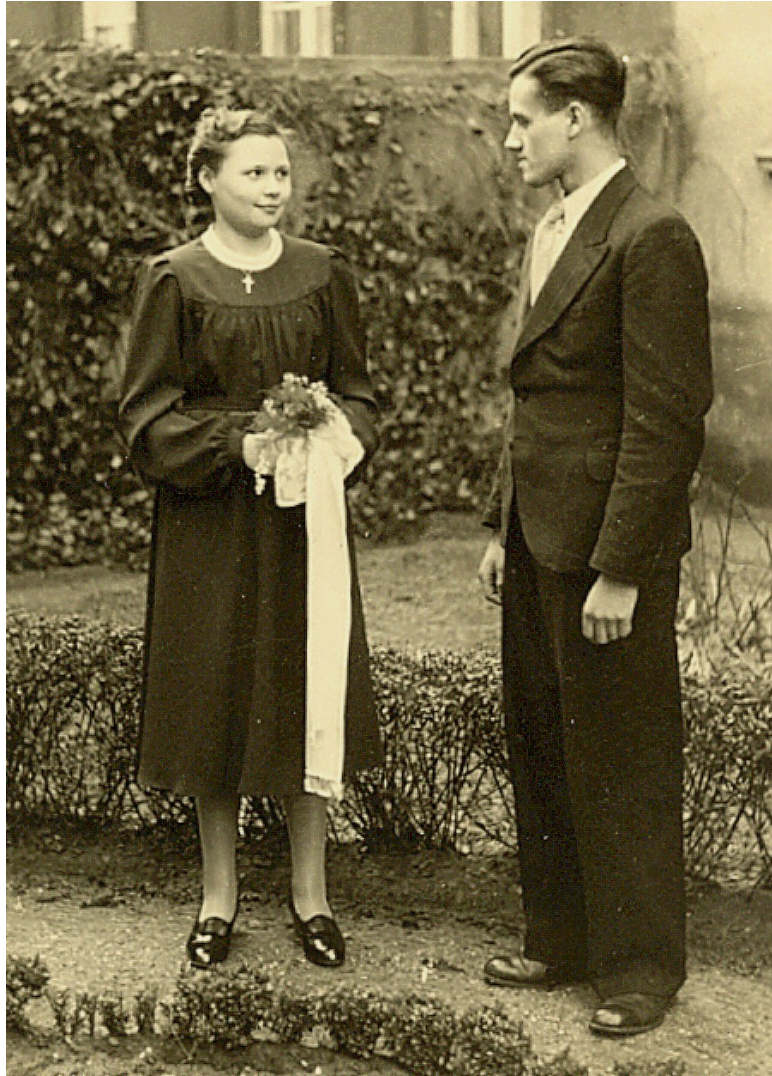


It

*is amazing how the world has changed after I turned
Eighteen.*

All-of-a-sudden there are Girls

Sister Ingeborg Marie
After her Graduation and Confirmation 1940



Inge and I, a few days before I joined the German Navy

CHAPTER FOUR

*Life in the German Navy
1940 to 1945*

Ship Artillery College

July to December 1940

The Ship Artillery College is located in Kiel, which is a good-size city and located in the southwest corner of the Baltic Sea. It is the main harbor of the *Ostsee Flotte* (German Baltic Sea Fleet), supported by a number of shipyards and arsenals along the east shore of the *Kieler Bucht* (Kieler Bay).

We are about 500 students living on campus, two hundred studying every day for six months to become Artillery-Fire Control Technicians. At the end of the semester we receive our crossed canon-barrels emblem on our sleeve. In a few years and after an additional nine months study here at the SAS I can become an Artillery Technician's Petty Officer.

We study every day until three o'clock in a variety of classrooms and laboratories. The rest of the day the authorities try to remind us that we are sailors of the *Kriegsmarine* (German Navy) and therefore soldiers. We have to exercise for several hours in the field. We study algebra and calculus, electricity and electro-magnetism, and the construction, function and maintenance of ship artillery and fire control. During our six-month semester, we spend four weeks in an artillery arsenal shop to become familiar with methods and techniques of maintenance and repairs of artillery pieces and fire control devices. These devices are mainly:

Sensors, like optical range finders, radar, target finders (large mounted binoculars) and gyros for each of the ship's three axes to obtain and transmit data over synchros to the fire control system, which utilize

vacuum tube type Amplifiers (with thyratrons), motor generator sets and electro-mechanical clutch amplifiers.

Mechanical calculators, which do addition, multiplication, and geometry, calculate *deck* values; convert the data to *horizon* values and back to deck values for the artillery.

I find the mechanical simulation of mathematics to solve fire control mathematical tasks fascinating. The job is how to hit a distant moving target from a moving and unstable platform. Basically all data is obtained on the ship deck platform. It is then transmitted by synchros to a gyro generated artificial terrestrial (horizon) platform for computation of ballistic data, and then transmitted back to the ship deck platform by the fire control equipment. From here, the gun barrel elevation and radial position data goes to the artillery in an uninterrupted stream. That data includes all required corrections for the period the shell is in flight. It is a beautiful piece of precision machinery.

Roommates?

“Get out of here, we want to study. You are getting on my nerves, Frank!” Frank is one of my ten roommates in the *Ship Artillery College*. Frank and his visiting countryman, who lives next door, are from one of the Friesian Islands. They speak a weird dialect; I don’t understand much of it.

The Friesian Islands are a string of mostly small islands along the Netherlands and German North Sea coast. A few families only populate some of these islands.

Frank gets many parcels from home with food and cigarettes, which he never shares with anybody.

The war has been going on for almost a year now and food and cigarettes are rationed. The food here is good and plenty, but cigarettes are harder to get. I couldn’t care less. I never did smoke; I give or trade my cigarettes away.

Frank got another parcel today, and he is hiding behind his locker doors to open it, making sure nobody finds out what he got. Walter especially would like to know; he is a heavy smoker. The rest of us come from many areas of Germany, we always share things. Walter comes from the Black Forest, and they make a mean Cherry Schnapps. This stuff is at least 160 proof. Boy, it is good! Now I know why they call it *Feuerwasser* (firewater).

Frank has just left the room when Walter explains, “I would like to let Frank know that being a roommate means he should share a cigarette once in a while.” The other nine of us agree that Frank is the only outsider in our room, and maybe he needs a little help to learn. After kicking it around I have an idea.

“I understand that when one smokes horse hair one gets nauseated. Why don’t we put a few strands of horsehair in his cigarettes the next opportunity we get? Let’s cut some off the broom, it’s normally horse hair.”

“Hey, guys, Frank left his coat hanging here, and a package of cigarettes is in one pocket,” Walter announces.

“Somebody stand in front of the door to make sure we don’t get caught.” Within a minute, Walter and I have inserted three horsehair strands with a long needle in each of Frank’s cigarettes.

We are slapping our thighs, laughing as we proceed. The nine of us have formed a stronger feeling of togetherness, now that we are sharing a secret and are partners in a conspiracy.

Frank comes back after a few minutes, I hope for a smoke. Luck is with us. The nine of us pretend to be involved in something important and pay no attention to Frank, but we don’t miss a thing. Frank takes a cigarette out of his jacket and lights it. It doesn’t take long and half of it is gone. Frank shows no sign of anything. He sits casually in his chair, totally relaxed, leaning all the way back and is reading his mail, with a smile on his face. In a little while, the whole cigarette is gone up in smoke and Frank does not blink an eye.

So much for the horsehair theory! Let’s not tell Frank about it, he may even put horsehair in the cigarettes himself, because he likes it. I think these Friesians lived for centuries in very small communities on small islands, that makes people weird.

That is probably it.

The Battleship Bismarck

1940

I am standing in awe at the water’s edge and talk to several of my roommates that came here with me; we are looking at the most powerful battleship ever built in front of us. I have been told in class that the Bismarck would arrive at the pier in our area today. How big those fifteen-inch barrels are. I shudder to think should those monsters ever fire.

“The ten best of our two-hundred men course will become part of the crew when we graduate in three months,” our instructor has told us in class today.

“Imagine I am standing next to those gigantic gun barrels, or doing my job in those turrets?” My chances are pretty good that I will be on it. I like what we learn here at the SAS. It is very interesting and is in line with what I think will be taught in engineering. I got very good grades and am doing well in all classes.

I only got caught once clipping my finger nails while the chief petty officer was talking. ‘Big deal’, I was in a hurry to go ashore.

I had to do kitchen duty in the officer’s mess hall for a weekend. It wasn’t bad. Actually all we five servers had to do was picking up the serving bowls in the kitchen and put them on the tables. We had to show up thirty minutes before the officers arrived. The five of us wondered whether those canned cherries were any good. They were too good.

“We better quit and serve what we have left,” I start to get concerned. After a short count, we still had five cherries per setting left. Should somebody ask we’ll tell them something about wartime and cherries are hard to get. I hope this kitchen duty thing will not be on my record.

“Why do you think they would put us on the Bismarck? We technicians are just coming out of Artillery College?” Walter asks.

“This ship is brand new, everything should be perfect, I guess.” I am not too concerned; we will figure it out when we get there, we always have.

As my classmates and I walk back to our rooms, we only talk about what life would be on the Bismarck. We turn around several times to look at this ship.

The end of December 1940, the Ship Artillery-Fire Control Technician Course is over. All students of our course are standing in line, three deep, facing our commander, Captain Kiena. We know he always gets to the point, so it would not be a long speech, good. I remember, at the beginning of our course, when he found out some of us didn’t know how to swim, he canceled shore leave for the non-swimmers until they could swim fifteen minutes. What they hadn’t learned in nineteen years he made them learn in three weeks. We are standing in the bright sun and it is a beautiful day, a few days before Christmas. I can’t wait for the good news that my assignment will be the Bismarck. I can feel it.

This is the final moment of our course. Captain Kiena is standing in front of us--we are his company--looking up and down that long line. He is standing proud and tall.

“*Männer der Kriegsmarine* (men of the Navy),” he begins his speech, “I thank everybody for having been an especially good student. Maybe the wartime has something to do with it, this is the second course since the war

began; I have several mementos for the top men of the course.” He calls five of us, including me, and we get a book that he has signed. I peek at the first page and it says that I finished first in this course.

That means I qualify for the Bismarck!

Captain Kiena continues, “Let me announce the ten lucky men which will start their career on the Bismarck, the most powerful and beautiful ship ever built.” Yes sir, it will be my ship soon! It’s hard to believe that this beautiful ship will be my home.

I hear the first name. It is not mine. Maybe Captain Kiena goes by the alphabet, I think.

Although my sailor uniform is wide open around my neck, something is choking me. Captain Kiena announces the second name. It is not my name, again. I feel something is going wrong. I am standing in formation and I can’t wipe my forehead; I feel beads of sweat collecting on it. Why am I nervous? There are eight more names and Standke is near the end of the alphabet.

Now there is one more name left, and I am still waiting. This must be it. Captain Kiena is looking the other way and I manage to wipe my sleeve over my forehead. But when the Captain announces the last name, it is still not mine. It is Walter’s.

I feel that something has gone terribly wrong. But it says in my book that I am number one. Why was I not called?

I don’t know what to say. I swallow a few times and look around to my classmates. They don’t understand it either.

Walter says, “It must be some screw-up, I am looking forward to being on the Bismarck with you. Let’s look into that.” Maybe that kitchen duty thing did me in after all? After I get my composure back, I am going to find out if it is a mistake; it must be. Maybe the Bismarck will take eleven technicians. Why would they leave the best behind?

On our way to our room I run into our classroom instructor.

“Sir, can you explain why I am not one of the ten who go onto the Bismarck?”

“Good question, I was wondering too. Which fleet did you sign up with, North Sea or Baltic Sea?” the instructor asks, “The Bismarck belongs to the North Sea Fleet.”

That’s the explanation! What bad luck! To save a few hours travel time to go home during vacations, I happen to sign up for the wrong fleet. How could I have known? My instructor adds, “The Tirpitz is an identical

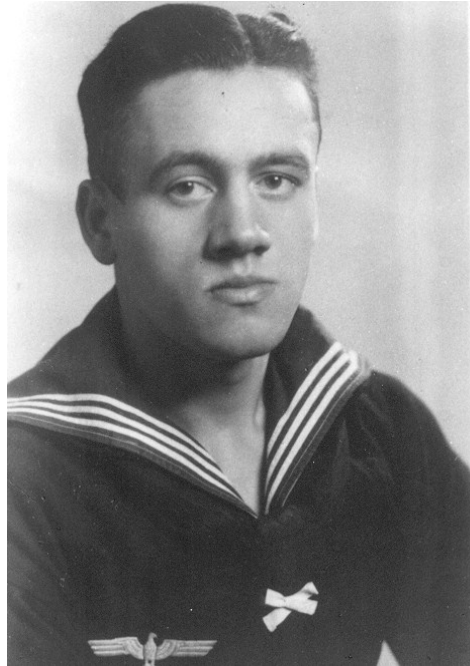
ship. It belongs to the Baltic Sea Fleet and you qualify for that ship. With a little luck you might get on the Tirpitz instead.”

When I get my envelope with my new assignment later in the afternoon, it reads that I go to Norway? What’s going on in Norway? Nothing! Did I study so hard for that? This is bad luck. It is unfair!

I am lost. I have nothing to show for it other than my first prize, a book. It is called "The Yearling," by Marjorie Rawlings. A nice book probably, but I do not like to read fiction. I have been shoved aside to rot in Norway.

I never saw my comrades again. Six months later the Bismarck was sunk in the Atlantic, on the 27th of May 1941 after sinking the British battleship Hood in a battle with the British Fleet. The crews of both ships perished. Thanks for my fate for making me pick the wrong fleet! The Battleship Tirpitz was in service a year later, too late for me. Lucky me again! In November 1944 the Tirpitz was also sunk with heavy losses of her crew after repeated bombings.

Ready for my First Assignment



1941, at 20 years

"I would have preferred to be on the Battleship Bismarck, but I'm beginning to enjoy this trip." I mention to my friend Günter Roske, as we get ready to board the coastal motor ship in Andalsnes, Norway. Günter was with me in the boot camp on the Dänholm and at the Ship Artillery College in Kiel. He is taller than I am, and with his curly blond hair the girls always notice him. He is also a real nice guy, a real buddy.

From Germany, we took the ferry to Sweden and went by train to Oslo, Norway. Then we continued on to Andalsnes on the coast to get on a coastal ferry to Molde.

Günter and I looked up where Molde is. We found it between Bergen and Trondheim on the West-Norwegian coast. We had never heard of it. It is about three hundred-Miles north of Oslo, on a fjord and close to the North

Sea. At this time I don't have a clue what we are supposed to do there. Maybe work around some of the coastal batteries. But they haven't fired a shot since the British left. Germany is now controlling the country. Maybe we'll be on a patrol boat; those converted trawlers that go up and down the coast near harbors. They really don't need us either; they only have one little canon. Who knows?

The last few hours to Andalsnes are a beautiful scenic tour. It is amusing when the train stops to pick up a few milk cans. Puffing steam and blowing its whistle the ancient locomotive tries so hard to climb the many mountains and switchbacks. A ferry is still waiting for all train passengers to arrive.

This coastal motor ship is not a big ship. It carries about fifty passengers and goods from one coastal town to the next along the Norwegian coast. We are the only two Germans on board, and with our blue sailor uniforms, we are easily recognized. It is almost eight o'clock in the morning early in February 1941, and cold and dark this far north. We leave our sea bags outside next to the other luggage. It looks like that's what people do here.

At eight o'clock the ship's bell rings and the ship starts to shake and slowly starts moving. Our next stop in about four hours will be the little town of Molde, our destination.

"Have you ever done this trip before?" one Norwegian passenger asks us in good German. Günter and I are not sure what our relationship with the Norwegians will be, and his friendly question is a good sign.

"No, this is our first trip in Norway. I enjoyed the train ride from Dombas to Andalsnes. What a beautiful country," I answer. "I saw a hundred waterfalls, maybe more. I went from side to side on the train to see as much as possible."

This middle aged stranger continues the conversation, "In spring it is even better, then there is much more water coming down the mountains.

It is not a typical tourist route, and I am glad you noticed the beauty of this part of our country." Some other Norwegians, sitting nearby, seem to like that I have such a favorable impression of their country. I continue, "I observed that on the train ride to Andalsnes, the train--a real and ancient steam locomotive--stopped many times at little platforms to pick up four or so twenty-liter milk cans, with nobody at the platform."

Everybody smiles. I guess they wonder that a twenty-year old would even notice such a thing.

“Enjoy your trip, don’t miss the scenery outside,” was the final good advice of the stranger. I look through the windows; we are passing a very tall rocky mountain within a few feet.

“Günter, let’s go out and take a better look. It is light enough now to see the scenery.” We both go to the aft deck and try to touch the thousand foot rock we are passing; I am only a couple inches short.

I am in a strange country, but the weather is perfect, the scenery is beautiful, and I am not exactly sure what I am supposed to do here. But I am enjoying every minute of it and I am learning many new things.

The scenic boat ride from Andalsnes to Molde has been winding along fjords through rocky canyons for four hours. We now have come to a fjord several miles wide with dozens of islands of all sizes. This is the first stop for the ship after Andalsnes. The ship is approaching Molde and the passengers come together on deck.

Some have told me that Molde is also known as *The City of Roses*. Prior to World War 1, during summer vacation, the German Kaiser was often here. I was told that some Norwegians are still sore that the Luftwaffe had bombed several buildings near the pier, one day *after* the British Navy had left and hurried home. The German military did not know that the British had left.

The Molde pier is now full of people who greet passengers who disembark and say good-bye to others who go away on the boat. I get my sea bag and walk off the ship with Günter. I see a truck and a driver trying to get our attention. “Hop on the truck, I’ll take you to your station, it is only a few minutes away.” He maneuvers the truck through the crowd very carefully, stopping all the time when somebody crosses in front of him.

“I can not afford to have an accident, any accident. The German military will throw the book at me, they want no friction with the Norwegian people,” the driver explains after we stop. “This is your place, Moldegard. I have to go back to the truck station, good luck to you.”

A sailor shouts, “You are my replacement, what took you so long? I have been here since April 1940, when it all began. The British torpedoed my destroyer and I have been here ever since.”

“You sure got a healthy tan. Where did you get that from?” I would like to know. “Do you like skiing? Then you will like it here too.”



Molde and Molde-Fjord

Fixing a Crank

“Can I help you?” I m talking to a sailor who came into my workshop. He is a broad shouldered big fellow, and he brings pieces of what looks like a large crank.

“I am from the coastal battery at the mouth of the Molde Fjord. My name is Ralph. Can you fix this crank for us?” He places the two pieces on my workbench as he speaks.

“How did that happen?” I would I like to know. “They are so big you couldn’t break them if you tried,” I mention it as I turn the two pieces over and over. “Where are they from, what are they?” Ralph explains, “The crank operates the breech of our exercise cannon.”

“That keeps your crew in shape, I guess,” I talk while I study the pieces, especially the broken ends. I try to find out why that crank broke. “Could it be sabotage, maybe?” I speculate.

“No, not likely.”

I agree, we would have some evidence, like dings and dents. There is nothing like that. Actually this piece has been well taken care of; it’s almost polished everywhere. But why did it break?

“By the way, Ralph, we can’t weld it, we don’t have any arc welding equipment.”

“Then what are we going to do? Our Chief told me not to come back without a positive answer,” Ralph is getting edgy and I feel sorry for him.

“Don’t get excited, Ralph, I think I can make you a new one.” I try to calm him down. “I work with a Norwegian jack-of-all-trades craftsman here in town, and I think with a little help from us, he could do it.”

While I have been talking, I got an idea. The break is no ordinary break, because it looks too clean. There is no bending at the edges and no tearing, and there is nothing wrong with the material, nice fine grain, no discoloration or rust indicating it is an old crack.

“When did it break, Ralph, recently?”

“About two weeks ago, the Chief decided to exercise the gun crew. It was freezing. The crank just snapped, they tell me.”

“That’s what I think too, it just snapped. The designer most likely used ‘high carbon steel’, which gives you extra strength. That would be the normal thing to do. But at very low temperatures you can run into ‘cold brittleness’, and that’s what it looks like. Low carbon--or mild-- steel does not have cold brittleness, so that’s what we are going to use for the new crank. Which is probably all my Norwegian shop has. We are in business, Ralph. I’ll talk to my man in town, make him a drawing and take care of the paperwork so the German Navy pays him for his work. He will then also be entitled to replacement material from Germany. I call you and keep you up-to-date.” In a day, I am done with my drawing and the paperwork for the Navy superintendent, so all I need is the Lieutenant’s signature.

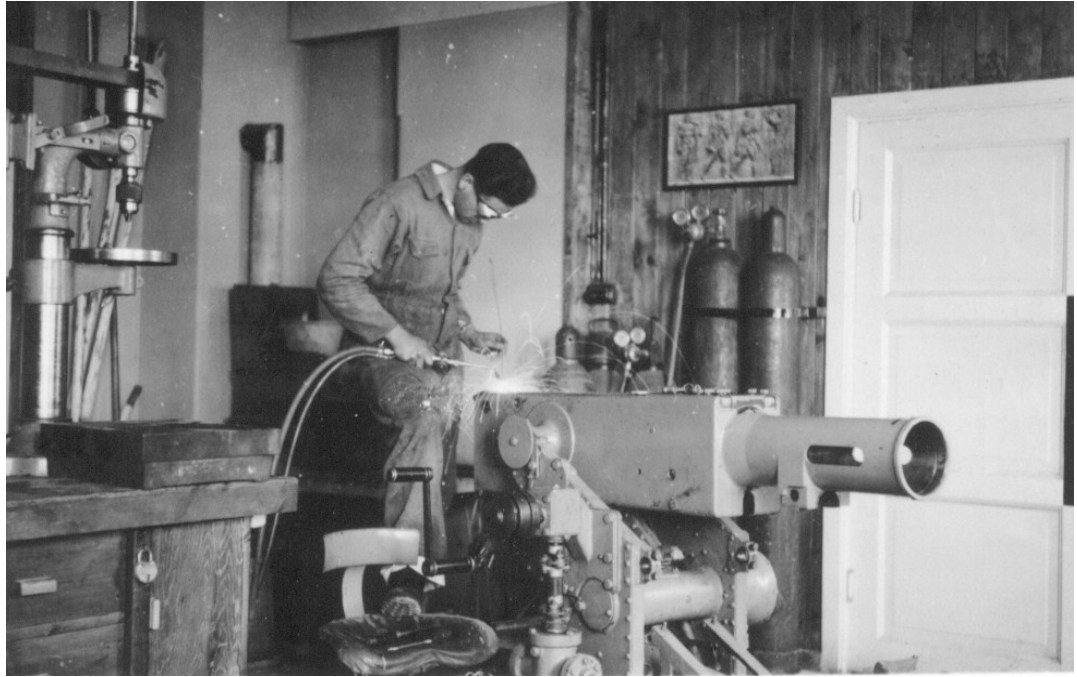
I am a little leery of that guy. I heard rumors he comes from the hinterland. He has a giant inferiority complex that makes him difficult to deal with. It reminds me to treat him with kid gloves.

I knock on his door, and again when nothing happens. I am starting to get bad vibes again about this character.

After a minute I hear, "*Hereinkommen!*" (Come in). According to protocol I have to stand here at the door until spoken to, but what for? Aren't we all in the same Navy trying to get the job done? He is not the Kaiser of China!

He has a visitor, a petty officer commander of one of the patrol boats, probably requesting a service from us. He steps back to the window and looks at his boat down at the pier while I am walking over to the Lieutenant. I hand him my drawing of the new crank and the Work-Request for him to sign. After he studies the drawing for a while, he comments, "Your drawing is incomplete, you don't have a material specified. Make sure it is high-carbon steel per DIN specification." That sounds to me he is trying to impress his visitor, the petty officer, at my expense. That does it!

"High-carbon steel would be the worst, that's why the crank broke during the cold spell two weeks ago. I will specify low-carbon steel and add the material to the drawing, *Herr Leutenant*. I have discussed what material to use with our supplier a few days ago, sir, and it is available at his shop." The petty officer at the window suddenly develops an interest in us. He stands behind the Lieutenant and gives me the thumbs-up sign with a sly smile. The Lieutenant's expression freezes. Without a word, he signs the documents, and with a poker face hands them to me. "Thank you, sir." I am on my way. I am on my way out all right, but I wonder what will be in my next review? Unfortunately, these reviews, written by the commanders every quarter, are confidential. I sure would like to know what my next review will look like.



**Repairing a 40mm Bofors FLAK, salvaged
from a British Petrol Boat**

The Review

What a difference! We have a new lieutenant, Baron Von Bülow. In spite of his name, he makes a good impression. He told us last Sunday that the *Kriegsmarine* screwed up as far as our vacations go, and in our favor. We normally get two weeks vacation a year from the local German Harbor command, but our headquarters for Artillery Maintenance and Repair in Kiel also has vacation scheduled for us.

He is telling us that he feels it is not his responsibility to straighten this out, as long as we don't complain that we have too much work to do with so many of us on vacation.

Trust me! Nobody will complain. The new lieutenant has been here for two months now, and it is mid June 1941. My new review should be written by now by the new lieutenant, since a review is written every quarter, or when there is a change in command. I really want to know what is in the latest review by the new commander, and how much damage was done when I had to straighten out the last lieutenant when he bugged me with his stupid comment about my drawing.

I have to get hold of my *Führungsbuch* (Performance and Conduct Book). It has to be in the lieutenant's office, where else can it be!

When the Norwegian cleaning woman comes every Thursday, the Sailor-on-Duty has the office keys and has to be there while she works. He then has to lock the office up again. Today is Thursday and I took over as Sailor-on-Duty to let my buddies go to town. With the office keys in my pocket, I am waiting for the cleaning woman to finish. I am by myself now with a bundle of keys and systematically look in one cabinet after another. So far, I haven't found the books. We are six seamen, so there must be a pile of six booklets somewhere in the lieutenant's office. I have come to the last cabinet and haven't found the booklets yet. Where could they possibly be? Sitting at the lieutenant's desk, I look around. What did I miss? **The books have to be here.** I checked every cabinet in the room, locked and unlocked. I am positive they are here in this room.

Methodically I looked at every piece of furniture in the room, one by one. Wait a minute; I am sitting in front of it, the desk drawer.

Of course! I almost missed it. But none of the keys fits. Now I am certain that's where the booklets are. But, I have a shop full of tools downstairs and I know how to use them. This will be an easy one.

I am back up with a flashlight, screwdrivers and wrenches, to get to my *Führungsbuch*. I better lock the door behind me, just in case somebody wants to come into the office at nine p.m. Nobody has ever done that, but this is one of those operations when I can not afford to have a witness.

In the background I hear the radio play *Lilly Marlene*, at present a very popular song in Germany and on the British radio, which we can receive here in Norway. All sounds are very normal. I am as cool and collected like a safe cracker.

Whoever made this desk did me a big favor; only eight screws hold the drawer slides in place. I didn't study for nothing to let this little lock hold me back.

'Careful, don't drop the drawer to the floor, making a racket and spill everything.' I would not be able to put all things back in the same place. But the desk drawer is light and comes out easily. A pile of six little booklets is right in front of me. My heart is pounding now. What will I find? I look for my booklet and look at the records. I am proud of what the Ship Artillery College reported. The next review is the one the former lieutenant wrote, that jerk! It says, '*It is not likely that a young seaman deserves this high a rating and 'average' would be more appropriate.*' The pox on this clown! Let's see what our new Lieutenant Von Bülow wrote. It reads, '*It appears the original review by the S.A.S. is correct. Standke is a very dependable performer of his duties. He is knowledgeable, a good craftsman and an assertive supervisor. However, his military demeanor needs more development. A transfer for the next course at the S.A.S. and a promotion would then be advisable.*' How about that! I knew this guy is okay!

About the *military demeanor*, that is good to know. I never considered that important. But, watch me when I will report as Seaman-on-Duty the next time.

To look into that little booklet told me a lot, and I will keep track of it from now on. Let me put everything back together again and get out of here. A few days later, I am Seaman-on-Duty again. At eight in the morning I report to the new Lieutenant Von Bülow. I wear the blue uniform and my sea boots, not fatigues and the soft boat shoes we usually wear around here. I knock with emphasis on his door. When I step into his office he looks up to me and I have his full attention. It seems to work. I click my heels and report for duty, trying to look serious. I hope he senses that I am working on my 'Military Demeanor'. If he is smart, he gets my message.

Scavenging

The Lieutenant has a memo circulated that we expect a salvaged former British petrol boat on our pier soon. The British sunk it themselves in coastal waters when they retreated from Norway about a year ago, when the German Navy came to Norway. Apparently, they left in a hurry, sunk their petrol boat, and hurried back to Britain on a fast ship.

Our job will be to remove all cannons and ammunitions that are still on board; the petrol boat will then be a trawler again. A tugboat will then take the trawler to the Norwegian shipyard a few hundred yards down the fjord from us. In a few months it will be seaworthy again. By then the cannons will have been overhauled in Germany and ammunition for these cannons manufactured. After we install all that again, the trawler will become a petrol boat again, this time it is a German one. In conclusion, the memo emphasizes that the former British Navy property is now German Navy property. I guess the message is **Do not remove German Navy property**. Okay, okay, I hear you! “Günter, what do you think? If the former British Navy property becomes German Navy property, the former British seaman property should become German seaman property, right? Isn’t that logical?” “Do you think there might be anything worthwhile on that ship, after a year in sea water?” “I don’t know, Günter, I am just trying to think ahead. Answers like that may come in handy should somebody ask silly questions. Didn’t you learn? ‘Be prepared’!

A few days later, after quitting time, Günter and I are just about to go fishing in the double canoe we have built for ourselves. We see a salvage tugboat with the former British petrol boat in tow coming toward our pier. “Let’s go fishing tomorrow Helmut; we have to see this ghost ship after the Norwegians have left. Doesn’t it look spooky? I wonder what it looks like on the inside. Let’s watch them!” All six of us seamen see the long green strands of algae hanging down on much of the ship. After the Norwegians tie up the ship on our pier, they leave with their tugboats.



The six of us are getting on board, in shorts and with flashlights.

“Be careful, it is awful slippery,” can be heard from below the deck.

“Hey guys, here is a dead horse.”

“A what? How do you get a horse on a ship?” I want to know.

“It looks like it; but I think it a big sack full of noodles or rice, swollen to twice its normal size. I guess the British gave up taking it along. It is right in the middle of the deck down here.”

I went along on a German patrol boat for a month several weeks ago and I know my way around. All patrol boats have been trawlers and are very similar. I am looking for the galley. It takes getting used to the long strands of algae in your face and around your neck. I hope there were no casualties when the British left, I surely do not want to run into a skeleton.

“Guys, I found the galley, and lots and lots of canned stuff, give me a hand,” I yell through the ship. Günter found a jug full of whiskey, at least that’s what he thinks it is.

“I found it on the lower deck, next to the engine. It was floating; there is still a lot of water down there. The jug is almost full; at least three liters are in there. It is still good, smell it.” He has removed the cork and puts the jug under my nose.

“Boy, that stuff smells good! One of these days, let’s have a whiskey party; I think it beats the rum that we are getting now.”

I better get on with business. “Let’s get all the cans out, but only the ones which don’t leak.”

The pile on the pier gets bigger and bigger. We have Libby’s Condensed Milk, Portuguese Sardines, Norwegian Herrings, Australian Corned Beef and other stuff. Too bad that the milk cans start to leak when they are disturbed; they form a white puddle on the pier. Some of the sardines are bad too; we have to watch it. The corned beef is perfect; not one can is bad. The Aussies have done a good job canning it for us.

All six of us are busy piling up cans on the pier when all of a sudden the Petty-Officer-on-Duty shows up. The petty officers live about fifty yards up the road and we hardly ever see them after quitting time. What does he want? It can only be bad news. We all stop and look at him while he looks around and tries to figure things out.

“You are doing a good job salvaging this food for our kitchen, let me get my Inventory Book and I will take inventory. I will be right back!”

We look at each other and think *He better get out of the sun!*

“That guy is nuts!” I suggest. “I didn’t crawl through slime and mussels and algae, slipped and have bumps and cuts from the barnacles all over me to share the goods with *them?*”

A voice from deep down in the ship clears the air, “Let’s grab the good stuff and hide it in the shop somewhere!”

None of us has sprung into action so fast since boot camp. A pile of leaking condensed milk cans is all that is left on the pier. Some cans have rolled over the edge of the pier in the commotion and rest on the bottom of the fjord. Only a thin white line is rising to the surface on several places.

“Let’s kick them all into the fjord before he comes back.” This is a good suggestion that needs no repeating. All of us *kick in*, and only a large white Libby’s milk puddle remains on the pier when the petty officer comes back. “What happened, all the cans are gone?” He looks around at the place where the cans were, staring at the white puddle. I try to explain, gently. “We had to get rid of them. The cans had rusted through and the contents are probably now poisonous. The safest thing was to get rid of it before anybody gets sick, or worse. That would really be irresponsible. We kicked all cans over the edge of the pier. Look down there, they are still leaking, and probably will for a long time.”

With a sad look on his face he comments, “All those cans would have helped our kitchen out a lot.”

Günter adds, “Yea, isn’t it a shame?” In the following weeks, every so often, we take a can of the fine Australian Corned Beef up to the kitchen and our sweet kitchen aid Sigrid serves each of us seamen a one half inch thick slice of it.

“Wasn’t it a good idea to trade a bottle of rum for a can of corned beef? “ I ask Günter, loud enough in case someone is listening and wondering. The whiskey alone was worth the effort in algae and slime to recover it. Did somebody say that somewhere before, “He, who drinks stuff like that, can’t be all bad?”

My Norwegian Friend Martin

“*W*hat a view!” The coastal ferry comes around and the Molde Fjord in its beauty is in front of me. I am coming back from my two weeks vacation in Berlin; it is actually almost four weeks away from my station here in Molde when you count the travel time too. Molde is only eight hundred miles from Berlin, but to go by train, ferry, train, ferry and train from Germany to Denmark to Sweden to Norway takes time.

I view the fjord and the little town Molde about six miles away on the other side of the fjord. I almost feel like I am coming home. I have been stationed here for seven months now and was lucky to get vacation, thanks to our new lieutenant. It normally takes a year.

The boat passes several little islands in the fjord. I am looking forward to see my pals, and will be back to canoeing and fishing in the clear fjord again.

I have learned to like my assignment in Norway. Actually, I like it a lot now. I think this is the best place to be during the war right now. When I think of what my life would be had I been on a ship I shudder. I came so close to being on the battleship Bismarck, a coffin for over two thousand German seamen now.

It takes a while for the ferry to travel six miles; the tide must be coming in. So be it! I am standing at the bow and feel like a million Kroners. The Molde Pier is coming close. A lot of townspeople are on the pier, saying hello or good-bye to relatives, friends or business people, maybe some tourists too. Nobody waits for me, I am sure of that. But I don't care; I like any bunch of happy people.

I have no trouble with my light suitcase moving through the crowd on the pier. Do I take a taxi or do I walk? It is only a twenty-minute walk to the eastern end of town where our station is.

To stroll through this little town is fun, and to see all the familiar places. I feel I am home again, sort of.

Passing the little bakery, I decide to step in, as I have done many times before. I don't know yet what they call these little flat sweet things here; I just point to it. I do know it wouldn't be called Danish. Our Norwegian foreman Martin taught me that Norwegians have a saying, '*It is as true as the devil is Danish*'. I smile at the *fröken* behind the counter and pay. The change I drop into a little box under the picture of a local pilot who perished during the initial fighting over a year ago. The picture shows a handsome young man; I feel sorry for his family. Down the street I come to the newspaper kiosk, waving to the sales girl. Since I am in German sailor uniform, she has no trouble recognizing me, and she responds with a broad smile. She must have gotten her teeth back. Before I left, several of us pretended to buy a magazine and then tried to make her laugh, knowing she didn't want to open her mouth. Her teeth were in the shop. The poor thing was so embarrassed; she was holding a hand in front of her mouth. She is now in fine shape, only her dentist and a few sailors would know.

A hundred yards before I get to our station are six Norwegian craftsmen building a good-sized motorized fishing boat with hand tools only. There is no power on this meadow next to the fjord. They made good progress the last four weeks, but they have only a few more weeks to finish it. It is late summer now.

I am home. "Hello everybody," I call as I step into the building.

"How is old Germany, still standing?" I am asked.

"They do the best they can. But I wonder, now that the army has also moved against the Russians." Russian army divisions had been observed moving toward the demarcation line that goes through the middle of Poland. The demarcation line was established between Stalin and Hitler when they decided to split Poland in 1939.

“By the way, Helmut, Martin asked when you would be back. He will not tell us what it is about.” I don’t know what it could be; I’ll find out tomorrow.

Martin is the foreman of our small group of Norwegian mechanics in the shop. He is about forty years old; the others are like most of us in the shop, around twenty. Only Willy Kempka is over thirty, the forever-seaman. He likes booze, which may have something to do with it. That his brother is one of Hitler’s chauffeurs did not help.

Martin is a likable fellow. You don’t have to ask him to lend a hand; he is there before you ask. He is always in good spirits, always smiling. He lives on one of the islands in the fjord with his family. A few months ago, Mama wrote if I could bring her a silver fox boa along when I come home for vacation. It is in fashion now and will be nice and warm around her neck in winter.

When I asked Martin, “What do you know about silver fox pelts and boas?”

“You talk to the right man.” The two of us went shopping; Martin knew what to look for and where to go. The pelt is then taken to the *Bunt maker*, to make the boa. Martin took me to the right store, and Mama got a beautiful piece to show off in the neighborhood and be warm in winter.

Martin is also teaching me to speak Norwegian. He thinks the best way is to hear and repeat ethnic jokes in their native language. That’s the way I like it!

But now I wonder what Martin wants to talk about, and why he only wants to talk to me? It is strange.

Monday morning I am early in the shop because Martin is always early for work. When he walks in I can tell he is in some sort of trouble.

“Helmut, let’s go to the other room so we can be alone. Look at the letter I got.” He speaks in Norwegian; usually he tries to talk in German to me. “I got it a week ago, it is very disturbing to me and I don’t know what to do.” His hands are trembling as he gives me a typed letter, addressed to Martin.

“Can you read it?” He asks.

As I start to read it I answer, “Yes, pretty much, I can figure it out.” Norwegian is similar to German in many ways.

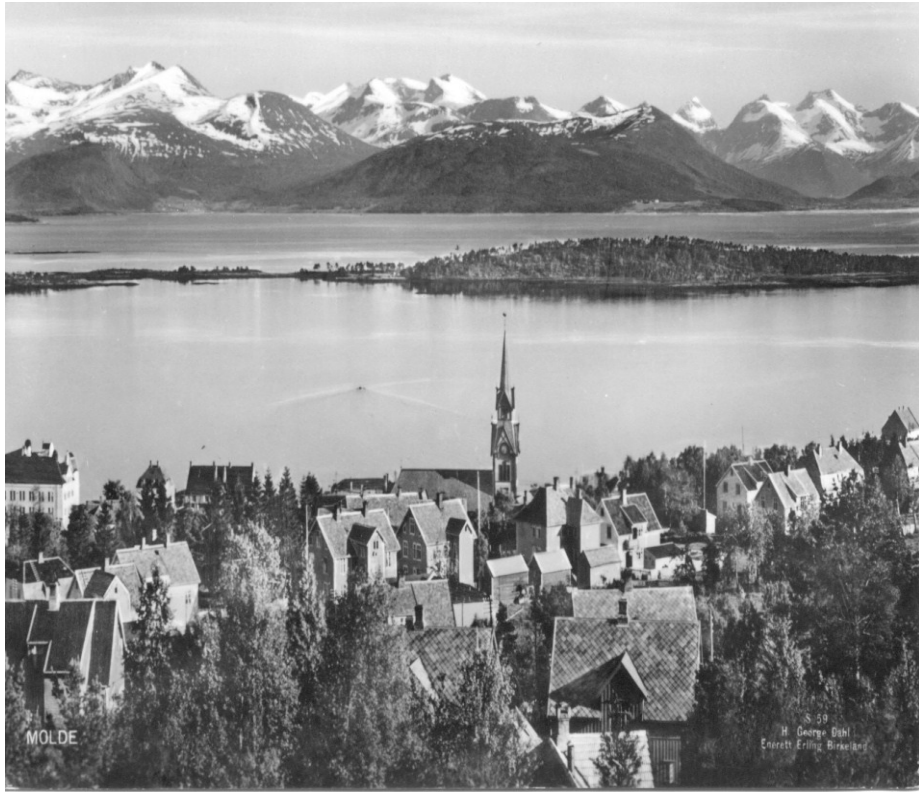
“I think somebody is trying to make you quit working for the Germans or he is going to dynamite your house. Is that what someone is writing to you?”

“Yes, the so-called Underground is threatening me. What do you think, Helmut, do I dare to ignore it?” His eyes look sad as he looks at me. That’s not the Martin I know. But I can’t think of a solution to this dilemma. I don’t know what to do either.

”I like to work here,” Martin continues, “The pay is good; double what I would get elsewhere, if I even can get another job.” I try to answer as best as I can, “It is impossible to know if this letter came from a crackpot, meaning nothing, or if the threat is real, Martin. I doubt that there is a German Security Organization here that could sort things out or even help you, it might even make your situation worse.”

I hand the letter back to Martin and look at him. I try to visualize myself in Martin’s place and my family threatened. Thinking out loud, “It is hard to believe that the letter was written by the Underground. This is not a strategic place; whether we have our little shop here or not doesn’t make any difference.”

Then I look at Martin, I know he is worried. “On the other hand, Martin, we can’t afford to be wrong. We can not take a chance, one never knows.” I know, he has gone through all this thinking already and has not found an answer. He is relying on me. I am not a gambler, and the more I think about it, the clearer it becomes. I cannot take a chance with Martin and his family, who I never met. I take Martin’s hand and look at him. “Martin, if I were you, I would quit!” Martin presses my hand. I will miss him a lot, but I cannot even stand the thought that something could happen to him. I never saw Martin again. I hope nothing happened to him. However, that would have been news in Molde, and I did not read about it.



Molde and Molde-Fjord

At the Arctic Circle in Winter 1941 to 1942

I have to pack my sea bag in a hurry; I am on my way to my new assignment. Lieutenant Von Bülow has been transferred to Sandnessjön a few weeks ago and he arranged that I would be there too; he wants to make a lot of changes up there.

It will take a few days for the coastal ferryboat to travel from Molde to Sandnessjön, my new station. My Norwegian coworkers tell me that it is about 600 miles farther north from Molde as the snow goose flies. It is a small town at the Arctic Circle, on the coast and south of Narvik. A year and a half ago there was heavy fighting between British and German destroyers. The German Navy could not allow the British to stay; because Swedish iron ore has been shipped from Narvik to Germany for a century and is now a strategic commodity.

I feel like a tourist on the coastal ferryboat. So far it is a nice sunny September day, but soon it will be wet, cold and dark up here.

What will the new place look like? The fact that the lieutenant wants to make a lot of changes makes me wonder. He has been writing good reviews for me. Maybe I will go back to study in Kiel in a short while. I hope so.

Several weeks ago, the Lieutenant Von Bülow looked for one of us to install large camouflage umbrellas over the cannons of our coastal batteries. The two older sailors in our outfit didn't think they were up to the job. I don't think it is such a big deal. I am sure I can handle it, as long as the lieutenant teams me up with a certified welder. The umbrella hardware is all precut steel pipes and has been shipped to the batteries several months ago.

The lieutenant assured me, "I'll get you a welder, also at every battery there will be as much manpower as you need."

It took me three weeks to complete the five batteries with four cannons each. The farthest battery north was near Bodö, about two hundred miles north of the Arctic Circle. The weather is cold, wet and windy up there. I think that the successful completion of that project makes him look good too. I am looking forward to working with him again. His motto was, *Live and let live!*

The boat is near my destination and I can see Sandnessjön from a distance. It is not even close in comparison with Molde. It looks like it has only two streets going parallel with the coast and a few side streets in between. There are a dozen or so radio antennas and some gray green wooden barracks outside of town, not far from the pier.

A seaman picks me up at the pier and walks me to one of the barracks I saw.

“That’s your home,” he explains. “The offices are in the next house. The lieutenant used to live there. Right now we don’t have one. The last one was here only four weeks, and then he was reassigned to headquarters in Berlin.”

I am dumbfounded. I was lured up here and than abandoned, I don’t know what to say.

I am sharing a room with five radio operators, members of the German Army Communication Corps.

The barracks are temporary buildings, inside and outside walls are single boards only, I can hear the wind outside and every word spoken next door. I hate it!

“Do they always have the radio on so loud next door?” I ask my roommate.

“They do, sometimes all night. They are petty officers. When they are drinking you can forget sleep.”

I hate this place! On top of it my bed is on the wall next to them. Of course, I moved in last. Sure enough, the noisy neighbors have a party in the evening and the radio is blaring. I can take a lot, but jerks like that bug me. After enduring it for a while, I have an idea. I unscrew my light bulb just enough to let it flicker and spark, making a racket on the radio next door. Every time they turn it back on again, I do my thing and have some fun with them; until they turn the radio off. Problem one is taken care of.

“Helmut,” announces my wireless operator roommate, “You seem to know a lot about radios. I’ll make you an honorary telegraph operator, unless you prefer ornery operator?”

“I will try to live up to that, I am new around here, but give me a little time,” I promise.

Good-bye Maat Mason

1942

Maat (petty officer, second class) Mason is trying to put me on the carpet--a review by the commanding officer. I have to appear in the Lieutenant's office in full dress. Since I am only a seaman first class, Mason is trying to give me a hard time and is actually interfering with my job. When Maat Mason was informing me to appear at twelve o'clock in the lieutenant's office, he did not say this was official. I think I will make this a casual affair; I go in my work clothes.

When I enter the lieutenant's office he doesn't seem to care how I am dressed. I walk up to his desk and casually wait to hear what he wants to tell me. I did not act as if I am *'on-the-carpet'*, remembering the old saying, *'Don't lie down if you don't want to be stepped on.'*

"Did you say to Maat Mason, *'Do the damn telephone job yourself'*, *Gefreiter Standke?*" The lieutenant Schulz is asking.

"Yes sir, I did, but that is only part of the story, sir."

"You can not say this to any superior rank, Standke, under any circumstances! Do you understand?"

"Yes sir, I am sorry!"

"Now tell me your side of the story."

"Yes sir. I am sorry I am late, but I fixed the telephone in your apartment and came here immediately." (I actually am two minutes early, but I think I will show a little measured submissiveness, that will set the tone the way I like it.)

"The problem is, as I see it, we don't have the means to do much at this place. We need tools and a volt-ohmmeter most of all. There has to be a way to get this stuff. We had a pretty good facility in Molde. When I got the assignment here to take over the maintenance of the telephone lines, all I had was a screw driver and a pair of pliers. I found a field telephone, but it had no wires to hook it up."

The lieutenant interrupts, "Wires that is what Mason was talking about. You took some from him and did not admit it, isn't this correct?"

“This is not quite correct, sir, I needed the wires to do the assignment Maat Mason had given me. I told Maat Mason that these wires, less than one meter long, belong to the *Kriegsmarine* and not to him. As I see it, he is sabotaging the assignment he gave me. That is when I told him, ‘*Get off my back or you can do the telephone job yourself.*’ I am sorry, I should have come to you, and I see that now.” The lieutenant is leaning back in his chair and lights a cigar. I guess he is on my side.

“Yes, you should have come to me. You said earlier that you had a pretty good facility in Molde, tell me about it.” I describe in glowing terms what was accomplished in Molde in a year, vs. nothing in Sandnessj n by whoever was here before, including Maat Mason. Only a few weeks ago, one of our new petty officers--a carpenter by trade-- managed to get a workshop built. He had the local sawmill cut boards out of a pile of telephone poles we had behind our barracks and all of us are building the workshop. We have to hurry before it gets really cold and will remain dark all day.

“We have a good start. But we need some tools, at least the basic ones.” I think I have the lieutenant’s attention.

“Do you have an idea what we need, Standke?”

“Oh yes. I literally grew up at the Tech. High School Workshop at the Knorr-Bremse in Berlin, I know that very well.”

“I know you are from Berlin by the sound of your voice. I grew up in Berlin too, as you probably noticed. Let me think about it, I will come back to you getting tools for the shop. In the meantime, don’t pick on Mason; let me handle it, okay?”

“Yes sir!”

I am leaving and pat myself on the back, but am brought back to reality in a hurry.

“What did you get?” I wonder what Mason thinks he is... He looks up and down at me and is wondering why I am in work clothes. He expected that I was ‘*on-the-carpet*’.

“What are you talking about Maat Mason?” I question with a sly grin on my face. I know this guy is laying-in-wait to do me in. Maat Mason turns around without saying a word. Strikeout! I know he will be back if I let him. Three days later, at eight o’clock in the morning, I am in the shop getting ready to take my bike to another German Office with phone problems. I am not in a hurry. It is still pretty dark and it is raining cats and dogs.

The phone rings, “Get me Maat Mason, Gefreiter Standke.”

“He is not here yet, sir,” I answer the lieutenant.

“Tell him to come to my office right away as soon as he shows up, Gefreiter Standke.”

“Yes sir!”

Mason is always late. I am not sure where he is, but I think he hangs out at the central switchboard with the Army Communication girls. If he would be a pal I would find him in no time; but he is not on my friendship list, he is an SOB. I go out, get my job done, and am back in the shop at lunchtime. Maat Mason is not in sight.

It is almost five o'clock and pitch dark outside, when Maat Mason storms through the door. I have to teach that guy to close the door in winter.

“Anything new?” he yells into the room. I don't turn around and keep stroking the wires of my test telephone in front of me.

“Not really, except the lieutenant asks that you come to his office, right away.” I turn around. I want to see his face when I tell him, and I want him to see the smirk on my face.

“When did he call?” I wait until his face is completely pale.

“At eight o'clock in the morning, Maat Mason.” I look him straight in the eye. You made my day!

He leaves the shop to see the lieutenant I guess, if he still can get him after five.

‘Dear Maat Mason, I wish you a good trip, wherever you are going.’

After two weeks Maat Mason is no longer with us, and he didn't even say Good-bye.

Outfitting the Shop

The German Navy Supply Depot is in Trondheim, Norway, and I am on my way. It is about two hundred miles south of here; but it is more than a three hundred-mile trip the way the Coastal Ferry goes, between the coast and the minefields which keep the bad guys out. The icy wind makes this a terrible trip, and ice covers most of the ship. This is not for tourists this time of the year, January 1942.

The ferry left the town and harbor of Sandnessjön at noon, when the sun peeked over the horizon for a moment and went under again. Now its twilight and then it will be dark again till noon tomorrow.

I have about two days to think about my job to get the tools for our new shop and how to go about it.

Lieutenant Schulz was very helpful. He gave me a requisition pad with all pages blank and with his signatures. He also gave me a letter to a high-ranking officer at the depot, in case I need help. He had called the Navy Depot Administration in Trondheim to get food and shelter for me for the time I have to stay. The depot will take care of shipment of all my wares back to Sandnessjön.

I am one of a handful of German passengers on this ship; all others are Norwegians. The cabin is very warm and it is not a bad trip.

On the third day I arrive in Trondheim and stay in living quarters for the depot administration.

Not bad! It is very quiet in comparison to where I live in Sandnessjön. Most sailors here at the depot hang out in the mess hall, play cards or chess, a game that I always wanted to learn one day.

“Do you play chess, Helmut?”

“I wish I could.” Before I can say more I am sitting at a board and start playing chess.

This is a new day and I have a job to do. After asking a few questions I found the tool supply department, and hit the first obstacle within the first minutes. I don't have catalog numbers to order anything. Generic descriptions of the tools I want don't help the guy behind the window.

After trying for several hours I realize that's not the way things work around here. The sailor behind the window and I wasted several hours and both of us are frustrated.

How can I get things done? When nobody else is near the window I drop a package of cigarettes on the counter and ask, "Isn't there a better way to get the tools for us up north?"

He takes the cigarettes, looks around the hall and says, "Come on into the store room and then you can copy the catalog numbers of what you need." Inside the storeroom I feel like the fox in the hen house. I see things I didn't even know I need.

For the next few hours I take notes, lots of catalog numbers and the matching proper descriptions. At the end of the day I pat myself on the back of having made a fundamental observation, the key catalysts that get things done around here is **cigarettes and booze**.

"Vielen Dank Alfred thanks for your help, now we can be more effective up north."

"Kein problem (no problem), Helmut, come back in case you forgot something."

It took me several days to prepare a list for the typist to type the requisitions. I found out I could also purchase tools in Norwegian hardware stores if I have a proper German Navy Purchase Order and a Material Ticket.

"I am interested in the table drill press and the table grinder over there. Do you sell them to the German Navy?" I am asking the shopkeeper. I am looking around, there is a lot of inventory and I am the only customer. Business must be bad.

"Yes, we do, but we have to have a Kriegsmarine Purchase Order and a Material Ticket, then we can buy replacement parts in Germany and will not deprive our local customers."

"Tusen tack," (thousand thanks) I answer in Norwegian, "I will return with the paper work."

In another store I see a portable forge on display. I inquire the price and decide to buy that too. That will allow me to make my own telephone pole hardware.

Back in my office, I expect that my requisitions have been typed by now. I have been here for three weeks and feel a little guilty that everything takes so long. When I check with the Norwegian typist, I find my notes and the requisition blanks untouched on her desk.

“I am told that you read and write German well, why has my stuff not been typed yet?”

She is a cute blond and with her blue innocent eyes she looks at me, “You wrote in long-hand gothic script, that I can not read. Why don’t you print it? Then I will type it right away.”

What can I say to a girl with a smile like that? But it sets me back a day or two to rewrite all requisitions. Suddenly she waves me to come over; “Your lieutenant is on the phone and wants to talk to you.”

“Yes sir, Gefreiter Standke here.”

“How is it coming, Standke, everything all right?”

“Yes, sir! I am wrapping it up, a few more days and I will be on my way back.”

“Listen, Standke, can you get an electrical portable heater for me? I am freezing to death at my desk.”

“Yes sir, I am sure I can, I have seen them in several hardware stores here. The paper work may take a few days, however.”

“I don’t care, just get me the heater.”

“Yes sir, can do!”

A couple of days later I have my paper work together and I only need the signature of the depot superintendent. I enter his office with the most military demeanor I can muster.

“May I ask for your signature, sir?” I ask him and hand him my pile of requisitions. He barely looks at them and about half of them signed in no-time. I stand next to his desk and wait, trying not to interrupt. I am a little apprehensive. I have been here in Trondheim for four weeks now and really have nothing to show for it yet. I keep my fingers crossed.

All of a sudden something catches his eye. “What? You want ten drills of each size from three to ten millimeters? Are you out of your mind? Have you forgotten that we are in a war and we all have to make that extra effort? You...You...You are sabotaging the war effort. Take your damn paper and get out of here. “

“Yes sir,” is all I can mumble, leaving his office in a daze.

I am stunned. I don’t know what to do now. I have accomplished absolutely nothing. Sure I had a good time here, but I let the people down who sent me.

Out of habit I go back to my desk where I have done all my paper work, next to that cute blond typist. As I am leafing through my requisitions and little by little I am getting hold of myself.

Except for the stupid twist drills, the superintendent was not unhappy with the other requests. All I have to do is back off on the drills. I cross out sizes one would never use anyhow and reduce the quantity from ten to one each. It is worth a try.

“What did you say, Helmut?” It is my blond secretary; I must have been talking to myself. Looking up I see her smile, it makes me feel better already. To let a day go by helps to put things back in perspective. I hope the superintendent simmered down too.

I am back in his office. “May I respectfully resubmit my revised requisitions, sir?” I think he is relaxed today. As he realizes the quantity changes from ten to one and some drill sizes even crossed out; he looks at me with a smile. “I think you got the message, didn’t you?”

“Yes sir, *ich werde alles tun für den Sieg* (I will do my thing for victory, sir).”

“You got it; Gefreiter ...what’s your name?”

“Gefreiter Standke, sir, Gefreiter Standke.”

He hands me the signed requisitions with a smile, “Good luck to you, and keep doing a good job!”

“Yes sir.” And I am out in a hurry. **I did it!**

Now I have to go to the tool room counter man Alfred with a package of cigarettes, and drop off my requisitions. All are now correctly filled out and signed.

I make arrangements for a truck and three men to pick up my stuff in town. I should be ready to go back to Sandnessjön in two days.

A small Norwegian coastal fishing boat, taking a typical load of rotated munitions back to Sandnessjön, will take my stuff along too. I have to be in the harbor commander’s office at nine o’clock tomorrow, before I board.

I get a lecture from this old white-haired captain, who had trouble getting up from his tough job behind his desk.

“Make sure that the boat will go day and night.”

“Yes sir, we will go day and night!” That sounds like a reasonable order to me, so why not?

The boat with the engine idling must be my boat.

“Hello everybody.” The crew comes up, all five of them. They smile from ear to ear as I shake hands with them.

The skipper is about forty; his skin is like leather, I can tell he has been around the sea a long time. The rest of the crew is about my age, twenty-one.

They show me my bunk below deck and I unload my personal stuff and my food for three days.

The boat is a relatively small coastal fishing boat, 80 to 100 tons, but seems to be quite seaworthy. It has to be in these waters.

It is nine o'clock, but still pretty dark, and we take off. The glow plug diesel engine with that typical low speed *popping* sounds is very comforting. I believe these engines can go forever.

Because the boat is in German Navy service it carries the appropriate German flag, one with a swastika in the middle.

The weather is bad, very cold and windy with fog and an occasional snow and shower. As we come out of Trondheim harbor it gets worse. Our boat resembles a large walnut shell and acts that way on the water. In this sea, the boat is bobbing and rolling; one cannot walk or stand without holding on to something. I try my best not to get seasick. I figure the best place is probably up in fresh air, next to the skipper in the pilot house, and being somewhat sheltered. I wonder how he is able to find his way at this twilight and this weather. He is staying close to shore and is squirming his way between hundreds of tall and shallow rocks. Visibility is bad too; at best he can see a hundred feet, at times even less. It is kind of scary.

The two of us can communicate fairly well in Norwegian and German. "Do you ever see British speed boats in these waters?" I want to know; I have read about it some time ago.

"Not that often, but one never knows." Without taking his eyes a second from our course but pointing with his head backwards he continues, "With that flag we are flying I am sure we would be a target," his tone is matter of fact.

I like guys like him. He is to the point. He says what he means, no double talk. Maybe the sea teaches you that.

"Do you have a Norwegian flag on board?" I ask. He is nodding his head, keeping his eyes steady forward, dodging rocks left and right as he goes. We are together in this, literally, and we both seem to think how we can improve our odds.

"Why don't you put that Norwegian flag up?" I suggest, and thinking that I cannot do much for my country being dead in icy water. Within a minute, I am sailing under a Norwegian flag. It feels the same and I don't have a problem with that. We don't meet many other boats, but when we do, I step out of sight. It is four o'clock and pitch dark. The boat's light is useless in the fog. How can the skipper possibly see where to go? He came too close to some rocks for my taste. We haven't talked much the last hour.

He is doing his best not to hit anything and I am more and more uncomfortable. Suddenly he breaks the quiet. "Do you think we should go on, as we have been instructed?" I am glad he asks; that gives me a chance to let him know what I think of this. I think to go on is irresponsible. I don't care what that old captain guy was telling us from behind his desk. What does he know?

"You are the skipper, use your own judgment," I tell him, "But if you want my opinion, I have been scared to go on for quite a while."

"Okay, we are now at a good spot where one of the crew members' family lives. We can stay here over night," he tells me.

"That's fine with me." The crew is on deck; we drop the anchor and row ashore in the dinghy. Not far from shore I can see light and the silhouette of a farmhouse. It looks like we have been expected.

The table is already set and I join them. I look a little strange between them in my blue uniform, but nobody seems to care.

I am told that the only way from here to anywhere is by boat. Schooling for children is difficult. The boy of the family goes to school twice a week only, but has a lot of homework to do. The only problem is, the parents grew up the same way and can not help much. Many fathers go to sea as youngsters, know every place on earth but cannot read and write very well. After dinner, the conversation gets very lively on the table and I can't follow too well. When I see the boy struggling with his homework I wonder if I can be of help. He is about ten years old and seems to be a bright kid. It takes me a while to study his textbook my Norwegian is still limited. After asking my skipper--the person I know best here--I find out what the kid is supposed to do. I have fun tutoring him. I learn a few things myself in the process and get lots of smiles out of him.

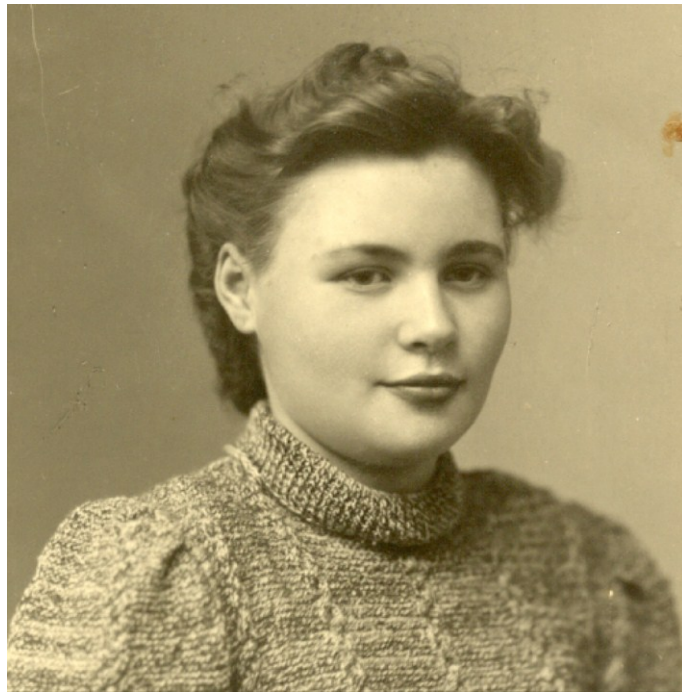
In the morning we row back to our boat and continue our trip to Sandnessjön. After three days I am running out of food, the trip was to last only three days. I am now sharing the crew's food, fish cooked in salt water with potatoes; I am now a family member.

After a week at sea--with stops at night--we do arrive safe and sound in Sandnessjön. All of us get off the boat and on the pier shake hands a long time.

Every time the boat is back in Sandnessjön, the skipper comes over to my barrack--only a block from the pier--and we laugh about my trip. Then I trade cigarettes for *geräucherten Lachs* (smoked salmon). Norwegian Lachs is the best!

Vacation in Germany 1942

During vacation in Germany, I managed to visit Inge who has to work as a Kindergarten Teacher assistant for a year in a little town outside of Berlin before she can graduate as a Kindergarten Teacher. What a young lady she has become. We go to a *Café* in the center of town. I am in my seaman uniform and Inge makes sure all her friends see us. I miss her a lot. When will I see her again?



Sister Inge in 1942, sixteen years old.

To Help on the Farm

Good-bye Sandnessjön. I take another look at this little town near the Arctic Circle where I was stationed for the last year. I leave a nice little workshop and friends behind, not to mention my happy German Navy telephone “customers.” I don’t know what is going to happen to them now after I am back in Germany, but the system is in much better shape now than it was a year ago. They will be okay.

With my sea bag I get on board of the coastal ferry to take me to Mosjön, the nearest rail road connection. The boat should be there late in the evening and I will catch my train tomorrow morning.

It takes a week to get to Germany, through Oslo, from there by the high speed Swedish electric train to Göteborg, Sweden, and then over Copenhagen, Denmark to Germany.

I am glad I am leaving before winter really starts. Even now, in mid-October, it is getting dark and cold.

My lieutenant in Sandnessjön recommended a promotion for me. That means I go back to the Ship Artillery College in Kiel again. I graduated there almost two years ago as Artillery Technician, (Seaman First Class).

This time it is a nine-month course, a continuation of the first one. It is the equivalent to an engineering education, the second and third semesters. When graduating in August 1943 I will become a petty officer second class.

But before I can go to the Ship Artillery College in Kiel I have to finish a four-week boot camp refresher tour in Stralsund, Germany. I was here for my original boot camp in 1940.

Then it was very tough, this time it is a joke.

I am pretty much the youngest sailor here; some guys have been eight years and more in the navy. Talk about teaching an old dog new tricks, they know all the tricks. The play here now is “Sailors in slow motion.” The drill instructors take it easy on us; they may have given up.

After a week, about two thousand sailors gather on the exercise field to listen to the commander.

“It is the beginning of November and a large part of the crop around here in Mecklenburg and Pomerania is still out in the field. If it can't be harvested in time the frost will ruin it. We will help to bring the crop in, for a week or two. Maybe you'll get better food than here when you are out on the farm. We will form groups of ten and cover the farms around Stralsund. By the end of the day you all will have your instructions, by tomorrow morning you will be at the railroad station to go to your destinations. Dismissed!”

All ten sailors in our room are one group; the oldest gets the paper work and has to find out how we get to our assigned place tomorrow.

When he returns he tells us, “We go by train about three hours and a few more hours on a narrow-gauge train. After a short walk of thirty minutes we get to the estate of Baron Von Maltzahn. The rest we will find out when we get there.

It is a nice warm day and my group walks the last thirty minutes to Baron Von Maltzahn's estate.

It is a large typical farm. The buildings form a square. The chateau is on one side, stables and storage buildings on the other three sides, with a large gate in one of them.

The ten of us step into the square and try to talk to someone. We see an elderly woman in a long black robe with greasy spots all over it.

Günter steps forward, “We are here to help you with the harvest, to whom can we talk to here?” She doesn't pay any attention to us for a second and disappears in the chateau. We look at each other and wonder.

“Maybe she is a foreign helper and doesn't speak German? She looked dirty enough.” To be funny I say, “She wouldn't be the Baroness, would she?” Everybody laughs.

Within a minute a younger woman comes out to us and we ask, “We are here to help with the harvest, where do we stay, what we have to do?”

“Come with me, we prepared the schoolhouse for you.” Down the road, a few hundred yards we see the red brick schoolhouse.

“Who was that old woman in the dirty dress? She didn't want to talk to us,” Günter, our leader asks.

We gather around that young woman, “Who was that...?” We have a hunch, but it could not possibly be...

The young woman turns around to make sure nobody else has followed us, then she answers, “That is the Baroness, it is below her dignity to talk to working people.” We sailors look at each other in amazement. I only read about something like that in Grimm's fairy tales. We sailors step inside the

schoolhouse. It is a single empty room, all tables and chairs have been removed and the floor is covered with straw. It looks already 'slept-in'.

Günter shakes his head. "I don't feel like helping that bunch. They not only give a damn about us, they despise us!"

At about six o'clock in the evening someone comes from the main building and brings our supper, two slices of bread with jam for each of us, no butter, only jam on the bread.

A few local folks pass by the schoolhouse and say 'hello' to us. We are still in blue and everybody can see we are sailors.

When they hear what we got for supper they nod their heads, "We believe you, that's the Von Maltzahns."

"But it isn't only the Von Maltzahns, around here; all the big landlords are the same--working people don't count."

One of the visitors is eager to get a word in. He does not hide the way he feels about the Von Maltzahns, "The Baron Von Maltzahn is the Bürgermeister of the town, he is our landlord and he is the Nazi Ortsgruppenleiter (local town's leader). Not because he is a convinced Nazi, he actually hates the Nazis, but he wants to control all the power in this area. He has managed to do just that."

As I look around our visitors I see a lot of people nodding their heads in support. The next morning at 5:30 a horse drawn wagon comes by and we get two slices of bread with jam again.

"I think I'll be dead before lunch, I am starving already," that's how I feel. We hop on the wagon and go out to the field.

I wonder out aloud, "How much work do they expect us to do with what we get to eat here. This is the worst place I have ever been."

It is still dark and cold and frost covers the ground. Groups are gathering in the dark. One figure comes out of the dark to meet us.

"I am one of the local residents here in this area. Come on over and join us." The ten of us walk over to the local farmhands and shake hands with the ones that are near.

"Harvesting is the only time when we can make some money. You get a ticket every time you empty an eighty-pound basket full of potatoes.

Von Maltzahn pays ten pennies per ticket, but he will give you only five pennies because he has to pay you a Mark per day." I am now wondering about this entire operation about 'helping to get the crop in'.

"What an SOB that Maltzahn is." Günter adds, "What side is he on? These guys want to profit while we are at war and get shot at. It sure makes you think, doesn't it?"

Our local spokesman continues, “The groups you see are French and Belgian prisoners-of-war on the left, then us locals here and German repatriates from Yugoslavia and at the very right are people from Poland.

“If we locals bring you sandwiches for breakfast and lunch and you give us your tickets Von Maltzahn will have to pay us ten pennies per ticket, how does that sound?”

“You got a deal,” is Günter’s instant response. Everybody on the field lines up at the edge of it to harvest potatoes, by hand, with only a four-pronged short hoe.

I watch the German locals and the German repatriates take five rows at a time to make all the money they can, everybody else takes three rows. So do we, for now. Let’s wait and see what the Von Maltzahns have for lunch.

I have the middle row between my legs and reach left and right to the other two rows with my hoe. I grab the potato’s green with my left, slam the hoe behind the potato bush into the ground and pull on my hoe and on the potato green to get the potatoes out. Whacking the potato green on the basket edge to knock the potatoes into the basket. Then I go with my fingers through the dirt trying to find additional potatoes.

All harvesters move forward at the same speed, emptying the baskets in the wagons that follow behind us. At this time we get a ticket for each basket of potatoes. Günter and I help each other carrying the heavy basket to the wagon. Everybody is busy and things move on for several hours.

“*Mittagessen!*” (Lunchtime) is announced from a horse drawn wagon loaded with a tub of soup. The local farmhands and the repatriates keep on working, they need the money. Could it be they know something about the food? It could be both.

The rest of us stop working and walk over to the lunch wagon. I pick up a canteen filled with soup.

“What is this?” I ask Günter next to me. “Look at all the floating peas in the tub.”

“What about it?” he asks.

“Don’t you know that peas that float have worms in them? Only chickens get those peas. This is a soup with wormy peas; this is chicken feed at best.” I almost have to throw up. All sailors have stopped eating by now and we pour our soup on the ground.

“The pox on Baron Von Maltzahn and his kitchen, I am ready to quit,” are my thoughts. I do not know if all others have not identified what they are eating or whether they are too hungry to care.

After the break my sailor comrades and I cut back from three rows to one, just enough to give some tickets to the locals for sandwiches. I am not working for people like the Von Maltzahns. I am not his subject.

At the end of the day several of us go into the next village to find a pub. Out here in the country they ought to have something to eat for us, even in November 1942. We have no trouble finding one. As we sit down the pub owner brings us beer. "It's on the house," and he sits down with us. "Tell me, what is going on in the war?"

"*Prost*" (cheers) and that pretty much takes care of the first glass. The pub owner comes back with another round, "I don't trust what I see and read in the news. By the way, are you staying at the Von Maltzahns?"

"Yes, we are," we confirm. "Let me go to the kitchen to fix something for you. I know what the Von Maltzahns cook. Even their own kids came here often because they didn't get enough to eat."

After ten days--and many times back at the pub--we pack and go back to our basic training in Stralsund. We think we have a sad story to tell. But it turns out ours is not special at all, it is rather typical. All big landlords for many miles around are exploiting and mistreating people who work for them, including service men. It doesn't matter whether they are Germans, foreigners or even their own soldiers fighting their war. *Something is wrong! Do they think we are serfs?*

The commander has us back on the exercise field. "I am sorry to hear that most of you had a bad experience during the last two weeks on the farms around here. But for the moment we have to win the war we are in. After that we have a lot of work to do to correct a number of things at home. But one thing at a time! Keep your spirits up, men, "Dismissed!"

Schiffs-Artillerie College

Petty Officer Training, Nov. 1942-Aug. 1943

The first few weeks of this nine-month course are behind me. I like it a lot. The instructors in math and science are PhD's. Experienced petty officers are the instructors in fire control, gunnery and related subjects. It is a very interesting course.

My classmates have interesting stories to tell. Two of them were at sea on board a cruiser and an auxiliary cruiser.

Paul is telling about when he was one year and a half in the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean. Not being able to go home on vacation after a year, his vacation became, *A Week as a Tourist on an Auxiliary Cruiser*. A sign on his back read, *Vacationer! Do not disturb!* He went fishing from his ship and was a nonperson for a week. He got a kick out of watching everybody work and hustle.

Rudy is telling about his biggest mistake in life. "Why did I listen to those self-appointed super patriots that made me leave Montevideo? Our commander had decided to scuttle the pocket battle ship Graf Spee against Hitler's orders to save the crew from certain death.

"The British had assembled an overwhelming armada at the Rio de la Plata, outside the Uruguayan waters, and we were low on ammunition and had one turret out of commission. We were interned in Montevideo under the most casual circumstances. I got a good job as a technician; got paid well and nobody bothered me. I'll never forgive myself for having left my lovely South American girlfriend. I could have a nice family in Montevideo or Argentina by now. Here I sit back in class, a sailor with no future as far as I can see.

"Tell me, does that make sense?" Rudy is depressed every time something reminds him of it.

Tomorrow is Saturday and I meet my old grade school classmate Heinz Zöllner. I grew up with Heinz and we spent a lot of time together. We were rowing together and we signed up for the German Navy together.

Last time I met him was a few months ago, in December 1942. He was here in Kiel and was assigned to a U-boats tender, next to the shipyard. He was telling me then how successful the U-boats were in retaliating against

the British blockade against Germany. I wonder what he can tell me now, several months later. The latest news is not that great.

“*Wie geht’s, Heinz?*” I am greeting him in front of one of the coffeehouses, the sailor’s hangouts in downtown Kiel.

“It is a long story,” he answers, “let’s go in and sit down.” I can tell by his voice and his expressions that something is wrong. He does not sound like the happy-go-lucky and can-do-anything guy I remember. The two of us sip our coffee. The coffee is really good here. I can smell it from a block away. I figure Heinz will talk when he is ready. We have a six-cup *Kaffee-Kännchen* (little coffee can) and I top off our cups.

“Remember, Helmut, when we met in December 42, we U-boats did very well. We had just sunk over 700, 000 tons. We don’t come anywhere near that now. I am on the staff of the U-boat tender until our boat is ready. We train on our almost finished U-boat in the meantime. Being on staff on the tender we do regular work, like storing personal belongings and navy supplied uniforms a boat doesn’t take along when it goes out. Each boat has a separate small room on the tender. When we lose a U-boat the U-boat tender staff opens that room and separates the personal belongings from the navy stuff. We send the personal belongings back home to the parents or wives; the navy stuff will be re-inventoried by the navy.

“In the process I get a first-hand look of how many boats we loose. Believe me, Helmut, it is bad.” I really don’t know what to say. Heinz is confirming what I feared. The last years I have learned to read between the lines. I pour some more coffee in our cups and ask, “When will your boat be ready, do you know, Heinz?” He hesitates, “I guess in a couple of weeks or so, it’s supposed to be confidential. Then we will go too. Keep your fingers crossed, Helmut! Remember the good times we have had, don’t forget me. I better go now.”

Heinz shakes my hand for quite a while. I try hard not to think that this could be the last time I see him. Instead, I try to think of the good times we had over the many years when we grew up together. We were joking of going to Hawaii as we signed up for the German Navy in 1938.

I know it doesn’t look good for Heinz. “***Damn this war!***”

P.S. Heinz was lost at sea shortly thereafter. So were my other three good friends in our group of five that grew up in the suburb of Berlin. We had signed up for the Kriegsmarine together in peacetime 1938 for a chance to study engineering, to see Hawaii and the world. Only I did not serve on a submarine. Heinz, I did not forget you. I remember you as if you were here.

A Day in Court

Today I am a juror/witness, and I am on my way to the courthouse here on the big German Navy Base in Kiel. It is only two blocks away from the Ship Artillery College Campus, where I stay. I have been serving as a juror/witness at the Court-Marshal about once every two weeks. Almost all cases so far have been petty cases, stealing cigarettes mostly. I do not mind missing a class; I learn things about life and people.

Today I have to walk farther; a large area has been roped off. Kiel had several bombing raids last night and one bomb hit our base. Fortunately, it was a dud only and hit the grass. Now what? The ground is very soft and who knows how deep it went? Guards have to keep some guys away from the impact--to see what, a water-filled hole in the ground? At the courthouse, I get my assignment and go to my courtroom to take my seat on the bench. Another seaman and two captains join me on the bench on either side of the judge's chair.

I look at the case schedule for today. One case seems to be a serious one, *Selbst-Verstümmelung* (mutilation of oneself to avoid military service); this is a serious case in wartime. I understand it can mean the death penalty.

Who is the judge today? It is the friendly Dr. Popken? This judge usually gets the accused off with a slap on the wrist. Most of it is petty stuff anyway. Maybe today will be different, who knows.

The defendant comes through the door, a very young sailor. He can't be over twenty. He looks like a red blooded good-looking kid to me. He is bewildered as he is directed to his chair, fidgeting with a piece of paper in front of him. He has a civil defense lawyer, not a bad idea in his case. I cannot believe that this kid would mutilate himself; it smells! We will see. This is a court-marshal and only a few uniformed spectators are here.

We stand up as the judge enters the room until he sits down between the two officers, flanked by us two seamen. He is about fifty years old, a little on the heavy side and wears a uniform under his robe. He looks over his spectacles and smiles to the accused young sailor. He is trying to make him feel at ease. I think this is a good sign. The judge must have studied the papers, without looking at the documents in front of him he addresses the accused sailor.

“Before we get to the case itself, tell me how you grew up. Tell me about your parents or your guardian or who took care of you until you joined the *Kriegsmarine*,” the judge asks. “Relax, be yourself.”

The young sailor stands up, but before he can say anything the judge tells him, “Remain seated, relax”.

I hear that the parents own a motor barge. They had no time for the boy while they are trying to make a living; moving goods over the rivers of Europe.

“I lived with my grandparents to be able to enroll in school. Only during vacations did I stay on the boat and traveled with my parents.” I am observing this young man, his manners and how he talks about his parents and grandparents; there are no signs that this is not a normal young man.

When he stops for a moment, the judge interjects. “Tell me, what really did happen on the evening in January 1943 on your way back to the base.”

“I was together with my girlfriend and we had a fight. I had told her I didn’t want to see her any more.”

“How long have you known her, how old is she? Tell me some details,” the judge wants to know. I think the judge suspects the same thing I do.

“She is six years older than I. I met her about three month ago. When I told her that day in January I don’t want to see you any more, she told me I can’t do that, she would complain about me to my commanding officer.”

“Quiet in the court,” the judge calls to order when people wonder about the women the young sailor fell for. “Continue,” orders the judge.

“I paid no attention to what she had said and left her apartment to go back to the base. She followed me and tried to stop me. When I started to run she ran too. When I was near the base I was about fifty meters ahead of her; I saw a clothes line in front of a house. I grabbed it and wrapped it around my neck.” At this point the judge wondered, but he also helps the young seaman to find the proper words. So he would not say anything that can be misinterpreted again. I know Dr. Popken does that, he has done it in earlier cases.

“Did you do that to scare the women or to impress her? You didn’t really have any intention to kill yourself, did you?”

“No, that had never entered my mind, your Honor. I really don’t know why I did that, I was so confused, and maybe I tried to scare her. All I wanted was to get away from her.”

“What did that woman do after she caught up with you?”

“She screamed and took the clothes line away from me. I then ran to the base. She followed me and reported to the Lieutenant-on-duty that I was trying to kill myself and that she had just saved me.”

The young sailor has trouble finishing his story. He is starting to cry, buries his face in his hands and sobs. His lawyer pats him on his shoulders, trying to calm him down.

The judge again pages through the report from the commanding officer, who requested the court-marshal of a sailor who is trying to commit suicide. While the judge is reading he shakes his head every so often. All eyes are on the judge. He always takes his time. To me this is a clear-cut case. I have the impression that most people in this room feel the same way. Why is it that several officers had no common sense? The judge clears his throat and bangs his gavel on the desk.

“The verdict is, *The young sailor will be transferred out of this town and away from his present base and command.* “ The gavel announces that this judgment is final.

All of us sitting on the bench have to do now is sign the court papers that this was a fair trial. Yes, I think it was. It should not have become a court case in the first place, but I am glad this court sorted it out.

On the way home I review this whole affair in my mind again. Why can't some people see the obvious? This young man almost had his life ruined if it hadn't been for this judge, and nobody had cared. This is awful!

Troop Entertainment

In a few months, I will have completed my petty officer's training. It is summer 1943. Everything is routine by now at the Ship Artillery College in Kiel, including the nightly air raids on the city of Kiel. It seems intentional that only the populated areas are being pulverized. As of now, the shipyards and the railroad station have not been bombed.

We now have a Base Theater and we may see some movies. Last week we even had a chamber orchestra playing for us. I can't figure out what that was for, by intermission most of us left.

If they want to bring us music I wish it would be the kind I heard in Norway, from a British station. We were not supposed to listen to them, but how could we tell, right? They played Lilly Marlene; I know that is one of our songs, so it must be one of our stations, right?

Then we heard something with Choo--Choo, another like Tiger Rack and others like it. What terrific music, few of us like chamber music.

We finished supper. I look around and ask, "Who will come with me to the *Film-der-Woche* (Movie-of-the-Week)? How about it, Rudi and Paul?"

Rudi and Paul are two of my roommates. Rudi was interned in Montevideo, Uruguay, after the crew scuttled the pocket battle ship Graf Spee on the Rio de la Plata.

We are now sitting next to each other in class. He would now kill the guy that talked him into going back to Germany. He is sitting in class now and will end up who knows where when this course is over in a few weeks. His girl friend is in Montevideo and he will not forget her. He even studied Engineering while in camp with textbooks supplied through the Red Cross.

The two of us are very good friends. Between us there is little we don't know or can't figure out.

Paul is my other good friend and he is also a good student. He is very analytical and we kid him by telling him many times, *it does not add up, Paul*. But all three of us are critical of many things around us, and many things do in fact not add up. Paul is also a very good athlete. I am working out with him to get my shot put improved. I have trouble making the eight meters minimum for the national Sport Badge. I passed everything else.

Rudi, Paul and I have decided to go to the movie. We will at least see the news; maybe some more details about that tragic battle of a

sacrificed German army in Stalingrad. Now we know that they died of hunger, snow and ice and the overwhelming Russian forces. The supreme commander, Adolf Hitler, promised to get them back to the German line, but in the end abandoned the entire army. I do not think the German Army will ever forgive him for that.

The title of the first feature is 'The Training of a Marksman', a Russian Army film.

"What is that all about?" Paul wants to know.

"Psst, Paul, not so loud, we'll see," I have to remind him. Paul is leaning forward in his chair; he has always said that we need more sport and less boot camp.

"The Russians pick their marksmen students from the top gymnast team; they do what I have been saying all along."

This Russian film has subtitles in German, so we can tell what is going on. It has lots of training in gymnastic, rifle handling, and patience.

To pass the test and be a certified marksman the Russian student has to terminate a marksman on the German side of the front. The camera is focused on a tree one thousand meters away.

Paul is grabbing my arm; "See how the Russian is climbing through that tree, that's what gymnastic training will do for you."

Nothing happens for two days, the camera also shows the Russian marksman student, motionless in position. Suddenly a leg becomes visible a thousand meters away, a big mistake. It tells the marksman student all he needs to know.

Paul is all excited, "I knew it! I knew it! I feared for that German marksman when I saw how thoroughly that Russian soldier was trained, how he moved and how patient he was."

During the intermission Rudi, Paul and I don't talk much; I am going over what I just saw. Two soldiers on opposite sides doing their patriotic duty. They did not know each other but were ordered to kill one another. Had they met under normal conditions they probably would have been good friends. Why do people still go and die for this?

"What is the next feature?" Rudi is asking.

"I hope it will make me forget the first one." I look at the program, "*Unsere Braven Männer der Infanterie* (Our Brave Men of the Infantry), it says here.

"Look at these poor German infantry men. The Russian T34 tanks are all over them, and how many they have." Our men are badly outnumbered and outgunned. No German Panzer (Tank) is visible, and this

is a German film. “At least they have the Panzerfaust,” (a bazooka-type weapon), Rudi is saying.

“Big deal!” Paul answers. That thing, as good as it is, has a range of only thirty meters, and should you miss the tank you are doomed.”

Paul continues, “Now we know why our guys have been moving back, they don’t have a chance!”

Rudi, Paul and I are walking home.

Rudi says after a long while, “It is like a bad dream.”

I add, trying to be funny, “But we have Göbbels, he is telling us to have hope. The *Wunder Waffe* (wonder weapon) is around the corner.”

“Shut up, Helmut. Can somebody get me a ticket on a Spanish ship to Montevideo?”

Graduation at Ship Artillery College

“Rudi, how do you think we did?”

“The two of us? We can’t miss!” We are talking about the final test we had in the morning.

The last school day is over and the last exam is behind us. Rudi and I sat next to each other in class and our talents complement each other. I am sure we did well in the tests. Tomorrow--the end of August 1943--is the graduation of almost a hundred students of our course at the Schiffs-Artillerie College in Kiel. The nine months course in math, physics, design of guns and fire controls, maintenance and repair is over. It is the petty officer second-class course. Our specialty covers the on-deck artillery and its fire control for all ships and coastal batteries in the German Navy.

In the evening we sit around the table and speculate on what our new assignments will be.

“I hope I finally get on a ship. What is better, a big ship or a small ship? Like a destroyer?” I am asking my roommates that have been on ships for years.

Rudi, who was on the Graf Spee, answers, “A big ship, definitely! You have a galley, a bakery, a laundry, movies, you name it. I prefer a big ship.”

“Helmut, don’t listen to Rudi.” I am surprised. Hans Schumm is speaking up. He is a quiet soft-spoken fellow, who usually listens. I don’t recall he ever had an opposing opinion. All conversation stops.

“Rudi, on your big ship, you were hunted down. Your chances of being effective are limited, if you have any. You know all about the Graf Spee, and then there is the Bismarck.”

Hans reminds Rudi. “I take a small ship, if I can. You know everybody, you are a family. And you are always busy. There is mine laying, mine sweeping, convoy duty, and a skirmish with a British speedboat once in a while. Nothing you can’t handle.”

I think Hans has a point, most of my roommates agree with him.



Petty Officers Graduation, 1943

I am in the third row, the third from the right

All members of our course are standing in formation behind the Ship Artillery College and are ready to listen to Captain Kiena. It is a beautiful late summer day. We are all dressed up for the occasion, our graduation to Artillery Technicians Petty Officer.

It all reminds me of the graduation two and a half years ago, when I stood here first to become an Artillery Technician Seaman.

Lots of things seem to be different. All of us have been out in the field. Some of us have a lot to talk about. Since I was in Norway, I do most of the listening.

Captain Kiena looks much older now. Other than that he seems to be the same realistic thinking officer whom all of us respect.

He stands in front of us, taking his time to look us over. He is proud of his students at graduation time. He has not spoken a word yet. Then, it is as if a shadow goes over his face. He probably thinks what will become of us *out there*.

“We have a difficult job to do,” he starts. He looks from one end to the other of our long formation. “But we are well prepared and we will do our duty to keep the enemy away from our shores. In particular when their intention is to make a potato field out of Germany, to quote Mr. Morgenthau, an advisor to the American president Roosevelt. The daily fire bombing of German cities and resulting murder of women and children tell us what he has planned for us.”

How many more people will he kill before he will say peace has been brought to Germany? How many more German generals have to have ‘auto accidents’ or commit ‘suicides’ at the hand of our Supreme Commander and his henchmen, and how many cities and people will have to go up in smoke before peace is considered an option? Anywhere else this would be called genocide. Suddenly I hear Captain Kiena speaking again.

“Let’s congratulate the ten highest rated students. Rudi’s elbow almost breaks my ribs when he and I are announced as third and fourth. We have the same number of points.

“That’s not bad, out of a hundred,” is Rudi’s comment.

Once the commotion settles a little, Captain Kiena continues, “I am sure you will remember the last nine months as important in your career. What I will hand you now will be just as important, if not more so, your next assignment.”

All of us receive the envelopes with all information about where we go from here.

“Where do you go?” Rudi asks. I am fumbling with my envelope but manage to read my transfer information.

“I have to get on board the destroyer *Z10, Hans Lody*, between September ten and fourteen 1943 in Narvik, Norway,” I read out aloud.

“How about you, Rudi? Where do you go, Montevideo?”

“Psst, don’t tell anybody. But in the meantime I have to report to the North Sea Fleet Headquarter in Wilhelmshaven, that’s all I know.”

After the photographer takes our pictures we are back in our room and talk about our new assignments. I hear that Hans Schumm will go to Wilhelmshaven too.

“Hans, I hear you are going to Wilhelmshaven. Do you remember Charlotte, my pen pal, she lives there?”

“I know! Do you want me to say hello to her Helmut?”

“Yes, take her out for a date if you wish. Here, take her picture along too. I don’t think I will ever get to Wilhelmshaven.”

“Thanks, Helmut, I always liked her on the picture.”

“I know you did, that’s why I mention it. I think she is nice, she always wrote wonderful letters. Let me know what happened whenever we get back together again.”

“Thanks Helmut, thank you very much. I’ll tell her what a nice guy you are.”

P.S. After the war, a few days after we were discharged from the German Navy and were on our way home, I met Hans again by chance in an American holding camp north of Frankfurt. He told me that he had married Charlotte and they lived in Hanau, a large city near Frankfurt.

On Board Destroyer Z10,
Hans Lody
1943 to 1945

My ship, destroyer Hans Lody, is in the Alta Fjord, only a few hundred yards away from the battleship Tirpitz. This fjord is one of the most northern fjords of Norway. Our ship is anchored a few hundred yards from the Tirpitz and from the shore. The coast is hidden in the fog most of the time.

Two months have past that I am part of the crew as a Maat (petty officer second class) and I feel pretty much at home now. Except I hate to live with nine other petty officers in a room eight by sixteen feet. My roommates are okay, at least most of the time. Some I can do without when they are drunk. But the food is pretty good.

Next to me on our table is Alfred, a gentle giant. He is from the Rheinland. All people from that area are supposed to live on the sunny side of life. Alfred lives up to that. He speaks with a lovely sounding dialect, which reminds me of the good time I once had on a short trip along the Rhine River years ago.

“Alfred, do you know what is going on at Christmas here on board?” I know he would not mind my question; the two of us get along well. “I’ll tell you in a little while, Helmut, “he is whispering to me.

After lunch, when we were by ourselves, he tells me. “My guess is we will have a tiny Christmas tree. That is the way it was last year, and then we had too much of grog (Rum and hot water). Let me add I hate it--not because it is Christmas--but some of the guys in our room are then hard to get along with after they have too much grog. After two hours of grog, the window will be opened and the little tree shoved out of it, against the grain. Does that feel like Christmas, Helmut?”

“That’s sounds awful, what are you doing then?”

“I’ll have a few drinks too and than go to my wireless room, that’s off-limits to them.” So I am wondering about Christmas 1943. I can always go down to my fire control computer room. This room is across the aisle from our quarters, the lower deck. The fire control room is off-limits to outsiders too. The room is packed with fancy electro-mechanical computer equipment.

When the thyratrons are blinking their bluish light, the motor-generator-sets are humming and the clutches clicking am I at home.

'My ship' is getting on in years. She was put into service in 1936 and was able to make 36 knots then. But now our boilers are old, 'blowouts' have been welded up, reducing the boiler's capacity. We can only maintain steam pressure for about twenty knots, which is plenty for what we have to do up here.

Right now we have over ninety sea-mines on deck, to be placed several miles out along the coast. But the sea has to be calm and the sky has to be clear. Today is that day.

It is ten o'clock at night right now. The sky is crystal clear but the air is icy. The moon is up; it is ideal for what we have to do. I hear commotion in the boiler room next to our fire control room. Smoke from the chimneys indicates that we will go out soon. I have orders to get the fire control on 'Standby'. I am lucky to have Hans Schmidt in my crew. He is twenty-three, like I, and an experienced fire control technician. Hans repairs watches in his spare time, nothing can rattle him. He is my senior man and has been running our equipment for years. Hans gives me a hand to get things done and he knows what needs tender-loving-care.

"I get the gyros up to speed, they are a little tricky but I have had good luck with them, is that okay with you Maat Standke?"

"Go ahead, Hans, I am glad you are helping me out getting to know our equipment here."

Hans adds, "I sure will feel better when we get rid of all those mines; it's hard to move around, they take up all the space on deck."

"Yes, Hans. Imagine the bang if they would go off on deck?"

"Oh, that doesn't bother me. Whether they blow up on us or not, it's not going to hurt either way." Then he walks away whistling a tune.

I have five fire control seamen in my group; the six of us split three per watch. I will run the first watch and Hans will be running the second. At eleven, I hear the anchor chain rattle and the ship starts to roll a little. The sea is calm. The anti-aircraft artillery guys are at their guns, the fire control operators are at their controls. I sit next to them and listen to the tests that they perform. I have nothing to do right now except to keep my fingers crossed that all checks prove the fire control is battle ready. We technicians did our job. I am lucky to have such capable and willing guys in my group. I hold informal math and electronics lectures with them; it also helps the 'Esprit de corps.' I encourage questions, including private ones. I give advice when I can. Their questions tell me that my crew trusts me, and that I

will be honest and my judgment is good. Our boss is the Fire Control Petty Officer first class, who came up through the ranks like us; I can tell he is one of us. The other day he invited my crew and me to a party right here in the fire control room. He brought French Cognac and we brought a box (24 bottles) of Beck's beer. It was fun to see our group of fire control technicians to be such a tight knit bunch. It was fun, some of us had a little too much of it. Now I have my earphones on to listen in on the traffic between the artillery crew at the five-inch guns, the twenty and the thirty-seven millimeter flak (Flug Abwehr Kanonen), the target acquisition places and the fire control. Everything is working as it is supposed to. We are ready for battle, which I hope will not happen, especially with all those mines on deck.

For several hours now we have maneuvered westward to the open sea, through our own minefields. I am glad our navigators know exactly where the mines are, and the mines are where they are supposed to be, to safely get us through those fields.

It is one o'clock when I hear commotion on deck above us. The vibrations of the ship have stopped and we are slowing down. We must be at location. I am glad we arrived. We have been lucky so far and I hope we turn around soon. I unplug my phone to go on deck; I want to see this. It is bitter cold on deck, even at this slow speed and little wind. No wonder; we are several hundred miles above the Arctic Circle in January 1944. There is not much to see; it looks like a ghost ship without a crew. After a while my eyes have adjusted to the darkness and I start to see things. All anti-aircraft guns are on full alert; the crew's shadows are around the guns. Some places I can make out a cigarette glowing.

These guys have been out in the icy wind for hours now and staring into the dark. It feels good to see them so alert. I am glad I don't have to stand there in the icy night. The mines are on tracks on either side of the ship, so they can be rolled to the stern. A seaman with a stopwatch calls out when a mine has to be rolled overboard. Nothing interesting is actually going on, I better go back to the warm control room and put my earphones back on. An hour later the banging on deck has stopped, and the turbines hum at a higher pitch. A comfortable vibration goes through the ship. Looking at our gages we go east again, we are going home. Even an anchorage can be home.

South Bound

"One mine, ninety degrees, two-hundred meters," the loudspeaker blares. All men on deck look starboard. "There it is," and several hands point to a tiny dark shadow on the water in the distance. Sometimes it is visible; many times it is not. It's barely floating, bobbing up and down. Although it is noontime, it is only twilight this far north. That makes it extra difficult.

My ship has left Alta Fjord and we are going south, to Germany maybe? Good-bye Tirpitz. Take care of yourself.

Hans and I have been crawling around and under the first gun, in the dark, trying to get the megohms up (insulation to ground) on the artillery controls system. Because this gun is often much under water and iced up, it needs constant care. We were trying to dry out the receptacles with a hot air blower, when we heard the announcement.

"Hans, you have been around this mine shooting before, does that happen often?" "No, not that often, maybe once or twice for an entire trip along the coast. We used to sink them by shooting at them with our four-barrel twenty-millimeter gun. One burst, that's all it took."

"Don't the mines blow up when they get hit?" "No, Maat Standke, the mines disarm when they break loose. They just sink."

"They are supposed to, Hans, what if...?"

"We are not to use the twenty-millimeter guns any more, to save ammo, someone has to use a rifle," Hans is telling me.

"I think that is a silly idea, even when you hit that mine, at that shallow angle the bullet will bounce off and will not penetrate the steel shell of the mine to sink it."

"Yes, Maat Standke, I think so too."

"Another thing, when a twenty millimeter hits it, the shell will explode, ripping that mine open."

"We shall see, Maat Standke."

Someone on the bridge--I guess it is the lieutenant--is plinking away at that mine. He wants something to write home about. Most of the time that thing is below the water, the shooting makes no sense.

"How long can this go on, the convoy is miles ahead of us now." I am thinking out loud. We are drifting closer and closer to the mine.

I am uneasy getting that close. We are probably now less than sixty meters from the mine and the rifle shots keep coming.

BANG! Suddenly there is a giant fireball. This mine didn't know the rules. Most of us on deck watching the spectacle get knocked over by the blast. A number of metal pieces come toward us and hit the superstructure. Some are as big as a sea boot. It makes a racket when it hits something.

"Anybody got hurt?" I hear the chief petty officer on the speaker. I look around; it takes awhile until everybody gets up and comes out from behind covers. Not counting a few bruises, nobody got hurt.

"Hans, I wonder if this rifle exercise came to an end."

After a few minutes things are back to normal. We are a lucky ship, again. We arrive in Narvik after a few hours. Five iron ore ships and a troop transport are waiting for us to protect them on their trip to Germany.

Here in Narvik, we have to refuel, that gives some of my shipmates and me a chance to see the town for a few hours. Because I did not see much when I got on board here in Narvik a several months ago, I like to look around. Who knows when I will get another chance?

Narvik is a little but important town, about 250 miles north of the Arctic Circle. Iron ore is shipped from here, instead of from Sweden where it is mined. The Swedish ports on the eastern coast of Sweden, on the Golf of Bothnia, are not ice free in winter, but Narvik is. Narvik is located on the west coast of Norway, and the seawater is saltier and the effects of the Gulf Stream make the difference.

As we stroll through the snow-covered town, we meet several German Infantrymen, a rare sight in this town. "What are you guys doing here?" I ask them. "We are on our way to Germany, we are on vacation," they tell us. "Some ships are supposed to take us down from here," a tall leather-skinned non-com army man tells us.

"We probably have something to do with that," I answer and we shake hands. He grins. Am I glad to get away from the Finnish-Russian front." "How is it going?" He is looking around at his buddies, looking for conformation. I am not sure what that hesitation means.

Then he continues, "I don't mind fighting the Russians and helping the Finns, but I am scared stiff of going out to sea." I try again, "How is that war going in Finland?"

My non-com acquaintance, after scratching his whiskers, is willing to let us know. "It is amazing how well the Finns are able to hold the

Russians back. They are the bravest and most fearless fighters I have ever met. I feel honored to be on their side. Giant Russia has invaded them again and only the German Army is helping them, I wonder for how long. The Americans not only couldn't care less about the Finns; on top of it, they are helping the Russian invaders. I face more and more American equipment on our front. I am afraid it is only a matter of time that the Finns can hold out. God help them!"

"We better go back." I shake his hand, as do my shipmates. "Don't you worry! Our lucky destroyer is with you, nothing will happen to you. Enjoy the trip!"

We are at sea now for days, going at a leisurely ten knots, which is all the freighters can do. Everything is normal; at least what's normal this far North and in winter.

It is only twilight around noon and dark the rest of the day. Once in a while we see an aurora; it is spooky, and pretty in a way. But the air is icy.

At times we deploy minesweeping equipment to cut the cables of mines that the British might have planted here. So far we haven't found any.

After a week of traveling south with our convoy, Denmark comes into view. The coast is green; that alone makes me feel better. And the days are longer. The iron ore ships are leaving us, going to Germany along the western coast of Denmark. Our destroyer Hans Lody and the troop transport ships, with our new friends on board, go on to Copenhagen on the East Coast.

In another day we will be in the harbor of Copenhagen. As we slowly pass the troop transport ships, we wave them good-bye and wish them a good trip home.

Our destroyer ties up on one of the piers, within a short distance of the famous bronze maiden in the sea, not far from the pier. If that doesn't mean good luck, I don't know what does.

What will our next assignment be?

A Good Time in Copenhagen

Three of my roommates and I are meandering through the streets of Copenhagen. It is a beautiful Sunday early afternoon. It is sunny and calm. “Doesn’t it feel good to have the sun warming your back?” I am asking my comrades.

“*Hold it, hold it!*” I stop walking and put my nose up to find out where that good coffee smell is coming from, it is a particular coffee aroma I like and have missed for years.

We have been advised not to walk alone through the streets in the dark. That’s why the four of us went. We look through the shop windows and see everything we can possibly wish to buy. The prices are not bad. I could use a new pair of shoes; as a sailor I pay attention to how I am dressed.

“I wish I had a pair of good shoes.” I am talking to myself; I have not seen those for a long time in Germany, maybe one of these days.

We mingle with ordinary Danes on the sidewalk. They are well dressed and very polite when it gets a little crowded. They easily step aside and make room without comment. I like their manners. It encourages us to do the same. I wonder if other German soldiers notice that the Danes are so polite in the street.

But now I have to track my coffee down. Upwind from us I see a Bakery and Coffee Shop. We open the door to sense the coffee aroma.

“This must be it.” It is Alfred, the connoisseur of wine and coffee.

“It’s a nice place,” he continues, “fancy curtains, fine tablecloth, it looks good.”

I add, “Let’s sit at that table at the sunny window over there; I want to be in the sun. I had enough freezing in Norway; it feels good to be warm, doesn’t it?”

The other two in our group are Rudi and Horst. Rudi is the torpedo technician’s petty officer, another technical character. The two of us communicate well and often wonder about the technical ignorance of other roommates.

We try hard not to overdo it, but we do it all the time and we probably earned the comments that we are arrogant. That’s just too bad, is it our fault that they don’t know anything?

Horst is a boatman; he runs the actual operation in our fire control room when we are on battle station or during exercise.

He is a quiet and likable fellow, fairly tall and husky. He corrects his crew when he has to, but gives praise when it is earned. His men respect him, although he trains them hard. That may pay off should the situation require it.

A young waitress comes over to our table, "*Kaffee?*" she asks us in German. "Would you like a small can, or a pot?"

"A pot, a pot," I tell her, "Your coffee is worth a trip to Copenhagen." To my tablemates I add, "The last good cup I had has been over three years ago, when I was in Kiel. It was a beautiful city then."

After the coffee the waitress brings a large crystal plate with fancy cake.

"Take what you like, we charge only what you take, *guten Appetit.*"

"Guys, don't be shy, we live only once, who knows. It may be a long while before we have this kind of cake again," it's Alfred's comment, and he takes another large piece of the cheesecake.

"The devil makes me do it," Alfred thinks he has to explain.

Horst is fingering the tablecloth, "Man, this is good stuff. Here in Denmark, it is like it used to be in Germany. What a difference four and a half years of war make. You can tell there was no war here in Denmark."

"By the way, Horst, did you notice that the ship was listing when we got off? We were refueling then, could that have anything to do with it?" I am looking at Horst, who does a lot of things that have to do with running our destroyer.

"No, it shouldn't, I noticed it too. The stokers do all the refueling operation. But now you have me worried. I forgot all about it."

I feel my mouth is getting dryer, "It wasn't that bad, but maybe there is something wrong."

Horst is wiping his forehead, "As a boatman I am only indirectly involved, I didn't pay much attention. I was not on watch and I was so eager to go ashore on this fine day."

All of a sudden Horst jumps up, "Hey guys, let's hurry back, something is wrong. I feel it."

We pay and get back to the ship as fast as we can, the last mile we are almost running. As we come closer to the harbor I can make out our two chimneys from a distance above the rooftops.

"Look at the chimneys of our ship; at least it is still afloat. I wonder what it was."

“Thank God.” I don’t recall that Horst ever prayed before.

Karl, another petty officer roommate of ours is on the gangway on watch.

“You guys missed something today, we almost sunk the ship ourselves, and on the pier. We would have been the laughing stock of the entire navy.”

“What happened?” All four of us call out.

Karl continues, “You wouldn’t believe it, some stoker idiot opened the wrong valve during the refueling.” Horst and Karl are both boatmen and work a lot together. Karl is in charge in the operation of the first five-inch gun. But Horst wants details.

“Which compartment got flooded?” Karl is now getting very serious.

“The room where we store the cigarettes! It couldn’t be any worse! Don’t fall over the wet boxes in the isle; we had to clean the compartment out.”

We have to squeeze past the boxes, mostly all cigarette boxes. They stand three feet tall in a puddle of brown juice.

Karl is almost crying, “What will happen to my cigarette ration? I am in trouble.”

I never liked Karl stinking up the small room we live in, but he isn’t the only one. “Karl, I would call the flooding of cigarettes a blessing in disguise. Here is your chance to quit cold turkey. What an opportunity for you.”

“Shut up, wise guy!” Karl is getting upset. I know why.

We sit and sleep on the same bunk, he is on the lower level, and I am on the upper one. I have to tilt up the back of the bunk and hook it up to a couple of chains when I want to go to sleep. In the evening we have to coordinate the bunk situation.

Karl is one of those guys who look for trouble when they have had a drink. I was only a couple of weeks on board when one evening Karl came back from shore leave.

Most of my roommates and I were playing cards, until Karl came in. He acted as if he had a drink or two. He looked around first and then focused on me. He is a broad shouldered one hundred-ninety pound husky guy versus my one hundred-thirty pounds, dripping wet. I disappear when I stand behind him. First I tried to be a diplomat.

He mumbled about something and grabbed my shirt. It became very quiet in the room.

Most of my roommates were ready to hold Karl back. I figured this is a chicken-pecking contest, I am new around here. But I am on the spot; I can't get out of this one.

Karl tried to hit me but missed, I really had no choice. I hit back. When it became clear that I was holding more than my own, at least for now, my roommates leaned back and enjoyed Karl standing there with a split lip.

After a while my roommates did step in and pulled us apart. I was glad they did, I realized in the long run my luck would run out.

The next morning, as always, half of the crew was assembled on the aft-deck. We petty officers second class stand by ourselves.

Karl, with a shiner and Band-Aid on his lip was standing in the third row; I am in the front row, as always. I too had a few blue spots, but none are showing.

My boss, the artillery technician's petty officer first class, was so proud of me.

"Maat Standke, next Saturday the Artillery Technician's Group will have a party in the fire control room." He didn't stop shaking my hand. At the party I found out that he too beat up the big boatmen's petty officer when they had a party, and he marked him with a shiner.

My fight with Karl was a few months ago, but I have never been sure about Karl since.

It is now almost a week after the cigarettes got flooded and Karl hasn't had a smoke for days. The wet cigarette boxes are still standing in the isle and are oozing brown tobacco juice.

"Helmut, you don't smoke, can I borrow a package of cigarettes from you?"

I know from experience that one can never expect to get cigarettes back from a smoker. So, loaning Karl a package of cigarettes makes no sense.

We get ten cigarettes a day, and I send some of them to dad, some I give away. But I always have some, wondering what I can do with them.

We technical petty officers have to go on watch about once a week from ten p.m. to two a.m. or from two a.m. to six a.m. when we are on the pier or anchored. I hate it! The boredom is killing me. There is absolutely nothing to do. Time stands still!

I have an idea. "Karl, I'll make you an offer you can't refuse. I'll give you thirty cigarettes; I mean a package and a half, if you take over my

watch tonight from two to six in the morning. What do you think? Thirty is a lot of cigarettes; you can smoke all night and then some." Karl almost hugs me, "You got it, Helmut, thank you, thank, thank you! Can I have some now?"

"Yes, I'll give you ten cigarettes now and the other twenty tonight, Karl. Is that okay? Glad to help you out."

If this cigarettes-for-watch thing is catching on, my watch problem will be solved.

Sailing Home

May 1944

"Alfred, what are you so happy about?"

"Am I? How do you know I am happy?"

"Alfred, I know you by now. Today you're walking around with a smile on your face for no apparent reason. And you whistle "*Muss I denn, muss I denn zum Städtele hinaus*" (A happy German folk song about a young man who has to go out of town but is promising his sweetheart he will return). Everybody knows that melody. Alfred, fess up. Did you learn something in the wireless room that you can't tell me?"

“I am not supposed to tell anybody, but you guessed it, I didn’t tell you. Tomorrow we are sailing home to our base harbor, Kiel, Germany.” May is a good time to be in Germany, normally at least. The last three months we have been patrolling the Skagerrak, a one hundred-mile strait between Denmark and Norway. We tried to make it difficult for the British to obtain Swedish ball bearings. We were stationed in Frederiks Havn at the Kattegat Strait, in the north of Denmark, fifty miles from Göteborg, Sweden. In the north, in Norway, our harbor was Kristiansand. Frederiks Havn and Kristiansand are both nice clean little towns with a harbor; shipping is their business. In Kristiansand everything is scarce; in Frederiks Havn everything is available. I managed to get a fancy pair of black shoes here, trading a shoe carton full of reclaimed tobacco for the shoes.

For weeks we put up with those wet and smelly cigarettes in seawater soaked boxes. But then several of us figured if we take the wet paper off the cigarettes the tobacco can be dried. Smokers do not mind anything as long as it smokes.

We get information when the British boat leaves Göteborg, their shipping point, but we do not have radar and because they use speedboats, we never caught any. Rumor has it we get a new boiler and will have radar installed. I wonder how long that will take. The war may be over by then.

In the news we have seen Field marshal Rommel inspecting the fortifications in the west along the Atlantic Coast.

His report, *Considerable improvements still have to be made*. That tells me a lot.

Early in the morning the boiler room gets busy. Not the thick black sooty smoke we sometimes see when we have to go out in a hurry—caused by lack of air for a decent combustion—but normal white smoke, telling me this is a planned trip. It is a sunny day as we sail eastward along the Norwegian coast. It is strange, normally we go southeast. As we come to the little Norwegian town of Arendal and tie up on the pier it becomes clear. Several herring trawlers are also on the pier, unloading and packaging herrings they caught at their normal fishing places near Newfoundland. Our captain must have known. He is giving us a chance to bring something along when we come home. Something to eat, more than anything else, is always welcome. The pier is covered with long tables and workers who clean out the herrings and pack them with layers of salt in barrels. One fellow looks like the boss and several of us inquire how we can buy some herrings. “You have to buy the whole case and split it between yourselves. We sell you the salt too. Go a couple of blocks through Arendal and get yourself wooden barrels

and tubs and you are all set.” We do just that, and in half an hour, we are back. I bought two wooden tubs with a lid that will hold about forty pounds of herrings each, according to the merchant. I look at how the Norwegian workers clean out the fish. I also buy a special knife they use. My buddies and I buy a large case, at least two hundred pounds of fish, and get busy. I remove head and tail from the herrings to pack more herrings. Mama will be happy when she sees the eighty pounds of herrings. Food is rationed at home and often none is available. They often go hungry. As I am lugging my tubs on board I am asked, “Where did you get the herrings from?” I turn my head to point to the pier.

“Do you see that guy who looks like Santa Claus, the one with that booming voice, talk to him. The tubs I got in town, a couple blocks from here on the main street.” I am back on deck and join many other seamen, with containers of all kinds full with salt herrings. “Where can we put all the herrings?” is what everybody wants to know.

Here comes the Chief Petty Officer on board, with at least a hundred pounds of herrings, he ought to know. All eyes are on him. I am confident he will have a solution. He always has the right answer when things are difficult. He looks around, and then looks at us. “Hey men, mark your containers first with your name. Place them around the torpedo turrets; we never need them, around the searchlights, chimneys, places like that. Leave the guns clear, just in case. I think we are as good as home, a couple of days, maybe. Get in touch with me in Kiel, I will arrange for a truck to get all this stuff to the railroad station so you can ship it home.” The deck becomes an ant heap. More and more herrings come on board. By nightfall, the containers are stacked several feet high at all available places everywhere on deck. There is no complaint, no negative comment. A new mood of *togetherness* has come over the ship.

As long as the sea is calm and we do not have to go on battle station, we will get the herrings safely home to Germany.

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Overhaul and Update the Ship

We made it safely to Kiel, herrings and all. Kiel is our home base and in the southwest corner of the Baltic Sea, south of Denmark. It is the home base for the Baltic Sea Fleet.

Finally, we are tied up in the shipyard. All ammunition, depth charges, torpedoes and other explosives have been unloaded first before we where cleared to come in.

This is a busy place. Another destroyer is waiting to come in on the west-side of the bay across from us.

“Rudi, let’s find out where the nearest air raid shelter is, just in case.”

“Right over there, fifty yards from here. That tunnel entrance that you see goes into the hill. I know I have been here before.” Rudi and I are leaning over the railing as if we had nothing to do; in fact, we do have almost nothing to do. Rudi continues, “In an air raid everybody goes to the shelter, only three men remain on board as watch.”

We observe Karl, who is on deck duty and helps a houseboat to come length side. The houseboat will give us a place to stay while work is performed on our ship. The houseboat is really a barge that needs a tugboat to move from place to place.

Karl comes over to join us. “Tomorrow we get off the ship and move over to the houseboat, including anything that can be moved. The dock workers can then move around our ship at will. Helmut, I saw on the board you are on watch tonight?”

“Yes, I am. I just found out I have to stay on board, even in an air raid. Whoever is on duty stays on board. Here in Kiel that’s not a good place to be. It is more dangerous than being at sea.”

“That’s what I want to talk to you about, Helmut. If you want me to do your watch tonight, including being on ship during an air raid, don’t you think that’s worth forty cigarettes?”

“I guess you are right, Karl. It’s not the same as being on the pier in Copenhagen. You got it, Karl.”

Sure enough, in the middle of the night we have an air raid. All crews of ships nearby gather in the shelter. Some of us try to sleep, forget it. Others show off their talents to entertain, and an hour or two go by before you know it.

Nothing happened on our side of the bay where all the shipyards and arsenals are. But we heard a few bomb explosions that were close enough to shake things up a bit. Karl earned his cigarettes.

On the next day we move onto the houseboat next to our ship. I take a break and look over the bay to the city. Some areas are still burning and black smoke clouds are visible.

Rudi joins me. “Noticed something across the bay, Helmut?”

“Not really, what are you looking at?”

“The place we were yesterday, a few hours ago. Look again.”

“You are right, only the chimneys are visible. That destroyer that went to the pier after us, it got bombed and sank. Oh my God, I hope the men got off and didn’t get killed.”

"Our luck is holding out, Rudi, *Drei mal Holz*, (knock on wood, three times)," and I knock on my head three times.

Because of our apparently long stay in the shipyard, our officers have been reassigned. They will leave tomorrow. That is what all the noise is about; they are having a going-away party.

The houseboat is a very noisy place to live on, it is all steel plates and none are insulated. The officers are making a racket that sounds through the entire houseboat. It is ten o’clock at night and we hope they will stop soon. My roommates and I are playing cards and chess, waiting to go to sleep. After a while we realize that is not going to happen.

Karl is tapping his fingers on the table and pays less and less attention to the chess game, and he is starting to make the dumbest mistakes.

All of a sudden he slams his fist on the table and yells, “That bunch is drinking our schnapps and smoking our cigarettes, and now they are making a racket that will not let us go to sleep.” We are all waiting to see Karl explode.

“I got an idea guys," Alfred announces, "see what I found in my bunk when we moved in the morning, a bottle of Hennessy French Cognac, what do you say?”

Alfred brings out a bottle of this fine stuff he has been talking about for some time. Here is my chance to find out.

We have been out of Cognac glasses for a long time, but our sturdy eggcup will do fine. The bottle and the eggcup are making the rounds and we have our own party going.

It is early in the morning when there is *Ruhe im Schiff* (Quiet on the ship). Only Karl had to go on deck duty at six o'clock. Suddenly our door flies open and Karl storms in.

"You've got to see this, come on out and look! You'll laugh yourself silly! Come on, come on!"

Karl has a hard time getting us going after the party last night.

I don't have a clue what Karl is talking about. Nobody has an idea what got Karl so excited. All of us follow Karl on deck in our Pajamas to see what it is.

Karl is pointing over the railing to the water below. He can't talk for laughing. When we recognize the situation we laugh too. Now we are even. These guys didn't let us sleep last night, now it's our turn to laugh.

From what it looks like five stoned officers and a young sailor, with five large suitcases, tried to row in a dinghy-for-three across the bay to catch the first train.

All six are swimming back to the houseboat now, but without their suitcases. The dinghy has capsized. They have only twenty yards to swim, that's as far as they got. Lucky for them! It could have been worse!

But fifty seamen are standing several feet above them and are laughing, while they stand there in wet uniforms freezing and having lost their entire luggage with all their belongings.

Several days later a large group of us is watching our diver, with pumping crew and support, trying to find the suitcases. He tried for thirty minutes and then signaled to come up.

After the diver's helmet has been removed he reports, "It is too muddy down there, I can't see a thing. There is nothing I can do. Sorry about that!"

Will She Ever Sail Again?

Our ship is now the second week in the shipyard in Kiel. It looks spooky now. The deck above the boiler room has been placed on the pier, chimneys and all. I can look from the pier into the boiler room. Cables and pipes that were once attached to the underside of the deck are now hanging crisscross everywhere. I wonder if all those guts will be reconnected to where they belong when the new boiler is in.

My five technicians and I are in the fire control room where I am going over the operation of fire control equipment with them, when our boss, the petty officer first class comes down.

“You will not believe this, but the fire control equipment will come out too for overhaul,” he tells us. “I tried to talk them out of it, but we have no say in it.”

I voice my concern, “I hope it doesn’t get damaged in the process and we will be worse off. It worked flawlessly. The arsenal workers don’t want to get drafted, I think, that’s all it is. The army takes anybody right now.”

“I think so too, but can you blame them?” He replies. “By the way, I will leave you guys in two weeks.”

I don’t think I hear right, “What are we are going to do without you?”

“You will do fine, I am sure of that. I transfer to the Reserve Officer’s Training School, but it will be in another two weeks. A lot of updating to the ship will take place.

We will get radar; the third five-inch gun will be removed and replaced with ten 37-millimeter self-loading anti-aircraft guns. That requires changes to be made to the fire control.

“Prepare for the removal of the equipment Maat Standke. We get together later, okay?”

“Yes sir, I will prepare for the removal.”

A large hole, about four feet by four feet has been cut into the deck above us. It doesn’t take long and our precious equipment has been removed and is on the way to the arsenal’s workshop.

My five technicians and I stand in our near empty control room. We are speechless, shake our heads and stare at the large hole in the ceiling. Who is going to listen to us?

What are they going to do to my fire control? I am almost certain I will not see my equipment again.

It is early in June of 1944; our lieutenant--now our present commander, the only officer left on the ship--wants the remaining crew to come to the conference room on the houseboat. I am surprised how well he is running the ship now. He used to be a flunky and we didn't think he would ever grow up. But he grew up in a hurry and doesn't mind to take responsibility for things. He is also generous in authorizing shore leave.

We are a small group that's still left on the ship. Many crewmembers are on vacation or on training courses, like our fire control team and the entire artillery crew.

“What can the lieutenant possibly tell us? Did peace break out?”

When the lieutenant walks into the room the gossip stops. “Men, I just got news from headquarters, I'd like to share it with you. The invasion of France by the Western allies is imminent. We don't know exactly when and where, but it is imminent. I will keep you up to date.” He salutes and leaves.

Since we expected the invasion to happen we are not surprised. The Norwegians told me three years ago that they observed American forces practicing landing maneuvers while Norwegian boats were herring fishing near Newfoundland.

We have air raids almost every night, most of the time more than one. Tonight we had one that hit the east of the bay, where all the shipyards are. I could feel the ground shaking; it must have been a near miss.

We feel pretty safe in our tunnel, but I worry about the watch on our ship. These poor guys are probably still shaking. All they can do is stand under the ship's bridge to keep from getting hit by all the steel shrapnel that is raining down on them.

The raid lasted only a little over one hour but it must have been close.

We come out of the tunnel and look around. Our ship is okay, but this time the shipyards were bombed and many buildings are in flames.

The next day at noontime the phone rings. I hear the lieutenant's voice.

“Maat Standke, I hate to tell you this, but the arsenal burned down during the bombing last night. I just got a call; our equipment is somewhere in the rubble.

I talked to headquarters in Berlin; they decided that our fire control equipment would be remanufactured and replaced.

That’s where I need you, Maat Standke. The manufacturer is Siemens in Berlin. It is your program anyway and you are at home in Berlin. I have a list of four destroyers of our type on the Baltic Sea Coast and the harbors where they are now. The list shows the parts that Siemens wants out of the spare boxes of each ship.

The project engineer at Siemens is Friedrich Winzer. Get the spare parts to him, he is your contact, and he is also the project engineer on our equipment. Any questions?”

“No sir, I will leave tomorrow morning.”

“One more thing, play it by ear. Report back to me your impressions of Winzer. Stay longer in Berlin if you have to. We need that equipment, I am sure you know all that.”

“Yes sir, you can depend on me.”

For two days I have been traveling from port to port. I managed to collect all the spare parts from the other destroyers of our class that Siemens requested.

I took the train to Berlin and am at the project engineer Winzer’s desk at Siemens now, in my navy uniform and I get help wherever I go. Project engineer Winzer gets up from his desk and greets me.

“Sorry to hear you lost your fire control equipment in a bombing raid. But all our engineering data is in good shape and we can make another system like yours. We need about three months, that would be October then, *wenn nichts dazwischen kommt*, (if nothing else happens).

“I understand. I saw the two meter thick brick wall that is being built around the building, only two stories high at this time,” I mentioned. “Are you going to make that wall as high as the building?”

“If it will get finished, who knows,” he answers. He seems to be a realistic and an honest fellow.

Winzer and I shake hands. We look at each other; we know that many things can happen to revise our plans.

It is October now. The new boiler and the radar have been installed.

I will find out if this new radar is any good when I compare the data with our excellent optical equipment. The installation of ten 37-millimeter anti-aircraft guns is almost completed.

But the access hole in the fire control room ceiling is still open and my fire control computers have not been shipped.

"Maat Standke, our equipment at Siemens is ready for testing. Winzer requested that you witness the test. That is very good news. Take off tomorrow and come back with the equipment. Do whatever it takes! You have my blessings!"

"Yes sir, I'll leave tomorrow morning."

The trains are more or less on schedule, with interruptions due to burning cities or damage to the track. But trains get rerouted and traffic is manageable. A day later I am at Siemens and on my way to Herr Winzer. As I walk up the stairs I look out of the window and notice the thick wall is almost gone; they are taking it down again. I guess Siemens doesn't want to be stuck with that monstrous contraption when the war is over. Do they know something?

Herr Winzer and I shake hands as if we have known each other for a long time. "Have a seat Herr Standke. We are almost on schedule, not quite. You live here in Berlin, don't you?"

"Yes, I do."

"I have let your lieutenant know that the testing will be a week from now, I am sure he will agree. We are going to keep this up from week to week for about three to four weeks. By then the equipment will be tested and can be shipped. We will fill out the paper work so that you will get your food ration stamps while you are here. Does that sound reasonable? Herr Standke?"

"Yes, then I can return with the equipment, that's what I am supposed to do. I have nothing to do in Kiel anyway."

"Call me every week to find out when the actual test day is or if anything has changed, Herr Standke."

"Auf Wiedersehen Herr Winzer."

The equipment was completed as promised. It arrived and is installed at the end of October. Preliminary tests indicate it is working okay. I got a few weeks vacation out of this disaster. It was nice to be with Mama again. When Mama got my letter that I would be home for a few weeks she came right away from her place in East Prussia, where she has been evacuated. Papa is still fire-chief in a factory in Belgium somewhere.

May 1945, is it over? Can we go Home now?

My destroyer Hans Lody is back in operation and we patrol the straits between Norway and Denmark again. Not much has changed up here. Everywhere else it looks like the war is almost over.

“Crank up the volume, I want to hear what the news is!” says Karl sitting next to me at lunchtime. My nine roommates and I stop chatting. It is the end of April 1945 and our ship is back on the pier in Copenhagen.

“The Russian Army advanced farther into Berlin and entered Karlshorst,” we hear, “we will report more as long as we can.”

We look at each other. The tone of the news is different; none of Göbbels’ hold-out’ stuff.

“Where is Karlshorst?” Karl asks...

“It is about where my home is,” I answer. “To be exact, it is 27km (17miles) from city center. I rode my bike for five years along the street where the Russians are right now.”

“This is terrible,” is Karl’s reply.

“Why is it, Karl? Think about it. The most important thing is the killing will stop. On average, the British and American bombers probably will kill ten thousand civilians every day or night, just to terrorize the ordinary population, mostly women, children and old people.

It is quiet in the room. I guess it is difficult to accept that the end of the war is a good thing, unfortunate, as it may seem. In addition it will stop Hitler’s maniacs from destroying what’s left of Germany. They are blowing up bridges, destroying communication facilities, schools and anything of value.

It is too quiet in the room and I wonder if my roommates understand what I am talking about. Suddenly I see my shipmates looking at me with strange faces. I think I am too far ahead of them. I have the feeling they think I am a turncoat. Who knows what desperate people can turn into?

“What I mean is, from the point in Berlin where the Russians are now, it can’t take more than a day or two at the most, and they will be at Hitler’s bunker. I know the area in detail, I grew up there. Believe me!”

Another announcement comes over the radio, "Doenitz has been given the post of chancellor and he will form a new government."

That will help clarifying the situation. I think my roommates come around accepting the fact.

Although Germany surrendered and the truce will start on May the eighth 1945, in a couple of days, the German Navy in the Baltic Sea has one more job to do. About 30, 000 German soldiers have been fighting for dear life on the peninsula Hela in the Bay of Danzig, fifty miles to the east of Copenhagen. They have been starving all winter and would certainly die or be killed by the Russians.

Russian submarines are known to be in the area between Hela and Copenhagen. They torpedoed the refugee ships Wilhelm Gustloff, Steuben and Goya in early 1945 with a total loss of over twenty thousand civilian refugees from the eastern provinces. Almost all were woman and children that died in the icy waters.

To get the German soldiers out of Hela a flotilla of seven destroyers—including the Hans Lody—and a former cruise ship is on the way from Copenhagen.

We arrive late at night at Hela. I am on watch in my fire control room when I hear the commotion on deck. I guess German soldiers are coming on board. I don't hear loud voices and it all seems to get done in an orderly fashion.

Before daybreak we leave Hela and sail back to Copenhagen. I now have a chance to go on deck.

At least two hundred tired and emaciated soldiers sit on deck. They rest their back on the superstructure and have their first decent meal in months.

They know they have been the lucky ones and have a good chance to see their families again.

"Thank you, thank you for getting me out of there and take me to the West," I hear wherever I go.

Our flotilla is heavily armed and we don't think a Russian submarine would dare. To be sure sailors are on watch everywhere.

Our rescue flotilla arrives in Copenhagen at late noon on the eighth of May, disembarking our army men right away. The plan is to go back one more time and several ships leave right away.

Our destroyer is low on fuel and we stay in Copenhagen over night. The captain announces that we have enough fuel to leave Copenhagen early in the morning and sail home to Kiel, our home base.

Today is the ninth of May 1945, and we have peace! Peace, after many years of killing and suffering which affected mostly the innocents.

It is a beautiful sunny day as our destroyer 'Hans Lody-Z10' is making her last voyage, HOME.

I am standing next to the Target-Acquisition, on a platform in front and a little below the ship's bridge. Here stands 'My Baby', a large Zeiss binocular connected by synchros to the fire control.

It is a comfortable place to be on a sunny day at peacetime. I will get used to it in no time.

A couple of our lieutenants and a few other seamen have joined me.

We are very relaxed; apparently we are in the process of becoming normal people.

"What are you going to do when you get home Standke?" one of the lieutenants asks me. He didn't say Maat (petty officer 2nd CL.) Standke, it sounds good.

"I will study engineering. I hope that all engineering colleges are not rubble by now, I have not heard from home for months.

"I hope my family is still alive after all the bombings of Berlin and the Russians fighting their way to Hitler's bunker. I'm sure it will be a long time before I'll know."

The lieutenants did not have a clue what they are going to do. "Maybe I will help out on the family farm," says one of them.

It is four o'clock when our ship enters the Kieler Bay. The British Navy now runs the harbor and they signal us to strike the flag.

Our captain decides we take the flag down at six o'clock, as we have always done.

It is six o'clock now and the entire crew is assembled on deck. The captain--he is a mature reserve officer and we all like him--makes an informal speech before the flag comes down.

"I thank you all for the service you performed for Deutschland, day in and day out. We had no choices in this war, soldiers never have. We did our duty nonetheless. Let us go home now and start rebuilding. Let us be doubly careful whom we will vote for as new leaders. Watch them carefully.

"We will be occupied for years to come. Don't expect justice. It will be a difficult time. You will be dealing with people who know little of Germany and have been indoctrinated for years to kill us and make a potato field out of Germany. They have killed over a million civilian

people in their bombing raids, even after the war was decided in Stalingrad at the beginning of 1943. The killing continued even after July 1944 when the German Army tried to assassinate Hitler. This is terror by the powers which entered the war to end terrors.

"Educate yourself, work hard and be patient, then you will have a future. By lowering our flag, your service in the German Navy has ended, *de facto*. I wish you all good luck for the future. May God be with you!" As soon as our flag has been lowered a motorboat with the British flag comes over from shore and comes length side our ship. It carries the British harbor commander and half a dozen British seamen, armed to their teeth with two pistols each and a bunch of hand grenades. These guys are dangerous; I hope they know what they are doing. I feel like telling them, hey guys, we are not going to hurt you, the war is over. Stop shaking. But what would be the point? Instead we are smiling at these kids. Let's not make them nervous.

When the British harbor commander steps on deck our seaman on duty pipes him on board and leads him and four of his sailors to our captain. We hang around on deck, talk and look at the two British sailors that remained in their boat. Their uniforms are dirty and tattered and they are uncomfortable looking at our guns.

After about twenty minutes the British harbor commander and his sailors come back on deck. The harbor commander carries our captain's wall clock under his arm. I wonder what he will now tell folks back home.

"This is your Chief Petty Officer," we hear the announcement. "We will all remain on ship for another day or two. Service from the galley will continue as usual. I will inform you when we get off the ship, over."

P.S. The refugee ship Wilhelm Gustloff was torpedoed in January 1945, 9,300 people died.

The refugee ship Steuben was torpedoed in February 10, 1945, 4,000 people died, 630 survived.

The refugee ship Goya was torpedoed in April 16, 1945. 7,000 people died, 172 survived.

All were torpedoed by a Russian submarine in the Baltic Sea a few miles from the German coast.

The war was over, the 8th of May 1945.

POW

We are starving in the POW camp on the island of Femarn.

It is sunny and warm on this former tourist resort island in the Baltic Sea east of Kiel. The crew of our destroyer and many other navy soldiers walked the fifty miles from Kiel to Femarn in a couple of days. Because we couldn't carry much, we abandoned most of what we started out with when we walked off the ship. Besides our blue uniforms—without the brass buttons, the British made an issue out of it—and boots and shoes and some underwear; we do not have much any more. We are housed in large tents near the beach, about a hundred of us in one tent.

After a week of no food some improvement has been made. It is noontime and our chief petty officer should come any time to bring us our daily ration. We are starving and hope he will be here soon.

A blanket is spread on the ground, and two breads for thirty men is sliced and shared by all of us. It is two thin slices and usually two cigarettes a day per man. Sometimes we get a teaspoon of sugar too. That's it for the day.

Karl comes over to me and asks, "Helmut, can I trade you my two slices of bread for your two cigarettes?"

"But Karl, you've got to eat something, I'd hate to do that to you."

"Never mind, Helmut, I don't feel the hunger when I smoke. Don't worry about me, I am pretty tough."

"Okay Karl, I really hate to do it, but I am terribly hungry, and it hurts."

I know I have to eat more. In the morning I got up and found myself flat on the ground again. I don't know how long I was out. Otherwise I feel okay. I don't know how Karl is doing it.

A kitchen has started to operate the last few days. So far, they ladle out warm water with five or six peas per ladle in it.

It's a start; maybe it will get better. If we are still around by then. You have to have a ticket to be eligible, no seconds.

Nobody has dishes of any kind. We have to share a large tin for four of us. A spoon and the tin can keep going around the four of us until the tin is empty. One morning a note on the bulletin board advises us to report to the office, a little tent next to ours with a German seaman as a clerk.

We are to report the location of our hometown, the zone, English, American, French or Russian.

“Helmut, what are you going to say? I have to go to a little place in the Russian Zone. Are you going to tell them you have to go to Berlin?”

“Hell no, Karl! The Russians would probably ship you straight to Siberia, and you are never heard from again. Don’t do that! At least not until we have more information.”

“Then what are you going to do?”

“Karl, I am not sure what the best thing is right now. I don’t think we have to do anything for the moment. We have to hold out a little while longer. By then, hopefully, it will become clearer.”

“Thanks, Helmut, will you keep me informed?”

“You bet, Karl, I will not forget.”

It is in the middle of July. We all have been powdered with DDT and finally have gotten rid of the lice. This stuff is amazing. The lice are gone in a day. The itching has stopped and the skin is healing now.

We never had lice before, but somehow in this camp we all got them. What a curse it is. You itch all over and scratch yourself bloody.

Middle July 1945, we have good news. The names of a few lucky guys have been called to go through the discharge process to get their discharge papers and go home. All are from the British Zone; all are coal miners or transportation people.

As much as I’d like to go home, Berlin is in the Russian Zone. There is too much bad news about the Russians; almost all women have been raped, civilian men are being shot, POWs from the west are being transferred to inland Russia or Siberia, and on and on. So, that’s out!

I hope that Mama and my sister Inge could hide somewhere. I don’t know if Papa made it home from Belgium. I do not even know if they are still alive, or if Oberschöneweide has been bombed to a pile of rubble.

There is much more agriculture in the south, the American zone.

That is it! I’ll go south!

“Karl, I think we have all the information we need. The release of POWs has started, and it seems very orderly. I will now go and register that I have to go to the American Zone. I think they will go home shortly, like the British Zone POWs.”

“Helmut, what are you going to tell them when they ask why you aren't going to Berlin? All data in the *Soldbuch* (Military Personal Booklet) shows you are from Berlin.”

“I know, Karl. I tell them my parents evacuated late in the war to Frankfurt. That's in the American Zone. I don't know what I am going to do there, but first things first.

“I don't think the British care, they are happy to get rid of us. The Americans are not the kind of people that care much about anything, much less about a lousy POW. Don't worry, Karl.”

To register I walk over to that little tent 'office'. I ask the clerk, a low ranking German seaman.

“You guys make one list after another and when the time comes to go home my name never comes up.” I raised my voice, wondering if the stripes on my jacket will still do the trick.

“What's going on here?”

“What is your name, sir?”

“Standke, Helmut Standke, American Zone.”

“Just a minute, sir.” He goes over the list a number of times and can't find Standke. Strange, isn't it?

I growl at the poor man and then give him all the data he wants to amend the list.

“I am sorry sir. I will amend the list right now and make sure everything gets updated.”

“Okay, let's be careful with those lists, they are very important!”

It worked. A week and a half later my name is called and I join the lucky ones getting out of here.

About one hundred of us POWs are bussed to a British camp on the mainland, with British soldiers running around by the hundreds. I never saw a British soldier on our German POW camp on the island Femarn. Law-and-order was maintained by unarmed German sailors.

“If you still have your *Soldbuch* (Military Personal Booklet) to prove to the British that you were in the German Navy, the case is simple.” Our Chief Petty Officer had suggested to us from the beginning to hang on to our *Soldbuch*.

In a day, I receive news that my discharge papers from the British authorities are ready.

A special train transfers all of us who go to the American Zone to an American army base in the American Zone. We get plenty of food for the trip and after two days arrive in Marburg, fifty miles north of Frankfurt.

That's as far as the railroad is operable, the remaining fifty miles are still in repair and we will continue by bus or truck we are told.

Marburg is an old and pretty town with a university since 1550AD, now with an American army base nearby. Apparently the base is in the middle of a wheat field. All around the base is wheat. It is a peaceful, warm and sunny day. My buddies and I are assigned a tent, and get an Army Menu Package for two of us. Two of us share an Army Menu #5--the cigarettes and the chocolate are missing, and we talk about the past and speculate about the future.

"Enjoy yourself, when transportation is available we will let you know."

I look around to become familiar with where our tent is so I will find it again. There are several hundred of them and they all look alike.

I know that guy over there. It is Hans Schumm; I graduated with him a couple of years ago at the Ship Artillery College in Kiel. I remember he had married my former pen pal.

"Hello Hans! Good to see you! You are almost home. Another couple of days or so. Do you still live in Hanau near Frankfurt?"

"I do, if Hanau is still there. I heard that Hanau no longer exists. It has been totally bombed out, just recently. I understand that there is not a single block standing. I have not heard from my parents or Charlotte, I hope they are still alive."

"We could go to the engineering college in Hanau, but it is doubtful that it still exists. Why don't you come and visit us, it is not far from Frankfurt by train, Charlotte will get a kick out of it, meeting her pen pal."

"Hans, I promise I'll come. I don't know either how my family is in Berlin, there is no mail going from one zone to another.

Maybe one of these days I'll sneak across the iron curtain. So far one hears only bad news from the Russian Zone, nothing but killings and raping."

Hans left in the morning by military truck to Frankfurt, and then he will take the train to get home. I hope he finds one. I volunteered to stay here for a week at the American base, to do some minor chores. The food is good; I wouldn't mind staying here longer. What would I do in Frankfurt anyway?

After a week I go on to Frankfurt by truck. It is a wild ride. The American soldier is driving like crazy--one leg casually sticking out of the

door--along a bombed out and barely fixed mountain road. It is not a big truck, the flat bed barely holding us thirty former POWs. We are packed so tightly that you cannot move. Those of us who can look over the cab and see the road in front of us yell when to lean to the right or to the left, to keep the truck from rolling down the mountain slope.

When we finally arrive in Frankfurt and get off the truck, I see the driver grinning from ear to ear. He meant to scare us a little. I wish him luck.

The truck drops us off at the railroad station. I am handed my discharge papers—dated July 21.1945--and am entitled to one meal at the Red Cross right here.

After finishing my meal--a tasty stew--I step out to the curb and look around.

I wish I knew someone here in Frankfurt.

CHAPTER FIVE

GOING HOME

From Frankfurt to Berlin

I am in Frankfurt, Now What? At least I am not hungry, for the moment. How can I get a place to stay? Ideal would be a job with room and board. I wonder if there is such a thing in this bombed out city. Let's find out!

It looks like those two guys on the street corner are natives. They have been standing there for a while and don't seem to be in any hurry to go anywhere. One is dressed in parts of a German Army uniform with large letters POW on his back, I wonder what that means. The other must have been in the Luftwaffe.

Our uniforms look 'used', but that's all we have. I have been in camps now for weeks. Chances are these two guys have been there too. They are my age; it can't hurt to talk to them.

"Guten Tag. I hope you can help me."

"Guten Tag, I hope we can, sailor."

"I just got to Frankfurt. I am new around here, I am looking for a place to stay, and I am trying to get a job."

"Oh boy, you are asking for a lot in this bombed-out city."

"I know, but I didn't want to go to Berlin on the Russian side and end up in Siberia."

The airman shakes his head, "I don't blame you, but it is almost impossible to get a room in this city. Most of it has been destroyed by the constant bombings and fire.

"Not only that," the army man adds, "The *Amis* (Americans) put a twenty foot high fence around most of what was not destroyed; and kicked the people out of their homes."

"And threw furniture and anything else they had no use for out of the windows into the street as trash--even from the fifth floor--to be bulldozed together and taken to the dump." The airman adds,

"If we had done that in France we would be war criminals and in jail or in a coal mine, if the mob would not have strung us up first!

"The *Amis* will be at war here for years to come, they have been indoctrinated and they believe that we are the Huns."

"That sounds grim, fellows. I had hoped we will finally get rid of the Nazis and have a democracy in Germany again." We should have known better.

I wish I knew what to do now!

"I hope I didn't discourage you too much, but when you see all that... I had to let off steam."

The army man tries to be helpful. "There is a slim chance, but here is what I would do.

"Go down the main street--watch out for *Amis* in their little cars, they call them jeeps. They go almost one hundred miles per hour in the city and pretend they will run you over. Sometimes they succeed. Watch out for them when you cross the street. After about three miles, you come to an area that is not too badly damaged. On the right you see that tall fence I was talking about with 'OFF LIMITS' signs every fifty meters.

"I have to explain something to you first. In Frankfurt you have to rent out a room to a refugee if your dwelling exceeds a certain area per person. With luck you find someone who will rent a room to you. Single persons are preferred over families. I would try that. Don't you think Werner?"

"That's your best and only chance sailor, I wish you luck!"

"*Vielen Dank*, I better be going."

I can now see the tall fence on the other side of the street. American soldiers are throwing a ball back and forth behind the fence; all

dressed in what looks like brand new uniforms. All look like clean cut young men.

After walking for an hour I am in the part of Frankfurt that looks like Berlin in peacetime. There is a sign in the window? Is there a room for rent? I try to read it, but it is on the second floor.

"Young man are you looking for a room? You look like you have been a sailor in the *Kriegsmarine*?"

"Yes. I just got out of a prisoner-of-war camp."

"I have been watching you for a few minutes; you look like you are lost. Can I be of help?" The voice belongs to a very friendly lady. She is blond and good looking, about twice my age, and she is well and neatly dressed. I wonder if she was a singer at one time, she has a beautiful mellow voice.

"When I saw you I had to think of our son. He hasn't come home yet, I hope he is well and maybe someone takes care of him. You are not from here? I can tell."

"No, I will go home to my parents in Berlin one of these days, but I don't think this is a good time to go to Berlin in the Russian Zone. No mail is going to and from the Russian zone, and I have no idea how they are. In the meantime I try to get a job here as a tool-and-die maker, a technician or a machine fitter."

"If you need a room, maybe you can live with us for the time being. Would you like too? You could stay in our son's room."

An angel must have sent her. How can I possibly thank her?

"I wouldn't know how to thank you enough, lady, *vielen, vielen Dank.*"

"Come along, I show you my son's room. What's your name?"

"My name is Helmut, Helmut Standke." We walk up to the second floor.

"Call me Frau Müller, Helmut."

"My husband is in our garden right now, the plums are ripe and I am drying them so we have more to eat."

She shows me her son's room, it's nice and light and not too small, with pictures of a young man flying a sailplane.

"Helmut, you better rest, you probably had enough worries today. Tomorrow I tell you how to get registered and how to get your food stamps. Come to the kitchen when you'd like something to drink."

It is a beautiful morning. I look through the window to the blue sky. "I am free; nobody will tell me what to do."

Only my stomach starts growling. Frau Müller must have heard that I am up; she knocks on the door and brings a couple sandwiches, with a big smile, which I will remember for a long time.

"When you are ready come to the kitchen and I will tell you how to get to the city office to be registered, so you can get your food stamps." Then she returns to the kitchen preparing and drying plums.

I have no trouble finding the city office; it is in a half burned- out building, in a dinky dark room. Most blown out windowpanes have been replaced with cardboard.

I have to get used to the darkness before I can see the room is crowded with people. Some of them are standing and casually leaning against the wall. In one corner several elderly women get their heads together and whisper something, turning their heads towards me once in a while. It is obvious they are talking about me.

"Did you serve in the *Kriegsmarine* (German Navy)? You are dressed like a sailor," one of them is asking.

"Yes I was." I can tell this is a hostile crowd.

"What are you doing here? Because of guys like you we sit in this rubble here, with nothing to eat, nothing to wear and probably freezing to death in winter."

"And now you come here and take the last bit of food away from us, you belong in jail," is another angry voice in the crowd.

I am biting my tongue and don't answer that, let them blow off steam. As kids we used to say in Berlin, "*You can't win a stinking contest with a heap of manure.*"

I know they wouldn't dare to come within my reach. I try to let them know that I would not hesitate to keep them at arm's length.

I get the paper from the table to see if job offers exist. I am turning from page to page and back and can't find a single job.

With all of what I heard the last few days, I have to look elsewhere to make a living; it can't be done in the cities.

On the way home I shop for food, standing in line and hoping they wouldn't run out of food before it is my turn. That's what people are saying near me.

But I am in luck. But looking at my little bundle of bread and margarine I shake my head. **It is not working out!**

Is This Hanau?

I promised Hans to visit him and Charlotte--my former pen pal-- in Hanau when I am in Frankfurt. I have been told that Hanau no longer exists; it was bombed and burned only a few weeks before the war was over. It was an all-out effort to wipe this place out. It is not far from Frankfurt and easy to get to by train. Looking around at the railroad station in Frankfurt I am told by one of the people standing around near the ticket counter, "You can't get a ticket without a permit, "The Amis (Americans) don't want you to travel, they see a Nazi terrorist at every corner."

"But I want to see friends in Hanau, how can I get there?"

"Take my permit to get your ticket, they don't read it. To hell with the Amis!" I return the permit after I got my ticket.

"What are you doing here in Frankfurt? You are from Berlin, aren't you?" He must have identified my berliner vernacular.

"Yes, I am. I don't want to go over the border yet until I get better news from the Russian zone. But I don't think I can stay here in Frankfurt on food stamps and no job."

My fellow traveler shakes his head, "No you can't. What is your profession?" He sounds like as if he speaks from experience. He is a middle-aged man and has a large bag at his feet, as if he is moving out of town too. "I am a tool-and-die maker, or technician of almost anything," I reply.

"I think I know of a place where you could go. It is a small ancient town that few people ever heard of. The name is Schlitz. It is less than one hundred kilometers to the east from here; stop there on the way to Berlin. There is mostly agriculture by small part time farmers, with the exception of a large estate owned by a Baron. I heard a soap industry exists there too and they look for technicians. You probably have a good chance there."

"Thanks for the tip. Yes, I'm going to try it. My train to Hanau is coming, I better go now. Thanks again."

"Good luck to you, sailor!"

Not many passengers are on the train. I look out of the window and enjoy the scenery, little one-family homes with a garden and little fields

around them. It looks very peaceful. It feels good to see places that the war has passed by, still occupied by the owners tending their gardens.

"Hanau", I hear the conductor. It is still fairly early, about ten o'clock. What is this? There is no city. And there is not one upright building as far as I can see. Instead of a railroad station, there are only rails, platforms with craters and a few lonely steel posts reaching for the sky. A few people get off the train with me. My map of Hanau is useless, there are no street signs left, and everything is rubble.

A larger street has been somewhat cleared of debris, so people can walk in the middle. I try to catch up with one of the train passengers to ask him for directions. He seems to be familiar with this part of Hanau; he walks as if he knows where to go.

"Pardon me; can you help me to find a good friend of mine who lived in Hanau?" He stops and looks at me, recognizing I was a sailor. He seems relatively familiar with the street I want to go. "I think it must be another five blocks or so along this street. I know it is hard to see where the blocks are, the side streets haven't been cleared yet, and you have to guess. Maybe when you are closer you find someone you can ask again."

"I'll try, thank you!"

I hope I will see someone I can ask. I am walking by myself along a small path between the rubble. To the left and right are piles of rubble where people lived—civilians, mostly women and children—who wanted the war to be over years ago. This was once a city of fifty thousand men, women and children.

I think it must be around here, if I only could find a street sign, or someone to talk to. Looking around I notice a little blue smoke rising out of the pile of bricks and a little path along the rubble leading to an opening. There are people here; they are underground. I hate to invade people's privacy, especially in their predicament. Eventually someone will appear. I am walking back and forth hoping for somebody to come.

"Helmut!" I almost drop dead. I don't know any woman for miles around; at least that's what I thought. I try to locate from where the voice is coming from.

"Over here, Helmut." Now I can see who is calling, it is Charlotte, my pen pal I have never seen in person. However, I have no trouble recognizing her; I remember her lovely face well.

Hans had just told me about her again when we met in Marburg, in the American army camp a few days ago. I walk over to her and we shake

hands. I feel a little awkward. We had been pen pals for nine months and wrote nice letters. But that was it. When Hans was transferred to her hometown I gave him her picture. They have been married now for several years.

"Come on in, Helmut. We hope to move out of here when my in-laws get their house rebuilt. They live in the suburbs and a good part of the house is still there."

We climb down over loose bricks to what used to be the basement of an apartment house. It is a one-room basement, with a minimum of hand-me-down furniture. Charlotte is looking around; "It's not bad; we do the best we can, as long as doesn't rain. But there is no running water, no power, and portable bathrooms are blocks away. I hope it will be over soon.

"Would you like something to drink, Helmut?"

"Yeah, a cup of whatever you have, Charlotte." While she is preparing some tea I take a look--actually it is my first real look--of her. She is pretty, has a nice figure, but her face tells me she must have gone through some bad times. I have her picture in my mind she mailed me when we began writing. That was three years ago.

"Where is Hans?" She places some herbal tea on the table and sits down next to me. "Hans is at work now; he found a job at the Swiss company Brown and Boveri. We were very lucky. Jobs are so hard to find. There are no factories left here. He will be home at six or so. Are you married, Helmut?" And she takes my hand to see if I wear a ring, and moves a little closer.

"No, Charlotte, the right one hasn't shown up yet. I have not been looking either. I would like to study engineering first.

"Hans and I talked about it again when we met in the American camp in Marburg. That was before he knew what happened to Hanau. Did Hans mention it?"

"Yes, he did. He investigated and was told that the college was bombed out and nobody knows when or if it will ever open up again."

"That was one of my hopes, we had dreamed of studying together one of these days."

"How has life been treating you after you and Hans married?"

"I was alone a lot, Hans being at sea most of the time. I have trouble with my in-laws. They have a restaurant and would like to see

me working there like a coolie. I am not built like one, and they resent that. I am not sure what I am going to do."

I wish I could think of something to say to comfort her, but I am afraid to say the wrong thing now, and it may be misinterpreted. I hope Hans would come soon.

"Hello, Helmut, you found us?" Hans is finally coming 'home' from work.

"I said I would come to see you, here I am. Charlotte told me that the engineering college is kaput, apparently for good."

"Yes, it is. They do not know if they ever get permission from the occupation forces to open it up again. It would have to be totally rebuilt. Right now they wouldn't have professors either.

"Let's have a drink, Helmut. I have a bottle of Cognac stashed away here for special occasions, so we can talk about the good old days in the Navy. Remember when we were joking, *Enjoy the war, the peace will be awful!* It sure turned out that way. My plans are now that we get my parent's restaurant going again. Then we have a roof over our head and with luck we can make a living."

The next morning I say, "*Auf Wiedersehen*, Charlotte. When I am home in Berlin I'll get in touch with you." When we look into our eyes, we know it means *adios*. I am leaving with Hans on his way to work to the train station, although my train will come two hours later. I am uncomfortable to be alone with Charlotte.

"It would have been nice to study together Hans, but it wasn't meant to be, I guess. I hope you get a better place to live in, at least before the winter."

"Yea, I think we will make it. That's why the whole family is working day and night on my parent's restaurant. We could live there too and I could help run the restaurant. I wouldn't have much time to study then."

"Okay, Hans, I wish you and Charlotte good luck for the future, good-bye." We shake hands one more time. Hans is off to work and I am on my way back to Frankfurt, and will pack my little bag.

What will the old town Schlitz be like?

"Thank you Frau Müller for letting me stay in your son's room, but I have not been able to find work here in Frankfurt. The day I went to Hanau I met someone who knew about some possibilities in a little town called Schlitz. It is one hundred kilometers closer to Berlin, and one of these days I will go home again. I will leave tomorrow morning by train. Thank you again and tell your husband too that I am very thankful."

"That's okay, Helmut. You remind us of our son. I hope he is all right. The mail is still not operating."

"I know Frau Müller, I don't know if my parents or my sister are okay. I tried the Red Cross but they can't tell me anything."

I am almost ready to leave when Frau Müller invites me to the kitchen. "Helmut, you better have a decent breakfast before your trip, who knows how long it will take you." She is taking care of me like my mother. I hope her son will be back soon and will be healthy.

At the railroad station I have to borrow a travel permit from a fellow former German soldier again to be able to get a railroad ticket. The western allies try to control traffic and make things difficult.

On several places during the trip the train track has not yet been repaired, and I have to take the bus a few times to get around it. It takes all day to go one hundred kilometers to go to Schlitz.

Getting off the train I am not sure what to do next. This is a nice place. Everything is clean, flowers are everywhere at the train station, and nobody seems to be in a hurry. I am still standing on the platform, looking around and enjoying everything I see. An elderly gentleman who got off the train with me comes over to me and asks, "Can I help you? Are you coming home from the Navy?"

"Yes, I was told that the soap factories here in Schlitz might be hiring technicians."

"There are no soap factories in Schlitz young man. If you look for work with food I would suggest you go to the Estate. It's too late today. Why don't you come along to my home and stay until tomorrow. You can stay in my son's room for the night. Let me take it from here."

"That's very generous of you. I like the job you are talking about, I am very much interested."

We walk about ten minutes through the town to his house. There is absolutely no sign of a war. Parts of Schlitz are like a medieval town. Some sections are half-timbered houses but other sections are modern family homes.

What a wonderful smell of hey and ripening grain fields. I have to take a slow deep breath and think of the time I was rowing to the Müritz through meadows and grain fields.

My *Schutzpatron* and I have arrived at his house. Flowers are everywhere. His wife is apparently the gardener here. She has an armful of roses when we arrive and greets her husband with a big smile.

"I bring a sailor for supper, *Liebling!* I met him at the station, I think the Estate can use help during harvesting. They will be happy to have him. "What's your name, young man?"

"My name is Helmut, Helmut Standke. I am on my way home to Berlin."

"Wash up and join us for supper, Helmut. Let me show you my son's room. We have not heard from him for eight months now, but that is not unusual I understand."

"Last time I heard from my parents was at Christmas, that's eight months too."

We had a nice supper and I went to bed early and slept like a log.

I am a little late for breakfast. When I come into the kitchen the table has been set for me.

"My husband went to the *Rathaus* (City Hall) to get you registered and to get a place for you to stay. Herbert knows his way around here in Schlitz."

I hear the door open and Herbert's voice, "Everything is arranged for you, Helmut. Here is the address of a family that had a room for rent. It is a nice family and very quiet. It's not far from here. Actually nothing is far here in Schlitz.

"Do you plan to go to the Estate?"

"Oh yes, sir, but I think I go to get my room first and get settled."

Refugees pay a fixed price per room, so it doesn't take much to agree on the rent with my new landlord. That's been settled, now I get the job.

I can't miss the Estate. It is a large operation with stables, barns, warehouses, garages with dozens of tractors and trucks and wagons to be drawn by horses or oxen. On one building is a sign 'Estate Office', that's for me.

"Can I help you?" A young lady behind a desk asks me.

"Yes, my name is Helmut Standke and I am looking for a job. I was told you need help."

"Do you have a profession?"

"Yes, I am a tool-and-die maker and machine fitter by trade."

"Are you willing to work as blacksmith, Herr Standke?"

"I sure am."

She continues, "This is the harvesting season and you will be asked to help in the field to bring the crop in, is that okay with you?"

"That's fine with me; I will enjoy it."

"Then you are hired. The official minimum wage is fifty-pfennig (pennies) per hour, we pay fifty-one. But we have free lunch, *de-jour*, what ever we happen to have that day. You get that nowhere else.

"Go over to Meister Albert's black smith shop and say hello. He is our blacksmith on the Estate, a very pleasant and capable man. Also, at lunchtime, why don't you join about twenty former service men and women for lunch in the kitchen, it is right across from the blacksmith shop. I wish you good luck Helmut."

I can't miss the blacksmith shop. Meister Albert is busy and I can hear him work. When I enter the shop, I don't interrupt him and wait until he puts that big wrought iron piece back on the fire.

"*Guten Tag Herr Albert!* My name is Helmut; I hope you have use for a guy like me? The office just hired me to work for you."

He wipes his hands on a rag, "Come on in, Helmut." By his handshake I can tell he is a real blacksmith. He removes his wrought iron piece from the fire so it wouldn't get 'burned' being unattended.

"Finally I get help! I have been asking for someone to give me a hand for a long time. What do you know about blacksmithing, Helmut, or more important, what do you know about lathes? Our lathe quit working some time ago and nobody knows how to fix it. I sure could use it now."

"Meister Albert, I only practiced blacksmithing for a few weeks, but lathes I know intimately. Let me take a look at it, unless it is totally broken we should be able to get it going again."

"Let's do it tomorrow." Meister Albert is looking me over. I am wearing my only decent outfit, my blue Navy uniform without the Navy brass trimmings and buttons.

"Do you have any working clothes? It looks like you just walked off a ship.

"Why don't you pick up a party uniform that some Nazis got rid of just before the war was over? You can get them as work clothes from a room near city hall, free. You can rip the Nazi paraphernalia off; nobody will mind that you wear this stuff. After a few days here in the shop nobody will recognize it anymore. Don't wear this stuff in public, some Amis may get the wrong idea and go ballistic."

"You better get over to the kitchen now, Helmut, it is almost lunch time."

"Thank you Meister Albert, I will be here tomorrow at seven, *auf wiedersehen*."

I walk over to the kitchen. The door is open and nobody seems to be inside. It is a fairly large room, with a long table and benches all around it. What a large shiny copper kettle. I can feel the heat radiating from it. It smells good too, whatever it is.

"Hello sailor, new around here?" I turn around to find out where that booming voice is coming from.

Wow! What a figure, what eyes. And that smile.

"I'm only kidding. I knew you were coming and I was expecting you."

It is one of the nurses I was told. I bet she was a head nurse.

"I am the cook around here, call me Gretchen. The rest of the troupe will be here any minute. You didn't have to dress up to see me, or...?"

And here is that look again.

"What's your name?"

"Oh, I am sorry, I was day-dreaming. I am Helmut."

"What were you dreaming about, confess Helmut?" She comes close and looks in my eyes. I better feed you extra!

"I am only kidding, I hope you don't mind."

"You are going to meet a lot of good army men. Most of us know each other from the time right after the war, when I was a nurse in a military hospital in what is now the Russian zone.

“It used to be the American Zone. When the Americans moved about fifty miles back towards the west, the Russians moved in. But we moved west too along with the Americans. Many army men were on crutches, bandaged, on carts, we moved all of them in any possible way. Nobody wanted to stay behind in the Russian Zone and die for sure. My friend Martha and I helped these men to get into a West German Hospital, no matter what it takes. Most of them made it.

“Some of us ended up here. The work is okay, and it is a good place to get something to eat.

"Take a seat, Helmut, any place you like, it doesn't matter."

The kitchen gets crowded, and Gretchen announces, "Meet Helmut, our sailor, I hope he lives up to the bad reputation the sailors have!"

It is a lively bunch with a terrific attitude. And they are tight knit: One for all and all for one! What a nice bunch!

Gretchen is ladling out the stew as we pass by the big kettle. "In case you don't know what we have today, it's Piggy, on-the-wild-side."

My neighbor fills me in what Gretchen is saying. "We had to trap wild pigs for all the damage they do in the fields. The Amis outlawed hunting, so the wild pigs multiply like crazy. Sometimes we catch one in a deep hole. How do you handle a wild boar in a hole? You call your friendly American Army Man and tell him to bring a rifle along. Easy enough!"

"Seconds anybody?" Gretchen is calling out. "And you need one for sure," she tells me, and fills my bowl up again.

"It's good! Thank you, Gretchen, for taking care of me."

It is one o'clock and everybody is going back to work, only Gretchen and I are still here. "How did you get to Schlitz? Helmut, it is such a small little town in Hessen."

"I was in Frankfurt. Although I could stay with a family whose son was still a POW somewhere, but I could not find work and my food stamps disappeared twice as fast as they should.

When I heard that soap factories in Schlitz need technical people, I took off. When I stepped off the train here in Schlitz an elderly gentleman spoke to me, recognizing me as a sailor.

"There are no soap factories in Schlitz, he told me. I suggest you go to the Baron's Estate; there you get work and something to eat.

"So, here I am."

"You are in good hands here, Helmut, we'll take care of you," Gretchen promises. And I get another one of those looks. I don't know what to make of it. She is much older than I, at least thirty. But what a smile and I can't take my eyes of that strapping figure.

Every time I see Gretchen I am daydreaming. It happened again. I can't figure her out.

Then I hear Gretchen, "I better get busy now, see you tomorrow, Helmut."

On the Estate in Schlitz

I fell in love with this little old town Schlitz on the day I arrived. My landlords are a friendly middle age couple with a young daughter. They rented a few acres of land and are now very busy getting the carrots, beets and potatoes in. Some of it is feed for a little piglet in the basement. My bathroom is in the basement too and the piggy smiles when it sleeps or grunts to greet me when I go to the bathroom. It's a neat little guy; except for one corner it keeps its living space very clean.

My room is very pleasant. The view out of my window is towards an ancient castle on top of a hill, the center of a large estate.

I got a job there and it seems to be a good place to work. I could do without schlepping the two hundred pound plus grain sacks from the tractor to the barn.

But with horror do I think of the time I worked on the farm in Pomerania in northeast Germany. During the war in 1942 the German Navy and Luftwaffe were sending men to help in the harvest. When we arrived we were treated like serfs, so were the native people in the area.

The estate owner, Von Maltzahn, had the gall to feed their workers soup cooked only with wormy peas.

I know what chickenfeed is. Mama was telling me how she sorted peas as a girl on the farm. The wormy ones float in water and are chicken feed.

Farming here in the southwest of Germany and the relationship between landowner and worker does not seem to be based on extreme exploitation as in the northeast.

Here, I actually like it. I cleaned up the machine shop, fixed the lathe, and now I almost call this place my home. The doors and windows are open and I enjoy the sunshine and the fresh air. Some town's people stick their noses in the door when they hear me at work. I hear 'hello' many times during the day and get to know quite a few towns' people.

My brown work clothes have changed color. Instead of washing them I will get myself another set. There are plenty of the discarded Nazi uniforms around. I think I am the only taker.

"Hello, anybody home?" Who is calling in English, I think that's what it is. I notice a jeep and two American soldiers. One of them is trying to talk to me and points to a red light on the dash. I can guess what he is trying to tell me, trouble.

I am walking around with grease spots on my outfit; which makes me an expert.

One of the soldiers and I look at the engine while the other one starts it up. I am scratching my head. I am not a motor mechanic. So far I haven't seen anything suspicious. When the American soldier revs' up the engine I notice one of the v-belt pulleys is sliding sideways and spinning on the generator shaft.

Eureka! I give the driver the thumbs-down signal to cut the engine. We don't need to speak to communicate. I get a wrench and take the belt off and remove the pulley. The setscrew is gone. There is no point for me to make a speech. Apparently that's what the soldiers think too. They let me do my thing and watch.

After re-tapping the pulley and installing a metric setscrew, things were back together in a few minutes.

Success! The motor purrs and there is no red light. Now the American soldier gives me the thumbs up sign and is grinning from ear to ear.

We shake hands. We could have done it two years ago, if not sooner. *If it had not been for the hate mongers all around us!*

The driver then reaches for five packages of Lucky Strike cigarettes and hands them to me. I am smiling too. The one hundred cigarettes at ten Marks each can buy many things on the black market. But I don't know a black market here in Schlitz and I have enough to eat. I think I let my army pals have the cigarettes.

"Gretchen, I just helped some American soldiers out of trouble with their jeep and I got five packages of Lucky Strikes. You know our guys here better than I do. Why don't you hand the cigarettes out to them as you see fit."

"Do you really mean that? Helmut."

"Yeah, of course! I know how smokers feel."

"Boy, you are a nice guy; I will pass them out, Helmut, thank you! They all deserve it. I have seen how they would do anything to save their buddy."

"I agree! You are a terrific bunch here. I am lucky to be with you; especially with you Gretchen, here in your kitchen."

I am Going Home!

"Helmut, can you drive a tractor? One of our drivers didn't show up."

"I am sure I can. Tell me, what those pedals do, the ones on the floor, and that long lever there." He wipes his forehead. "Are you kidding me?"

"No, of course not, why? How long can it take to tell me what three pedals and one lever do?"

That was four hours ago. In the meantime, I was driving one of our eight tractors and we just finished harvesting a large field of peas.

I am getting a kick out of it, sitting high on that tractor and being in control. There is nothing to it. All I have to do is follow the tractor in front of me, and keep my left front wheel in the rut of the right rear wheel the guy in front of me makes. When I pull the lever, the cutter will start and my coworker will manipulate the cutter to follow the contour of the field on the right. The machine will then bundle the stalks and drop them off to the left of us.

At least a dozen horse-drawn wagons have shown up to load the bundles up and bring them in and under roof.

It is lunchtime and we get a ride back to the Estate and to Gretchen's kitchen.

"You did pretty well, Helmut, and for the first time," Erich, our leadsman is telling me.

"I liked it a lot, make me one of your regulars, this is fun."

This young woman standing next to Gretchen must be the nurse that Gretchen was talking about.

Only a few days ago she had managed to cross the border from the Russian Zone to come over here, to the west. She should be able to tell me what is going on in the Russian zone.

I managed to sit next to her on our table. She is good looking, a little on the skinny side. Gretchen will take care of that. She seems friendly and smiles; I do not think she is as outgoing as Gretchen is.

She is the serious type. I have to hold back when I talk to her.

“My name is Helmut.”

“Call me Traudel, Helmut, glad to meet you.”

“Gretchen told us that you just came over the border. I should have gone home to my parents in Berlin some time ago and I feel guilty when I think about it. But I cannot get any information from there. No mail goes to the Russian Zone, six months after the war. I tried the Red Cross. They don’t have much information about missing persons or twenty million expelled ethnic Germans, which were kicked out of their home and land.

Tell me, what’s going on in the Russian Zone now?” Traudel is tired and is trying to get used to our way of life.

“When the Russian troops entered Germany, nobody was safe. Women especially didn’t dare to go into the street for fear they would be raped. The situation is better now, almost normal, at least by Russian standards. I don’t think you will have a problem going home to Berlin, Helmut.”

I am impressed the way Traudel talks and what she says, and her manners. Everything she says sounds factual.

She speaks slowly. Nobody interrupts her when she speaks.

It would be interesting to get to know her better. But that would take time. And I want to go home.

It is not meant to be!

“Vielen, vielen Dank, Traudel, I’ll do just that.” I notice she has nice warm and soft hands when I say “*Auf wiedersehen!*”

"I think it's time that I go home to Berlin," I announce to my lunch mates. “Traudel just told me that the situation in the Russian Zone has improved a lot, I think I have to go home to my parents and my sister.”

“Lucky you, Helmut, you got a home!” Traudel speaks up. “My family has lived in Pomerania for hundreds of years, longer than white people live in America. I lost my homeland when Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill decided at Yalta that Russia could keep the eastern half of Poland Stalin invaded in 1939, together with Hitler, who marched into the western half of Poland.”

“I know Traudel. American soldiers still believe they liberated Poland. They don’t want to know that millions of Poles and Germans

have lost their homes and had to move west, because the eastern half of Poland is now a part of the Sowjet Union.”

“I don’t know where my folks are now, Helmut, somewhere on the road, I guess; if they are still alive and didn't freeze or starve to death or got shot by Russian soldiers. In the meantime I am staying here on the farm. For now this is my family.”

Gretchen has joined us on the table and sits next to me. She has cleaned up the place and has a moment of well-earned rest.

“How long have you been with us, Helmut?”

“I came here in mid August and it is October now, six weeks Gretchen. It is hard to believe but I had a terrific time, thanks to all of you!”

“When are you leaving, Helmut?”

“I’ll have to give notice in the office and tell my landlord. I leave probably in a week or so. Does anybody want to come along with me?”

Nobody else wants to leave here now.

“Let us know when you leave so we can say good-bye to you and keep our fingers crossed Helmut,” Gretchen adds.

“I’ll stick my nose in here before I go, around lunch time for sure.”

I am on my way to my rented room and Traudel’s words still ring in my ear, “I don’t think you will have a problem going home to Berlin.”

I wish I had known that sooner. I probably could have left for home some time ago. I couldn’t stay in Frankfurt; the situation was too bad. The situation in Berlin can’t be any better, and Mama’s health isn’t the best either.

Now I really feel bad. I liked it here in Schlitz so much that I almost forgot I have to go on. I am not at home yet!

The word that I am leaving must have been going around in Schlitz. Two former German Army men showed up where I live and asked if they could join me to go home and cross the border to the Russian Zone. “I would have left some time ago,” says one of them, “but I was badly wounded in the head. I can’t hear very well and can see only with one eye. That’s too much of a handicap to go it alone. Do you mind if we come with you?”

“Of course you can come along! “*Wir lassen keinen Kameraden zurück.*” (We would never abandon a buddy.)

“When are you ready to leave?” I ask.

“We are ready anytime; whatever your plan is will be fine with us.”

"How about Tuesday in the morning at eight? I know a train leaves in direction Eisenach at eight o'clock. Eisenach is near the border, but in the Russian Zone. I don't know how far the train goes, so be prepared to walk a few kilometers.

We have to play it by ear. If we have to, we can probably work on a farm near the border for a few days. Everybody needs help during harvesting time. We can then gather more information on how to cross the border, the Werra River. What do you think?"

"Let's go Tuesday morning then!"

"Okay, see you at the train station on Tuesday before eight."

The two guys make a good impression; I don't think they will hold me back. How can I say no? It looks like the healthy man is taking care of the wounded one to get him home.

Officially, I no longer work at the Estate, but on Monday I show up for lunch in Gretchen's kitchen. I am saying good-bye to Meister Albert; we have become good friends.

"Who is running my lathe now, Helmut? I wish you good luck; make it safely across the border. *Auf wiedersehen!*" I brace myself for Meister Albert's handshake.

I am sitting at our kitchen table again with all my lunch mates and I get my last full meal, probably for a while to come.

"Where are you going over?" Gretchen wants to know.

"Based on what I heard during the last weeks I think Eisenach is probably the best place from here, unless I hear otherwise when I am closer to the border."

"East of Eisenach was our hospital until the Americans pulled back and let Stalin take over. I don't know what's wrong with the Americans? They give Stalin anything he wants. We had to move our Army hospital to the west too, and in a hurry, wounded, crippled and all.

"We managed to bring everybody out; they would have died with the Russians. It was only six months ago, but it seems like a lifetime. Doesn't it, Horst? Horst was on crutches then, but he hobbled all the way. Look at him now!"

"We are going to miss you, Helmut, but eventually we are all out of here. Have a good trip and don't do anything I wouldn't do." And Gretchen grabs me and I get a big hug that I had not anticipated. I wonder whose ribs would crack first.

Now that I am leaving she gives me a hug, you figure. I shake Traudel's hand one more time, that soft and warm hand.

Too bad I have to go.

I wave one more time and I am on my way. By tomorrow evening I should be at the border, maybe even in the Russian Zone. I keep my fingers crossed.

The train is on time at Tuesday at eight in the morning. Hans, Ernst, and I hope it will go close to the border so we will not have to walk too far. Nobody can tell us if other transportation is available to the border.

We have been traveling several hours now. All of a sudden the whistle blows and the train slows down. That's it, I guess. But it must be a long way to the border, another twenty kilometers or so.

Only a few passengers have come that far. Maybe they too want to go over the Werra. The three of us start walking east and hope we can catch a ride.

Handicapped Hans walks almost normally, he will be okay.

A truck is slowly catching up with us. It is a tractor pulling a flat bed trailer with milk cans.

We wave at him, and he stops. "Do you want a ride?" he yells. "Hop on board!"

That beats walking. We have to ask the natives when we stop where the border really is.

After a couple hours, our driver, a friendly elderly man, stops in a large village. I think he is a native, he ought to know. I'll ask him.

"Can you tell us how far it is to the border?"

He turns around and points to the east, "About two kilometers from here is the river Werra, which is the border. With the proper papers one can cross the bridge into the Russian Zone," he explains.

"Actually there are two bridges. The original one has been dynamited during the last days of the war. But when the Americans were still east from here they built a temporary bridge not far from the original one. But watch out! At night a Communist young character is sometimes on the bridge and is notifying the Russians when someone is trying to cross it. I have to go, good luck men!"

"Vielen Dank!"

"There you have it," I tell Hans and Ernst. "It is only two kilometers to the border. Let's go east a little and then wait until it gets dark, agreed?"

On our way, we meet some workers on the field. They see us coming and call, "hey fellows, can you help us out for a few days to get the crop in?"

"I have done that for the last few months, but today we want to go home," I answer and point to the little road next to the field, "But I have a question, is this the right way to the Werra and to the border?"

"Yes it is. Take the bridge on the left, the other one has a section missing in the middle. Don't fall into the water when you cross it at night!"

"We heard that a young Communist is standing on the bridge at night and will notify the Russians should we cross the bridge. I wonder if that story about the guy is true."

"Yes, it is, watch out for him. But you are three, and you were soldiers, why would that be a problem? You better wait until it is dark, men."

"Thank you very much."

I have all the information I need, and it is confirmed. "Let's wait behind that hay stack, guys, until it is dark."

Waiting is always boring. The three of us talk where we have been and where we are going, when two fellows, like us in well-worn partial former uniforms, are approaching us.

"You are crossing the border to East Germany tonight, aren't you? Can we join you?"

"Sit down, that makes five of us. We'll wait until it is dark before we go on."

The two fellows who just joined us seem to be scared. They are very young and were in service as FLAK-Helpers (Anti-Aircraft Artillery Helpers). They started service at sixteen years of age and were not really soldiers.

They wear a blue-gray uniform, similar to the Luftwaffe's. It's too big for them and is hanging down their shoulders. At that age it is very bad to go hungry for many months.

I hope they don't start something stupid. I could have done without them. But I have to help them to get home to Mama.

It is about nine o'clock and it is dark now.

"Let's get going!" I get them started.

After a few hundred meters the road makes a turn to the right. We get off the road and continue east, across the fields. It is pretty dark

by now but clear. We keep an eye on the moon and the stars to maintain our direction.

"What are they growing here; barbed wire fences are every hundred meters. I hope I don't tear my clothes on this stuff, or worse." I whisper to the fellow next to me. It is Ernst, the healthy army man who is trying to get his wounded buddy home.

"Listen, what is that?" He whispers in return. The five of us stop and listen. It is a squishing sound as if a Russian soldier in a rain overcoat walks or crawls in front of us. We are totally still and don't dare to move. After a while we notice that the sound does not come closer and doesn't go away.

"Let's investigate, let's sneak up on whatever it is, I don't want to sit here all night." As we have been taught in boot camp we crawl on elbows and belly without a sound towards that strange noise. It does not change, every few seconds another 'squish'. After a few minutes we are near the sound.

When the clouds move on and the moon comes out, I can now identify a person in the dark. It is a guy stealing cabbage in the field at night and dropping it in a sack, making that squishy sound. "We are safe. Leave him alone and continue east," I suggest. It is too dark to tell the time, but it must be around midnight when we arrive at a river. The five of us put our heads together. We assume this is the Werra. The bridge could be on our left or it could be on our right, we don't know, and we hope this is the Werra.

We decide to take a chance and go left. After walking for half an hour and not finding a bridge we are not so sure we shouldn't have gone right. After another discussion we continue on.

One of my partners taps me on the shoulder and points to the right. I can now make out the silhouette of a bridge in the darkness.

"Let me tell you what my plan is," I tell them.

"My idea is to move very slowly and in the dark over the bridge. We have to find out first whether this character is on the bridge. Two of us have to see that punk without being seen. He must be bored and will not be very observant. We can then observe him for a while whether he has contact with a Russian.

I don't want to scare him into action. Let's be casual when we deal with him. When all five of us are with him and pretend we look for our identification papers we fling him over the rail. A traitor doesn't deserve any better. Any better ideas?"

"Maybe we should wait until morning," I hear one of the kids.

"You must be kidding! You can't go over that bridge in daylight and you won't go over the bridge tomorrow night for the same reason you don't want to go over now!

"Who wants to go with me to see if this Communist punk is on the bridge? Who comes along?"

Ernst steps forward and we take off. We keep our heads low and slowly sneak along the rail of the bridge.

Fortunately it is a partially cloudy and dark night. I don't see anyone on the bridge yet. When the two of us are almost in the center of the bridge we realize that part of the bridge is missing. We are on the wrong bridge.

It shouldn't take us long now to find the new bridge; it is supposed to be next to the old one. We can see it now in the dark. The two nervous kids start to repeat this whole senseless discussion all over again, should we or should we not go over that bridge.

"We settled that guys! I volunteer to go first. Ernst, do you come along again?" We know it is for real this time.

"Do you see anybody? I don't." I whisper to Ernst when we are about in the middle of the bridge. We remain still and in the dark for a few more minutes. Nothing is moving on the bridge. After a while our other three travelers have come closer. I wave them on and all of us hurry over the bridge. Within seconds we are off the main road and have disappeared in the forest.

The five of us shake hands and slap ourselves on the shoulders. We are coming home!

We try to rest but we are too excited and the mosquitoes are having a feast.

We should be relatively safe now, but we have to get away from the border. We are moving parallel to the road but move unseen from the road through the forest. It is still dark and the Russians might be suspicious should they see us near the border.

It is almost six o'clock when I see a bicyclist in well-worn parts of a German army uniform coming down the road in direction of Eisenach. We come out of the woods and wave, trying to get his attention. We have a lot of questions.

"You have nothing to worry about," he assures us. And he gives us an important lecture on how to deal with the Russians, a people who for

the most part have never been in a developed country. To them we are all capitalists, which they have been indoctrinated to hate for a lifetime.

"Don't go as a large group, split up. Don't stare at a Russian soldier, they are very insecure people and unsure of themselves, don't provoke them or try to be smart. Other than that, don't worry. You get a free railroad ticket home if you have your POW release papers with you. Welcome home!"

"That makes sense. Let us split up, guys, and it's everybody for himself from here. I wish you good luck to get home all right."

After coming to Eisenach and asking a pedestrian I have no trouble finding the railroad station. Since I left my POW papers with friends in Schlitz--I did not want them to be taken away by the Russians at the border--I have to pay for my ticket to Berlin.

It is a slow trip. On many places the track is in repair, on other sections the Russians ripped the second track out as war reparations and the train has to wait for oncoming traffic.

I am wondering what I will find when I get home? I am sure they need my help. But is there a home? Are Mama, Papa and Inge alive?

It is about six in the morning when the train comes close to the center of Berlin. I am reminded of Hanau, not a single house is standing. In some places only a few brick walls tell there was once a city.

All of the destruction took place after I was here in October, a year ago, when I witnessed the acceptance test of my fire control equipment at Siemens. What will my neighborhood Oberschöne weide look like?

After I arrive in downtown Berlin I transfer to the commuter train, the S-Bahn (Schnell-Bahn). It is running and looks pretty normal. On most sections only one track is left. But there is less and less destruction as the train moves out to the suburbs.

When I get off the train at the *Schöne weide* station, everything is almost normal. There is isolated damage, there was probably some fighting here, but it is not too bad. The bridge over the Spree River is hanging in the water on one side. I am told some die-hard SS men did that sort of thing.

It is only a few more blocks to go. A Russian soldier is directing traffic at one of our main crossings. I see many Russian military trucks. All is quiet at the AEG (German General Electric). The big gates are closed. There is no activity at all now. One hundred thousand workers used to come and go; day-in and day-out.

When I am in front of our house I see Herr and Frau Sandow looking at the sunrise from their ground floor apartment window. They were doing it five years ago when I left for the Kriegsmarine. Nothing has changed here, that is good to know.

"Hallo Helmut, herzlich willkommen zu Hause!"

"Guten Morgen Frau und Herr Sandow, how are Mama and Papa?"

Frau Sandow answers, "Considering what everybody went through it is not too bad. They and Inge are fine. We all lost a lot of weight, but we survived, that's the main thing.

You better go home now. They have been trying hard to get information from the Red Cross about where you are, but the Red Cross has its hands full, I guess. I have been comforting your parents and told them, *don't worry about Helmut; he will knock on your door one of these days*. Didn't I say that Walter?"

"I'll better go up to them now and knock on their door, like you said. *Vielen Dank, Frau Sandow!*"

I walk up to the fourth floor and wonder what my parents and Inge will look like. At least I know they are okay. At this early hour, nobody would normally be knocking on the door. They will guess it is me.

I knock three times, as I always did when I had no keys. I can hear Mama running to the door, she knows it's me. The door is flying open and we are in each other's arms.

"Helmut, Helmut, Helmut," is all she can say while tears are streaming down her face. She holds me tight; I think she will never let me go anywhere again.

Papa and Inge are standing back while Mama and I are still standing in the doorway. I can see Papa, taking his glasses off and rubbing his eyes.

"Kommt rein!" calls Inge, my sister. I haven't seen her for at least a year. My little sister has grown up, she is nineteen now. I had better keep an eye on her from now on.

"Did I ever tell you I missed you, big brother?" And it takes a long while that we are patting us on the shoulder. Inge is hiding her tears on my shoulder.

"Hallo, Papa!" and we shake hands we have not done for years. Papa is again wiping his eyes. "Glad to see you back home, Helmut."

"How is the Fire-Chief business these days, Papa?"

"It's hard to believe, Helmut, I am now Fire-Chief of Oberschöneweide again, the young men are either not back yet or never will come back. In the meantime, we are busier than ever. We are lucky that we have an understanding Russian local commander; he was a Fire-Chief in Moscow.

When I told him that his soldiers had taken all our engines and equipment, the two of us went to the Russian truck-park where hundreds of fire engines from Berlin were ready to be shipped to Russia.

I got our fire trucks back. He is quite a guy. I think he is almost a friend of mine now. He told me to let him know if any of his soldiers give me trouble.

For being almost sixty I am in good shape, I can do it for a few more years or until the situation is back to normal."

Inge grabs my arm, "You better sit down next to me, Helmut, and I want to hear the whole story."

It feels so good to see my always happy little sister.

Yes, this is home!

CHAPTER SIX

East Germany

1945 TO 1952

I FINALLY STUDY ENGINEERING

1945 to 1949

It feels so good to be home again, with Mama, Papa and Inge. I am not sure what to do first. I should find out if the engineering colleges still exist, and then take it from there. That was my plan in 1939, six years ago.

Who can that be at the door?

Two characters have shown up on our front door, the second day I am home again. I registered yesterday, got my *'Food stamps for Unemployed'* and was told that I have two weeks vacation for having just arrived from POW camp.

After that I have to have a job or the State Unemployment Office will draft me. If I don't except I will not get any food stamps.

Papa had explained to me that the only jobs available now are dismantling German factories, to be shipped to Russia, or removing wartime rubble and debris from streets and side walks.

What do these two guys want from me? One wears a sloppy suit with baggy trousers and the other one wears a gray overall that looks it

hasn't been washed since the war broke out. They are talking in Russian to each other--I catch the word *rabotta*--I know that means 'work'.

Then the guy in the suit tells me, "We are coming from the State Unemployment Office and we found in the records that you are a mechanic. The Russian truck depot has asked us to come up with ten mechanics. You have to come to work tomorrow. The depot is located at the former grade school on Edison Street."

I have planned to go to the Engineering College tomorrow. Papa thinks that bombing and fighting in this part of Berlin was not too bad and that it might be open.

"I don't think I will be of great help to you, I am sorry. I had diphtheria a year ago and my left arm is paralyzed."

"Sorry to hear that, but you have to tell that to the Russian Major tomorrow. Be there at eight o'clock. Good Day!"

The truck-park is located at my old grade school, and I guess I have to go and pretend I have a paralyzed arm.

Russian soldiers are living in my school now, and it looks terrible. It is dirty, the walls are scratched and banged-up and some doors are splintered. Most lights are broken.

Russian military trucks, partially disassembled, are all over the schoolyard and groups of mechanics are working on them.

Nobody listens to my story of a paralyzed arm. Two other German mechanics and I are assigned to a Russian mechanic. He speaks a little German. After I tell him that I can't work with my left arm he wants me to give it a try. To make sure I will not inadvertently do anything with my left arm I keep my left hand in my pocket.

At the end of the day my Russian mechanic tells me to talk to the interpreter in the office. He obviously wants two hands from each helper.

In the office I tell them, "I told the two people from the unemployment office yesterday that my left arm is paralyzed, they sent me down here anyway. I guess they wanted to fill their quota."

"Bring a doctor's certificate that your arm is paralyzed and bring it to us in a day or two."

"Thank you, I will do that."

Papa's advice is, "just go to Doctor Maas, he knows you from day one, and he'll write you anything, Helmut."

Dr. Maas is happy to see me in good shape and laughs when I tell him what I need. "Did you have diphtheria, Helmut?"

"Yes I did. But I was lucky and was out of the Quarantine Hospital in the minimum of four weeks without any symptoms."

"Let's get a fancy form so the Russians have something good-looking in their file."

"Thank you Dr. Maas, How is business now after the war?"

"From a human perspective it is terrible. People die like flies. Go to the graveyard; we used to have one or two burials a day, now we have thirty or so. People starve to death. Try to get more to eat, work the black market if you have to. Good to see you, Helmut, say hello to your dad!"

Done that. I took Dr. Mass's paper to the Russian office and I think I got them off my back.

I am on my way to the Beuth State Engineering College in the north of Berlin and in the French Sector. The location doesn't really matter, but I wish it would be closer. The situation on the train is bad. Most railroad cars, which were not destroyed by war action, ended up in Russia. Half the tracks have been ripped out.

Berlin is considered one entity to be governed by one of the four Allies for three months at a time. But Russia was the only power for the first several months. It was during this period that the Russians ripped out public and industrial installations. They are still pulling the telephone cables out of the underground cable tunnels in our street right now.

Initially the Russians concentrated on the West Sectors before the West Allies showed up. Did Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill in Yalta agreed to that too?

The few trains, which are running, are now packed with hungry and angry people. After an hour I arrive at the Engineering College and see the damage. One wing of the building has collapsed during a bombing raid and is in rubbles. I walk over to a large group of young men and some women cleaning up the place.

"Grab a pick and start chipping off the mortar on the bricks in that pile. The bricks will be used to rebuild the laboratories that once stood here."

"No, go to the administration first and sign in. In order to get an application you have to work like us here for at least five hundred hours. After that--with luck--you get an application. Then you need luck again to be accepted. See you tomorrow in the oldest clothes you can find," is the advice from another potential student.

At the reception I am told, "Fill out your resume and go to one of the counselors over there and talk to them."

I am sitting around with dozens of other applicants and eventually one of the counselors waves me to come.

I am getting clammy after all the waiting and the uncertainty. For years I have been waiting for this moment. I am telling myself, *nothing really has gone wrong in the past, why should it go wrong now?*

Why does this counselor look at my resume so long? Is something wrong? Then, with my resume in hand he walks over to the supervisor and both of them poke around on my paper.

What is going on here?

After an agonizing minute he comes back--with a broad smile. "Herr Standke, with your ten years of applicable experience, and starting out at the Knorr-Bremse, you are the type we like to have as engineering students. Too many of you didn't come back, and we have to take a lot of students without much practical experience."

I hope he didn't hear the big stone dropping off my chest.

"Here is what I suggest you do. You are probably a little cold on math and physics in comparison to an eighteen-year old graduate. We have an engineering pre-semester that will bring you up to speed. If you finish this semester with a 'good' grade or better, you will automatically be admitted into the first semester. Let me explain a few minor details. The semester started in September already--six weeks ago-- but I think you will have no trouble catching up with them. Would you like to start next Monday?"

I don't know what to say. Somebody is watching out for me. I cannot find the right words, so I reach for his hand and shake it.

We Are Starving!

1945

"How many radios are you building now, Helmut?" my classmate Gerhard wants to know.

"The way it is going I think I will make a batch of ten next time. I get a better deal on parts in the surplus store and my housing maker will save me a bundle. I have standardized my housings and he can crank them out now. He is using mahogany scrap pieces in their boatbuilding plant."

"A few of my neighbors are interested too," says Gerhard, "But where will you sell the rest?"

"In West Germany, for about twice the money, Gerhard."

I have promised to bring him a new radio to class tomorrow, he has a customer. After spending an hour to improve the sound of the radio in front of me I think it is time to call it "Enough is enough!"

The sound is okay now, considering the speakers I have, I am mumbling to myself. I better wrap it up.

It is two o'clock in the morning and I am getting hungry. Food is shared equally between Mama, Papa and Inge and I, and I already ate my share. Gerhard has promised to bring seven hundred Mark for my radio in two days. Then I make enough money to buy cooking oil and bread from one of my other classmates; that will help a lot.

I hope that my friend Erich Schindler in Schlitz--I met him when I worked on the estate in Schlitz--can sell some of my radios in the west for much more money. There is a big market for radios in Germany. The occupation soldiers--east and west--stole every radio they saw.

The production of commercial radios has not started yet. There are no electronic factories left in the east, and no permits from the west allies have been obtained by the industries in the west. That's why several of my classmates and I are building radios from military surplus material now.

The mail is now going across the zone borders, and I received good news from Erich in Schlitz. He also sent my POW release papers.

He has three customers lined up, but delivery must be in Schlitz of course. Parcels are not allowed to be mailed, so far. That means I have to go and hand-carry the radios to Schlitz, across the Iron Curtain.

"Gerhard, I will leave Sunday, I figure that is a slow day at the border. Also I don't miss too much in classes at the beginning of the week. It will probably take me three to four days until I am back, Gerhard. Please take notes for me in class so I can keep up with it."

"I wish you luck."

I have to talk to my Cousin Hilde's husband Bruno, who has crossed the border recently, to find out what he knows.

I see Bruno only when Mama's family gets together. He is an electrical engineer and he and I have a good relationship.

"Hang-in-there, I know it is tough, but when you graduate you will find it does pay off," he tells me when we meet.

"Bruno, I am making radios, I know you do too. But I have to take some of them over to the American Zone. Didn't you recently go over the border too? Can you tell me, what is the best way to do it?"

"It's not that hard, Helmut. Take the train to Magdeburg and walk to the big truck refueling station there. You will find that on the most forward truck some people have climbed up on the trailer. Get on it too. The driver will take the passengers to within a couple kilometers of the border. On the way, he will probably stop in the middle of nowhere to collect twenty Marks from each of you. When you arrive near the border and get off the truck, go north for two kilometers into the forest, but through the underbrush, never walk on the road where the Russians can see you for miles. Then turn west for three miles and you are in the west. Turn south again and back to the highway and catch a truck to Helmstead, about ten kilometers. Helmstead is a fairly large city and a major railroad station. The rest is luck, Helmut."

"Thank you Bruno, that's what I will do. But what will happen when the Russians catch me, Bruno?"

"Well, they will probably lock you up for a week or two. And they will take your radios. That's for sure!"

"Thank you, Bruno. I let you know how it went when I come back."

Sunday morning I pack three of my radios and a few sandwiches in a suitcase and take off. So far, it is routine. I found the refueling station in Magdeburg and joined a bunch of people on the large trailer. The truck is now on the way to the border.

I am sitting on my suitcase and talk to one of the border crossers about my age. He tells me that he goes across the border once a week.

I am listening.

"You forgot one thing," he tells me. "You have to know when the train comes and stops at the border. That's when the train passengers try to cross the border. This is the time when you shouldn't go. That is when the Russians are strung out at the border and catch the amateurs, and meets their quota the easy way. I go once a week to get salt herrings from Bremerhaven. I have never been caught. We should be at the border in twenty minutes; it will be two thirty then. The train comes at one o'clock. It is the perfect time to go right-away north, Helmut."

I made it across the east-west border to Helmstead without a problem and even got my train to Schlitz without waiting much. I can now relax, lean back in my seat, and keep an eye on my suitcase above me. It is an Express Train and we are really moving. There are only a few stops.

I have been dozing off when I hear and feel the train slowing down.

"We must be on the American-British Zone border," the fellow next to me mentions.

"What do they look for here?" I feel my heart racing. What do they want to know?

"They only look if you have the right papers. That doesn't take long. Usually you can leave your luggage on board."

My God, I don't have any papers. What am I going to do now?

"*Alles aussteigen, passcontrolle*, you can leave your luggage on board," I hear the stationmaster call.

If they take me in and my radios are on the train, I loose my radios. If I take my suitcase with me, that's a give-away. What am I going to do?

"Hurry up, please," I hear the stationmaster again.

That doesn't leave me time to think. I get off the train and hope for luck, my radios are still on the train.

'*Verflixed*' (darn), nobody told me that I need Official Papers that I am a resident of the American Zone.

I should have never been on this train; I should have taken the slow regular train that goes around this checkpoint.

On the station platform in front of our railroad car, about thirty passengers are waiting to get back on the train. An American soldier checks every person's papers.

Occasional he is holding a passenger back and leads him twenty yards over to a group of other waiting passengers. I guess they don't have the right identification. I can feel sweat running down from my armpit and beads forming on my forehead.

I get my POW release paper out of my pocket and hold it fully unfolded and open in my hand. It's worth a try; I will not be a sitting duck!

When the soldier leads another guy over to the waiting group, and is turning his back to me, I step casually forward toward the train. With my POW-paper in hand I climb on board without turning back. Eventually the rest of the passengers come on board and all is back to normal.

"All aboard!" We start moving.

That was a close one.

I look up to my suitcase above me; it and I will be in Schlitz in two hours and deliver the radios. Erich is at the train station hoping I would be on this train. "You did it, Helmut, how did it go?" "Fine, except two hours ago my heart beat must have been two hundred when I crossed the zone border without the proper papers. I couldn't wipe the sweat off my brows; it would have given me away. There has to be smarter way." I keep shaking Erich's hand.

"Come home with me, my wife has something to eat for you and we have a *Bier*." I had dinner with the Schindlers and then we discuss business. "Helmut, one of the radios goes to a farmer, if you prefer flour instead of money, he would consider it. I would have to ship it to you in small packages as soon as parcels go again. He thinks one hundred pounds would be a fair price. What do you think?"

"I like it a lot. This whole business is to get food, it simplifies the whole process."

"That's what I thought. How long can you stay? Do you have a chance to go to the estate and see some of our old friends tomorrow?"

"No, Erich, I wish I could, it would be fun. But I have to be back in class the day after tomorrow. I have to leave with the first train tomorrow morning, maybe next time, Erich. In the meantime, *Prost* (Cheers) to the radio business."

We will not be freezing to Death!

"You don't have a choice, Papa."

"But it's against the law."

"Papa, you said yourself that the Nazis got us into this mess we are in now, why are you so hung up on their stupid laws?"

"This has nothing to do with the Nazis; it's an old German law, Helmut."

"I know that. It's also in the Old Testament. I also think it was the thing-to-do in any wild tribe that ever lived on earth."

"Actually, it is beside the point. There are no laws that can ask you to commit suicide." Papa is getting upset; he is not going to listen no matter what I say.

"Hey, you two!" It is my sister Inge, "Take it easy! Mama has told us for a week now that we are out of coal, and we have several more months to go before the winter is over. We also reached the limit of our gas allowance, and we exceeded the limit of our electrical allowance. Something has to give!"

"And I did not use my flat-iron or any other electrical things," adds Mama.

"Mama, don't worry. We are already over the limit when we use a sixty-watt light bulb for more than five hours. I myself use a sixty-watt light from four in the afternoon to two in the morning when I study, that's double our quota right here."

"What are we going to do about it? Helmut."

"I am going to fix that, Mama, don't ask questions! Stop worrying!"

I look at the frozen window and at the woolen blanket we hung in front of it to keep more of the heat in. The blanket is frozen to the window and has formed a thick ice sheet with the glass of the window. A little light comes over the top of the blanket. It is cold and dark in the middle of the day in the kitchen where we are during the daytime. Only the down covers keep us from freezing to death at night. I expect the water pipes in the kitchen to freeze any day.

"Something has to give! You are right Inge."

"Why can't the two of us go and get us a nice tree, Helmut?" Inge suggests.

"A green tree doesn't burn, you should know that," is Papa's comment.

"Papa, don't you remember what it said in your book by James F. Cooper, the Leather Stockings Tales? The German translation from 1864 you used to have. Whenever the American Indians and the trappers needed warmth, they cut a birch tree. They even burn in winter when freshly cut.

"You know what, Inge, its dark now. Let's get our sled out and a hand saw, and we get us a birch tree. I am not sitting here until I am frozen stiff. That's ridiculous!"

It is my old sled; I got it when I was a kid. That's now the only thing we have in the basement. Our bikes have been stolen and the coal, what little we got on the ration stamps, is gone. On the positive side, we have now plenty of room for birch firewood.

Inge and I are now on the way to the forest. The streets are covered with deep snow. It is very cold and snow is still falling. There is not a person in sight. It is the perfect weather for what we are trying to do. We cross the street to walk around the street light at the end of the block and walk in the dark.

"Inge, you better keep your ears covered, it doesn't take much and they are frozen." On every step, I feel warmer already.

To the park and forest is only a few blocks from our house. But then we have to pull our sled along a stretch of barbed wire to get to the birch trees.

"Inge, it can't be far. I remember there was a patch of birch trees in this pine forest, not far from the fence. I used to pedal this road every day to school, rain or shine, even with my violin. My God, that was a long time ago, about seven years.

"I never told you, I took care of our electricity problem a couple of weeks ago. You learn a lot of things in college. Some of my classmates figured out, when they connected a large capacitor between one line of the electrical outlet and the water pipe, the electrical meter would go slowly backwards. I got a capacitor too and hooked it up. When a sixty-watt light bulb is burning the meter stops going forward. After you turn the light off during the night the meter goes backwards.

Yes, it works! We are now within our quota. Don't tell Papa, he doesn't have to know. He would worry himself to death."

Inge tugs on my sleeve, "Listen! Did you hear that?" she whispers. We both stop and try to figure out what is going on.

CRASH

"Here it goes again," Inge is pressing my arm.

"Inge, that's the sound of a falling tree, the snow is muffling the sound. This must be the place. Let's get into the forest here." I spread the barbed wire and let Inge get through.

We hear several people whispering around us. By now our eyes have adjusted to the darkness and a streetlight from blocks away gives a faint light.

"We better move out of the way a little before we get killed by a falling tree," I warn Inge.

"Here is a nice one, about six inches thick. I wonder if my handsaw can handle that." As soon as we shake the tree, snow is dropping from the branches and Inge and I are covered all over with it. It no longer matters. The saw is cutting through the frozen birch like butter.

"Inge, we have our heating problem under control." I think the Trappers and Indians in America's wilderness knew what to do a long time ago.

Another CRASH, but this time it is our tree.

"Hold the tree so I can cut the branches off, Inge." It doesn't take us long and Inge and I have cut the tree in five long pieces and are on our way home in no time. It is not much more than a mile to go back to our house.

"That was easy, Helmut, we could have taken a bigger tree."

"It was much easier than I thought. I think that I'll get us a bigger tree tomorrow. I wonder what Papa will say when the wood is crackling in our potbelly stove. I bet he will sit close to the stove."

"You know, Helmut, I think Papa is worried that something goes wrong and his name will be in the paper. Remember he is now working for the City of Berlin as Fire-Chief, and the forest belongs to the city. I think that is his real hang-up, he doesn't want to admit it."

"That makes sense, Inge, I am sure you are right."

Back at home, we store the wood in our basement, lock it up and go upstairs.

"How did it go?" Mama wants to know. "Did anybody come and ask questions? Papa was a little worried about it."

"Mama, we had absolutely no problem. The forest is full of people doing the same thing. I wonder if they all read *The last Mohican* and *The long Rifle*. Next time I cut a bigger tree. Five six feet long pieces are in the basement now. I will cut them up tomorrow morning and bring firewood up here."

"Can I come with you when you go for wood again Helmut?"

"Do you want to, Mama? Do you mean it?"

"Of course I mean it. When I was a kid and still living out in the country, I was cutting firewood with my brothers all the time."

"The two of us can get us a good one Mama; how about tomorrow night unless the weather gets much worse? If we don't go soon then there won't be any birch trees left."

It stopped snowing and it is a good day again to go and get firewood. Mama and I left as it got dark and we are just going past the park on our way to the birch trees.

"Mama I still remember when I got this sled here. That was Christmas in 1928, and I was eight years old."

"I know, Helmut. It was a long and very cold winter and it was snowing for days. The railroad stopped running and delivering coal because the railroad switches no longer worked."

"But I had a ball with my new sled on the toboggan slide right here in the park."

"I worried you would freeze your ears off, Helmut. But Inge was only two years old then and she kept me busy, and I was working at home for the Varta factory. I was happy you had fun and I could work and take care of Inge.

I don't know if you saw Papa checking up on you on the toboggan slide. He came back home and told me you are a good kid. We are lucky it is only two blocks to the park. We had told you to come home when you are cold."

"We are at our birch tree farm now, Mama. Listen! Trees are falling left and right. Come over here, Mama, someone cut the barbed wire, It's easier here. Let's get out of the way of other people; we don't want to be hit by a falling tree.

"How about a nice big tree Mama? Don't worry about the size too much, all you have to do is keep the sled from tipping over on the way home, I do the rest.

This one looks much bigger than the one Inge and I cut yesterday, and it doesn't have too many branches either. That helps. Step back Mama!"

With my bigger saw the tree falls in a few minutes and cutting it into six-foot pieces is no problem either.

"Okay Mama, getting out of here is the worst part, the rest is easy." It is a good trip home; we tipped the sled over only once.

Mama and I lock up the wood and the sled and go upstairs.

"Papa will be surprised what you did, Mama. I wonder what he will say."

Papa is listening to the radio when Mama and I step into the kitchen. We peel our thick coats off and Papa gets sprinkled with some snowflakes.

"Oskar, you should see what we brought home, six pieces, that tall," Mama is reaching as high as she can. Papa puts the paper down and is looking at me. "Helmut, are there still some birch trees left?"

"A lot of people are in the forest right now and it will not take long until all birch trees will be gone. Would you like to come along with me tomorrow to get a real big tree? Papa, if the two of us go we can take a tree a foot thick. I will take our big saw and a lot of rope to tie it all down. It will be a big load. Papa, it will be like the old days." I tell Papa how I do it and that it is not that hard at all.

This is the third day of getting firewood. Papa and I are stumping through the snow dragging our sled along.

"You bought a good sled Papa, it has been abused all these years and it is still in good shape."

"It was a small fortune then, I was out of a job in 1928, but it paid off to buy a good sled. It has to be, boys are pretty rough on it, aren't they?"

"Yea, Papa, but the worst is yet to come. You can hear the trees falling from here. If we still can get a big one we better do it now."

We start looking as we get closer. "Here is a big one, Helmut, nice and straight, not too many branches, what do you think?"

It is a big tree, at least a foot in diameter. Papa is much stronger than Mama or Inge, and we have all night, so why not. I untie our saw and start cutting.

"You better stand back, Papa, it's a big tree." I am getting better and better at it, but this tree is probably close to the limit.

Two hours later, I finish and we wrestle with the big pieces. As they say in Berlin, "*Mit Geduld and Spucke kann man alles machen*" (With patience and spit you can do anything). With a lot of patience we got our load home, tipping it only five times. Yes, we did it!

Our basement looks much friendlier now "Doesn't it feel good, coming home tired but having a lot to show for? Look at all this wood, Papa! That will keep us warm!"

We hurry upstairs to tell Mama. "Auguste, you should see how much wood Helmut and I just brought home. I think that will get us through the winter." Papa is beaming. Mama helps him out of that heavy coat. "Sit down, Oskar, and enjoy the warm room."

I smile at Mama and wink at Inge; Papa has made a good start to come around. "Here Papa, have a cigar. It is ancient, but I kept it for a special occasion. I think this is one!"

The Last Semester

"Helmut, I am glad you are here!" I hear as I enter the classroom for lunch. Lunch is available for students even during vacation. "What seems to be the problem, Kurt? Simmer down!" "Didn't you read the message on the bulletin board, Helmut?" "No, I just got here. What is it about?" "The winter semester--our final semester--has been cancelled for lack of coal to heat the college facilities, Helmut. The Russians and their blockade of West Berlin are the reason. West Berlin cannot get enough coal to the city from the west with the Russian blockade of West Berlin. This means, our College cannot be heated next winter. Here goes our final semester and our graduation, Helmut. "I have a job lined up after graduation at Siemens, and jobs are so hard to come by right now. The darn Russians try to make all Berlin Communist. They got the East, but now they want West Berlin too." "I know, I know, Kurt, I live in the East."

I had just picked up my free Red Cross 'Food for Students' Lunch in the assembly hall. About ten of my classmates usually meet here in class at lunchtime to have our free lunch, even during our summer vacation. The *Gauss State Engineering College* is located in West Berlin, and it is over a two hour round trip for me, but the lunch is worth it.

The Russians blockade all rails, road and river freight traffic between Berlin and the West since the end of March 1948.

But the Americans and the British are flying food and other essentials in, even coal. Every minute a big plane comes over our garden in the eastern part of Berlin. Almost above our garden, they make a U-turn and turn west and start their landing run at the West Berlin airport in Tempelhof.

However, coal is heavy; I guess it is beyond available capacity. Thank-goodness they do what they can. For some reason the Americans don't want to respond to the Russian challenge. I think they are afraid, even with their atom bomb.

"Damn the Communist! I am certain the Berliners will not cave in!" Kurt is still blowing off steam.

I think my classmates have been discussing the situation before I walked in. They now look to me--their speaker, their sounding board, and sometimes their common sense guide--if I have a solution. I wish I could

get rid of the Russian Communists, Germany tried that a few years ago and the western powers bombed us for it. Let's stay out of it.

"The question is if we manage to heat our classroom, somehow, can we conduct our final semester? I have seen a clever stove design that allows saw dust as fuel. I also happen to know where to get sawdust, for free; but in the Russian sector. Two questions remain, will the college and the professors support us and allow us to have classes in this facility in winter, and how do we get the sawdust from the eastern sector of Berlin to the western side during the Russian blockade?

I count on that we can make that stove ourselves, somehow. It is a very crude device but works like a charm. What do you think guys?"

"I volunteer to see our professors," answers Wolfgang, "I think some of them have lunch here too, right now, I have seen them in the assembly hall."

"Wait, I come along," Kurt adds.

"Helmut, what does that stove look like that burns sawdust? Maybe my dad's little shop can make it?" Hans asks.

"Hans, if you have an old steel oil drum or something like it, you are halfway there. I make a drawing of it. Except for the stove pipe all parts are made from about two millimeter sheet stock; nothing fancy. But does that thing put out heat!"

"Let me ask my dad, I am pretty sure we can make it," Hans assures us.

While we are talking Wolfgang and Kurt are coming back.

"Good news!" announces Wolfgang. "We talked to several of our professors. All say they will come to teach our scheduled classes, since their salary will go on anyway. They wish us good luck."

"That's good news. Who comes with me to the Administration Office to ask them for permission to come here when the rest of the college is closed? It makes a better impression. If I come by myself they may think it is only a crazy idea of mine. Actually, the more students the better."

Kurt, Günter, Hans and I walk to the college administration to ask for permission to heat our classroom individually and finish our semester as scheduled.

I tell them that the professors have promised to come to teach our scheduled classes if we manage to heat the classroom.

"That doesn't present a problem," the office manager tells us, "Somebody will always be here in the office."

"Thank you very much. In winter, during intermissions you are welcome to come over and get warm."

"Thank you. If it's really cold I may just do that," the manager answers, "maybe I can learn something."

We tell the class and suddenly things look as gloomy as they did an hour ago. **We have a plan.**

Only one critical thing is beyond our control. As long as the Russians blockade West Berlin we can't get the sawdust from the East to the West. We have to keep our eyes open for an opportunity.

We are all excited that we may graduate as engineers next spring, as scheduled. There is only *one* big IF.

"Hans, I get you the drawing tomorrow, than you can discuss it with your dad. I am sure the stove can be made in a day or two, if you have an oil drum and the steel. I volunteer in your shop if you need help.

"When we know how to get the sawdust from East to West we start moving. Let's stay in touch. In the meantime I will come here for lunch every day."

It happens that a couple of weeks later the United Nations announce that they will investigate the situation in Berlin. The Russians claim there is no blockade. Two days later the UN arrives.

My lunch mates and I sense that we may have an opportunity during the few days when the UN is here. I know the Russians well enough now that I anticipate there will not be a blockade during the days of the UN inspection.

There is in fact no blockade. Pictures in the newspapers show trucks moving across the East-West Berlin border.

"This is it! Guys, I need several of you to be here tomorrow to shovel the sawdust into the basement of this building, through the window the *Haus-meister indicated* to me. I will get a truck from the East Berlin City Transportation Department and pick up the sawdust. I hope I will have no trouble with the Russians at the border taking sawdust to the West."

Kurt volunteers, "How many will be here tomorrow with shovels, hands up?" Six hands are up.

"When do you think you will be here, Helmut?"

"I think between twelve and two, but remember, I am dealing with the East German Communists and the Russians. I don't trust either one of them. Anything can go wrong. Should that happen, I call you, unless I am

in jail. Then I call the UN, ha, ha! The UN will then believe the Russians that all jails are empty.

Early next day I go to the East Berlin Transportation Department to get a truck assigned for a job. I had asked the dairy manager, who lives in our apartment house, how he gets the sawdust. He is managing a dairy behind our house and is using that free sawdust as litter. He made me familiar with all the details.

At the Transportation District Office, at least ten tables are on the sidewalk with clerks. A long line of truck drivers is in front of each one. It takes hours before I get a truck assigned.

A truck driver in front of me complains, "How can I ever pay for my truck when I waste my time waiting for that stupid Communist to clear my papers and give me a permit for a little job. I think their plan is to get us out of business, and then the state can organize the transportation industry and control all business in the Russian zone. I could kill these idiots."

The clerk has all kinds of questions; most of it just to snoop out information about businesses for a future state takeover.

"Where is that sawdust going?"

"To our dairy, as litter, as we have always done. It is only a few kilometers from here," I answer. "Okay, that's twenty marks, here is your permit. I have my truck assigned, go to the driver, give him the permit and tell him where to pick up the sawdust. I climb into the cab and we take off.

"How do you like our new transportation organization here in the east?" I try to feel him out.

"That godforsaken bunch of Communists is trying to get us out of business." I think he is okay.

"Actually," I tell him, "This load of sawdust is going to West Berlin, to heat our college building. Because of the Russian blockade there is not sufficient coal, and our college will have to close during winter."

"There is no blockade today. My buddies just told me that they have made deliveries to the West the last two days and had no problems."

"How much do you charge for the sawdust load to go to the vicinity of the Zoo?"

"How do forty marks sound to you?"

"Okay, sounds good."

We arrive at the Varta Battery factory in Berlin-Oberschöneweide, where I live. To ship their products they make many wooden boxes and try to dispose of the sawdust.

The driver backs the truck under a big funnel-like container, and our truck is full in seconds. All goes well. We cross the border to the West without anybody checking anything, like in the old days. At the college my gang is waiting with shovels.

"Is it possible to back the truck close to the basement window, then most of the sawdust would fall into the basement by itself." I suggest to the driver. "*Kein (no) problem!*" In a moment, the sawdust slides off the truck and much of it directly into the basement.

"*Vielen Dank für die Hilfe* (Many thanks for the help)," I call up to the driver before he leaves.

Hans has started on the stove project and delivers two stoves a week later. "My dad figured, the classroom is large, and to be safe my dad suggested we make two stoves." We arrange one in front and the other in the back of the class. The stovepipes go through openings of the war damaged and cardboard covered windows. "Let's test one stove," Hans suggests, "we have a large carton full with sawdust here now. "Helmut, you show us how to run this thing."

"Okay everybody; watch it, so we all know how to do it. We pack the stove insert with sawdust, leaving an opening in the center, using that conical wooden bar. Tamp it down tight. Remove that conical bar. Place the insert in the oven and put the cover on. Light the paper on the bottom and leave the little door open for now, that's it. The sawdust starts to burn from the inside until all of it has burned, in a few hours."

It is still in class, only the paper crackles for a moment. You can hear a pin drop. Some of my classmates start to look at me and shrug their shoulders. Some even make nasty grimaces. I am closest to the oven and am ready to give it a kick.

But slowly I can feel the warmth of the steel, and then the middle of the cover starts to turn red.

"I told you! I told you!" With one filling, the stove keeps the cover red for several hours. "Open the windows, it is not winter yet, the stove is doing great!" Hans, Wolfgang, Kurt, Gerhard, Günter, and twenty other students and I clap our hands. Several of our professors are witnessing the test.

"Congratulations for a job well done. That's the spirit we like to see in our young engineers, especially in times like these."

"Our stoves and the sawdust will serve us well during the winter. We will not be intimidated." With both my arms stretched out high, I make the Victory salute. Hans and I shake hands. Did anybody have any doubt? Of course not.

The class of 1949 graduated as scheduled in April 1949. The blockade of West Berlin by the Soviets ended in May 1949.

Looking for a Job in East Berlin

1949

The Bundesmark has replaced the old currency, the Reichsmark, in the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) in 1948. West Germany consists of the former American-, British-, and French Zones.

In East Germany, the German Democratic Republic, GDR--the former Russian Zone--the so-called Eastmark replaced the Reichsmark. That really made the partition final.

Up to this point the Russians have been buying anything anywhere in all Germany with the Occupation Mark, which was printed in USA and generously given to the Russians. It was declared valid currency by the occupying forces and refusing to accept it was punishable.

When the West German Secretary for Economy Professor Ehrhard issued the new Bundesmark, all occupation forces protested, especially the Russians. For them the free ride to plunder West Germany too was over. The Bundesmark was a rare commodity for some time. Suddenly many wares showed up in showrooms that were previously held back by manufacturers. The economy in the West was now recovering.

In the East German Democratic Republic, (GDR), nothing of that sort happened. The Russian occupation forces were continuing to dismantle factories that were not destroyed during the war, to be shipped to Russia. Often the factory gates and the fences surrounding the property went along.

This act of no concern for the people was very disappointing to the old German Communists/Socialists comrades, who had hoped for the promised *Workers Paradise*, and the Great Socialist Union between Russian, German and eventually All-Europe Communist comrades. They never accepted the fact that International Socialism to solve all working people's problems had turned into Russian Imperialism.

Anticipating that our money, the Reichsmark, would become worthless sooner or later, I invested in radio components before the change, to get rid of Reichsmark cash.

During my college years I built over 50 radios, many I sold to the American Army PX stores in Frankfurt. It took me three days to cross the iron curtain and the British-American Zone border, round trip. The trick

was not to get caught, first with my radios going West and coming back with Lucky Strikes cigarettes going east.

Factory made radios with better reception and sound are now available in stores in West Germany.

Now I have to make radios and sell them here in East Germany at a lesser profit, but I am recovering my money using my in-house inventory.

I will soon have to look for a job.

Berlin 1949, at 28 Years



A job in East Berlin 1949-1952

"Hello Hilde, hello Bruno! What brings you back to the old neighborhood? Are you visiting uncle Hermann and Aunt Ida next door?"

After Hilde and Bruno married I did not see much of them any more. Bruno is an electrical engineer and works for a Russian company nearby, the former AEG (German General Electric).

We shake hands, "Helmut, Dad has told me you are a graduated engineer now."

"Yes, I graduated a few months ago."

"Are you interested in a job?" Bruno asks.

From my fellow classmates I have heard that jobs are not easy to find right now, it is obvious why, here in the east.

I have met Bruno a few times, and my impression is that he is a solid guy.

"We are looking for a few young mechanical engineers for our development laboratories; I think you would fit in perfectly. Are you interested?"

I wonder about what kind of a job I could get in a Russian company. I do remember a few hundred German engineers who had worked for the Russians and were "transferred" in the middle of the night to Russia--with Russian soldiers doing the packing.

It took several years until they were allowed to come back. With that on my mind I have a few questions.

Bruno laughs when I ask, "Do I have to sign anything that you will agree to transfers?"

"No, no," Bruno answers, "this is actually the former AEG. The only difference is, we have a new name, with Cyrillic letters, which none of us can read. In German it's NEF. The pay is okay, and every four weeks the "Intelligencia" gets a food parcel, ordinary workers are not included. The more important you are for the company, the bigger the parcel is. Yours will probably be middle size."

I figure I had better take advantage of the opportunity. "What do I have to do to apply?"

"Do you know the old 'National Automobile Factory' tower on the river Spree? The NEF is in that building."

“Yes, I know the place; I walked past it many times. We also made a field trip once through it, when I was a student.”

Bruno adds, “We are about 800 engineers, many of them PhD’s and most of them have a good name in the industry. We lose many of them when they get a better job in a West German company.

“I bet you will like it. It is a nice bunch of people. The surprising thing is you won’t find many Communists. There are a few, but they stick out like a sore thumb. You have to be careful when you talk to them.”

“I like what I hear, Bruno, what do I have to do?”

“Ask for the Personnel Office at the gate,” Helmut. “Someone at the gate will escort you then to the Personnel office. It’s very simple.” Cousin Hilde adds, “Good luck, Helmut. I will tell dad too, he always was proud of you. He wished that he had the opportunity to become an engineer when he was a youngster, and he feels good that you did it. He will be happy when he hears that you have the job.”

I really appreciate that Hilde and Bruno have come over, “Thank you very much, both of you. I’ll let Uncle Hermann know how it went.”

I am wearing my good suit and I am on my way to my job interview. At the company gate I get an escort to the personnel office. All is going well and I am escorted to the laboratory I am supposed to work in. Dr. Domsch will be my boss and we have a very nice conversation. He gives me the 'tour' of the laboratory. By noon I am hired. I meet my new colleagues and will show up for work on Monday. I am impressed how well I am treated. I also note that everybody is wearing a white shop coat and a tie. I wear a tie only when I go dancing and go out for a date. Since my navy days I don't like anything tight around my neck.

When I tell Mama about the shop coat, she wonders, “I don’t think you can get one here in the East, let me check if I have white cotton material, then I can make you one. I want you to look proper.”

Mama is always watching out for me.

On Monday morning I am on my way to the new job, it is only a five-block walk. I have the shop coat Mama made and a bunch of engineering reference books in my briefcase.

I am starting my engineering career today. Many thoughts go through my mind. Maybe I should start looking more seriously at the girls. I am done with making radios and studying, maybe I have time for girls?

This is my first job after graduation, and I am sitting the first time in my life on a desk to do my work, in the acoustic laboratory E10. Herr

Dr. Domsch is the *Laboratorium Director*. I try to remember names of my coworkers.

The work we do is for Russia, paid for by the East German tax payer. This year we work on telecommunication measuring equipment for the Russian Post Office. They oversee all telecommunication work in Russia, like all other European Post Offices do in their countries.

Bruno had also told me how well equipped this company is. First, this place was very lucky, especially during the fighting in Berlin during the last days of the war. Right after the fighting was over; Russia was the only power in Berlin.

The Russians plundered West Berlin and hurriedly moved all desirable equipment from the West Sectors of Berlin over to the East Sector; including anything inside of the company Siemens, which employed about 200,000 people.

My job here is to design, build and develop precision microphones, telephones and anything else electro-mechanical.

Once every few weeks a Russian engineer from his office in Leningrad shows up to familiarize himself with the units we are building for the Sowjets.

After a couple of days at work our young lab assistant Charlotte and I sit in the cafeteria together for lunch. She is filling me in on a few details of the lab. As she is talking I watch her and think that she is pretty. I was just about to ask her for a date, when she tells me, "Mr. Standke, I don't know if anybody told you already, but my fiancée worked in our lab. He managed to escape to West Germany and is on his way to Canada. You are replacing him. It was nice to work with Werner, pretty much like working with you. As soon as I hear from him I will follow him to Canada too."

Charlotte changes the subject and fills me in on the political persuasions of the people we meet. "Watch out for the mechanic, he claims he is not a Communist Party member, but the way he talks and acts, I feel he is. He can of course be a spy or party underground man without being a Communist Party member."

I am not so sure about the lab assistant that sits opposite me.

"What do you think about Herr Swierts?" I ask.

"He is new too, we are not so sure about him. We do know that his wife is the manager of the State Handels-Organisation (HO) store. It is fairly certain that at least she is a party member."

Often we lab engineers, including Dr. Domsch, sit together at lunch in the cafeteria and we talk interesting stuff. I am fairly new at this, but I hear discussions, actually lectures, about music, art, philosophies, religions, actually anything. All are very well educated and open minded.

I participate, but I am careful with my answers. I have a lot to learn. It is very interesting to work and talk with my coworkers.

The work is moving along at a leisurely pace. What I design is made in the model shop. Since I am a machine fitter/tool and die maker by trade, they consider me as *One of us who made good*. I can suggest and help in many ways, and can praise when a job is well done. I think I found the right tone with them. *Der Ton macht die Musik* (The tone makes the music). A side benefit is I hear rumors and the latest jokes. My model shop machinist came to our lab today, pretending to have a question, to tell me a new joke.

Stalin comes to Berlin to review the socialist progress in the city. To find out, he tours some factories and talks to some of the workers. He asks one, "Do you like your job?"

The fellow answers, "It's okay."

Stalin wants to know more. "How about the rest of the family, are all working for the advancement of socialism?"

"All are working, except my brother in West Berlin, he is unemployed."

Stalin gets all excited, "Bring him over here, we got plenty of work for him."

"Oh no, Sir, leave him in West Berlin. He brings us a lot of food packages, without him we would starve to death."

Work, Play, and Politics

By now, I am a week on my new job and start to feel a little more comfortable. Our Lab. Director is Dr. Domsch. He conducts the present and future development projects and negotiates with the Company's Technical Director and the Russians.

We work on sound analyzing equipment, where the sound spectrum is analyzed and displayed on a cathode-ray tube. Based on previously collected data the source of the sound can then be determined. It has to be portable; each of several components has to be less than 50 lb.

We are speculating what the Russians are using this equipment for; aircraft recognition maybe, who knows?

During lunchtime, Charlotte and I stand in line in the large company cafeteria. It is filled to capacity.

"What do we have today?" Charlotte mumbles as she is peeking over to the counter.

"Meat, Peas, potatoes, gravy. Not bad!" Another voice in the line speaks up.

In line with us are other young engineers who work in other laboratories, all are happy to eat here. "Imagine what a bachelor like me would do without this lunch. The ration stamps would not get very far.

Charlotte talks to several of our lab fellows around us, "Why don't we all sit on one table and you can get to know Helmut, he is the new engineer in our lab. He is taking Werner's place."

Six of us sit down on one of the tables; Charlotte starts to introduce me to them, and calls their names. "There is Heiner, the only married man in this bunch, and then there are Fritz, Heinz and Achim over there."

I look around and try to remember them. All are about my age, give or take three or so years. Heiner seems to be a little older than I am; the others a little younger maybe. All seem to be fun loving, open minded and easy to get along with.

"Where did you study, Helmut?" Fritz asks me, but all others look at me to find out too.

"I went to Gauss College, in West Berlin."

Fritz answers, "So did I, and so did Heinz and Achim."

"I graduated last spring, six months ago," I continued. "I built additional radios at home to turn my boxes full of radio parts back into cash. I had bought these parts before the old Reichsmark became worthless."

"You built radios too?" Fritz asks, "That means we all built radios."

Heiner is eager to change the subject, "Helmut, do you play Volleyball? We are a few players short."

"Yes, I do," I answer, "But I am not the greatest."

"You just joined our team," Heiner announces.

I know that I need more exercise; here is a way to get started.

"When and where do you play, Heiner?"

Heiner looks around, "Everyone on this table is on the team, and we play every Friday after work. We walk from here about two miles down the street, direction Köpenick, passing all the empty sport club buildings to come to the volleyball fields.

"We better get back to work," Heinz suggests, "Why don't we all meet here again tomorrow." He is right. We are the only ones left in the cafeteria.

In the lab Dr. Domsch discusses a new program with all of us. "Company Management wants to know our position on the development of an underwater sound analyzer.

"My personal opinion is the application of this device is not for a peaceful purpose. It reminds me of a time, which we would like to forget. What do you think?"

Our answers are instantaneous and unanimous, "No way!" That is the end of it. This is 1950, only five years after the war, and the terrible evidence is still all around us.

The sound analyzer of our present project requires a precision microphone. Because it is not available in the East, we develop one in our lab. It has become one of my assignments. Fortunately, Herr Bineck, one of our senior electronic engineers, is also quite experienced in precision acoustical apparatus.

He is a very independent character. He is short and stocky, early fifties and often comes in shorts. He is very, very casual. I found out by now that besides his PhD degree he is a genius.

And he has principles! He never compromises with the 'pinkies' in our company. He makes them squirm and gets a kick out of it. When he specifies components which are unavailable in the East, the manufacturing management, many of them Communists, come to our lab

to request changes. “Herr Bineck you know that we don’t have MP (metal-paper) capacitors. Please change your parts list.”

Bineck leans back in his chair, puts his feet on his desk and makes them dance. This is his moment. “You guys keep telling us that everything is better in the East, and you can’t even make a lousy MP capacitor? That’s too bad. You wouldn’t ship inferior equipment to Russia, would you?”

The manufacturing management has to spend some Westmarks to purchase MP capacitors in West Berlin, and they hate it.

I have a similar problem with them. To make my microphones temperature stable I have to make them out of Invar steel, a steel that doesn't expand at room temperature and a few hundred degrees above. I don’t need much, about eight inches of 1.0 inch diameter stock. We don’t have Invar steel in the East, and Purchasing will not spend any Westmarks for it. They are in the habit of substituting materials whenever they can't get something in the East. Somebody made them a hand written substitution list, which they use. I have seen this list; the substitutions are arbitrary and often wrong. The engineers are never told that substitute materials are used. This is irresponsible and ridiculous. No wonder some developments are in trouble.

In regards to the Invar steel I told them, “There are no substitutes, I don’t care where you get it from. It is your job to get the required material.”

Once every four weeks the Russian Company Manager is making his rounds through all the labs. He brings with him an interpreter and a secretary. He never speaks German, but we are sure he understands it. I tell him that Purchasing doesn’t buy the Invar steel and our schedule can not be met. I need only about eight inches. He laughs, "Buy three feet, that will do it," the interpreter tells me that in German.

He is a Russian major, mid forties, with a sporty figure, and always smiling. He could be one of us. He is also an amateur photographer, like most of us. He bought himself a fancy enlarger, and leaves it in our amateur darkroom, where we all can use it. Nice guy! Let’s see if he has something to say around here.

I am back at my desk when I hear Charlotte, “What are you doing tonight, Helmut?” That catches me off guard. I am not sure why she asks, but I feel a funny tingle, for a short moment, when she doesn’t even look up.

To clarify how I am supposed to take that, I ask, “What are *you*... doing tonight?”

“The reason I ask, I am afraid to stand by myself in the dark at ten p.m. to wait for the street car, on my way home,” she replies.

“At 10 p.m. waiting for a street car?” I wonder.

“That’s when my English class at the Adult Evening School is over, Helmut. It is only a 15-minute ride, but I never know when this thing comes. Didn’t you say once you are thinking of improving your English? I have then an escort and you can work on your English.”

I am surprised, but I am flexible. Who wouldn’t help a pretty girl out, and in the evening?

“When is the next lesson? Charlotte, I have to prepare myself a little.”

“You’ve got about two hours, it starts at seven and goes till ten.”

“Okay, lets go then and wait for the streetcar together, I don’t mind.”

After our English lesson, while we are waiting for the streetcar, I ask her, “When are you planning to follow Werner to Canada?”

“I am not exactly sure, probably at the end of the year, Werner will let me know when he gets somewhat settled.”

I am interested how that exactly works, to go to the West as a refugee or whatever. I am sure she knows that by now. “What do you have to do to get to Canada?”

Charlotte answers freely; I guess she knows me well enough by now.

“I will have to go over to West Berlin and register as a refugee and stay in one of the refugee camps until I get the refugee papers and the proper documents to become a West German citizen. With these documents I can then apply for a visa to immigrate to Canada.”

“And then I will stand here all by myself. I think I will miss you.”

It is Friday and lunchtime. Heiner comes to our table and reminds us not to forget to come to the volleyball game. A few girls have joined Heiner, Fritz, Heinz and me on our table.

All seem to be eligible, or at least they act that way. It is a very interesting bunch; ready for anything.

Their speaker, Frau Schmidt, a lively young widow, declares, “I am looking forward to the game, when we can play against you guys. I feel sorry for you, you don’t have a chance.” A few secretaries are chirping in too.

After work, the Volleyball teams are walking to the playing fields. On our way we pass the empty and partly burned out buildings of the rowing Club "Brandenburgia", of which I was a member from 1936 to 1940, when I joined the German Navy.

"Let me take a quick look of this place, I had a good time here as a teenager," I ask the group. "Why don't you come along, you probably walked past this place many times."

"I wonder if that secret gate lock still works," I am thinking out loud, as I reach up to push that button on the gate post down. Sure enough, the gate opens. We walk down the weed overgrown path toward the river and to the buildings. The building on the right, the main building, with a dance floor, a bar, locker rooms with showers, and the boathouse itself, is totally burned out. The building on the left, the women facility, is still standing, but empty.

Rumor has it; Russian soldiers pushed all those capitalist's boats into the river. The boats got trapped and broken up in the destroyed bridges.

"Look, Heiner, both buildings were full with boats. Brandenburgia had about 300 members, 30 of them on racing teams. We youngsters had a wonderful time growing up during our teens. It is all in ruins now."

We leave the abandoned place and continue on our way to the playing fields. Everybody is in deep thoughts about the time that we had barely survived. "Talk about rowing, Helmut, my girlfriend's parents have a rowboat for two. If you wish you can join Christel and me, we can then go on a boat trip together. With a coxswain it is always easier to navigate."

"That sounds great, Fritz, in summer time I will certainly take you up on it." We continue to walk to the playing field. The girls insist that they will play against us guys. They are going to show us. And they play their hearts out.

Actually, we spend as much time kidding each other as we play. Everything goes well and it is a super fun day. On Monday, at lunchtime, all volleyball team members sit together again and rave what a good time we had last Friday. "Who won?" Somebody asks. Frau Schmidt answers, "We had too much fun to count!" Although I am aching all over, I can't wait for the next game.

Ski Trip and Mardi Gras

1950

“Who wants to come along skiing with me?”

Heinz is asking Fritz and me. "There is snow in the mountains right now, who knows for how long? January is probably okay, but then, who knows."

Heinz, Fritz and I have lunch together in the company cafeteria. Heinz looks to both of us.

"I wish I could go, but I wonder if I can get a week vacation, I am only three months with the company?" I answer,



Myself

Heinz

Fritz has been the longest with the company, he answers, "I am sure you can, they have always been fairly generous. Talk to Dr. Domsch, if he will okay your vacation, then the personnel department will okay it too."

Fritz continues, "I really wish I could go too, but why don't you two go, you could probably stay in those (East) German Workers Union (FDGB) vacation villas, you know where the FDGB union bosses go."

Heinz adds, "We have the top FDGB functionary for our company working in our lab, I am sure he can answer that. I let you know, Helmut."

A few hours later, I walk down the hall to the power-supply lab, where Heinz works.

Heinz introduces me to Herr Hesters. According to Heinz, Hesters claims not to be a Communist Party member, but for a person in his position that is hard to believe. I am convinced that Hesters is a Communist, and he is reporting anything around him to the party's intelligence team.

"What are our chances to get a place in an FDGB vacation villa in a winter sport area, Herr Hesters?" I ask.

He is very friendly and answers, "I am sure you will have no problem, let me check, I will let you know tomorrow. In winter few FDGB members take vacations."

The next day, my phone rings. It is Heinz, "Let's go! We can have a place in an FDGB hotel in a week."

"Thanks, Heinz, let me talk to Dr. Domsch if I can get the week off."

All is going well and Heinz and I are packing. I am borrowing my sister Inge's skis. They are old and don't have steel edges. On icy slopes that will be a problem. My only time on skis was fifteen years ago. It probably doesn't count anymore.

Heinz and I board our train and we settle down. Let come what may, we go skiing. As the train is pulling out of the station, two young Fräuleins come through the passageway and peek into our compartment. After a look at Heinz and me, and a whisper to each other, they join us. We must have passed muster.

As time goes on the four of us seem to be in the best vacation mood. I close the compartment door to cut down the noise and to have a little privacy.

We like the train ride better and better. It's too bad that the Fräuleins don't go to Friedrichsroda, our destination.

We are just about to make dates after our vacation, when we are back in Berlin. Then the compartment door slides open again and a young man enters without asking whether there are vacant seats. Without hesitation he takes one of the empty seats. *No manners*, I conclude.

Normally one doesn't change compartments during a trip, especially not on an express train. He also has no baggage. The four of us look at him. Who is he; what does he want? The way he sizes us up, his demeanor and pushy voice tell me enough to know, he means trouble. His German grammar is poor and his education must be minimal. But it is more the way he talks to us that makes it so irritating. It is so dumb and arrogant. I slam the door shut behind him to let him feel my displeasure.

The four of us stop talking. I look him straight in the eye. Make my day!

He doesn't let me wait. "What do you think of the five year economic plan which the SED has proposed?"

He is saying SED, because the word "Communist" has become a derogatory word in Germany. The Communists, to improve their image and to increase their membership, took over the--left of center--Social Democratic Party (SPD) by hook and by crook and calls itself now the "Socialist Unity Party, or SED in German. The Communists hope that people will believe that the SED is now no longer the ultimate left and a Russian satellite party. But their actions speak louder than words.

I am wondering should I even bother to answer this character or ignore him. He is very irritating and he gives me the creeps. I just can't let him get away with it and let this jerk prevail. I decide to have fun with him.

"Is the SED's five year plan being implemented before or after the last German factory is dismantled for the Russians?"

He pauses, and with an irritating smirk on his stupid face, tries to answer. "Germany invaded Russia and they need our factories to rebuild it." "I do understand that, but this is now going on for five years. For how long is this to continue until your five year economic plan starts? You did not answer.

“Your SED and the Russians tell us we have been liberated. Why do you plunder someone you liberated? There are several million old-time German Communists that suffered under the Nazis, perhaps over a million died in concentration camps. Even your German Communist comrades are waiting to be liberated. Why is it so difficult for you to understand that there is something wrong with your story?”

While he is torturing his little brain for an answer, I continue, “As liberators, why would the Russians kidnap hundreds of engineers in the middle of the night, with all their family members, including women and children, and take them to Russia, to work there against their will?”

That happened three years ago to several hundred German engineers. During the night, a Russian military truck and a dozen soldiers arrived, packed up the entire family and all their belongings.

My dad was a mailman then. He delivered mail to the family one day and the next day the family was gone and Russian women had moved into the apartment.

This young fellow had been prepared to answer this; he did not deny that this took place, as some SED fellows have tried before when I brought it up.

“These engineers were not kidnapped. When they were hired, they signed an agreement to stay with the company should the company relocate.”

“This is an outrage,” I answer, “To relocate a 1000 miles away from home, to another country, without having a chance to say good-bye to relatives and neighbors and to pay their bills, in the middle of the night. This is kidnapping, and it should be called kidnapping, even by the SED party.”

I raised my voice by then to get through to him. I can tell I am tweaking his nerves. I knew he'd make my day when he walked in.

I continue, “Tell me, what other good things has the SED in mind for us?” He does not know what to say, but his blank face speaks for him. I had interrupted his prepared program and now he is lost.

I try to be a nice guy, reach for the door handle open the door for him. He gets the message and is probably happy I let him go and no longer wait for an answer.

Another hour later we arrive in Friedrichsroda. Let's forget this episode, we are on vacation. Maybe one of these days it will be history and we laugh about it.

When Heinz and I arrive at our hotel, we are pleasantly surprised. Heinz proclaims, "I think we will enjoy our winter vacation. Let's hope the SED will not be here with us at the same time."

After a good night's sleep and a pretty good breakfast we notice other vacationers in ski outfits heading for the slopes.

"This is a good sign," I notice, and turning to Heinz, "Let's talk to some of them, to find out where the action is."

The general opinion is, hire a ski instructor for a few hours a day. They know where to go, depending on your skill level, they teach you, and they know how to tell stories. Some of them are accomplished skiers and skied in the Olympics.

That's what we are going to do. Unfortunately, the slopes are icy. As I had feared, our equipment and skill is not up to it. Our ski instructor, Karl, suggests skiing cross-country all along the forest where the slopes are gentle and still covered with snow.

It is terrific. The sun is shining and we have to peel off our jackets. After about three hours Heinz asks, "Don't you think we have enough exercise for the first day, Helmut?"

"Yes, I think so. We can always go again in the afternoon if our sore muscles will let us."

For a first day it was great, and we plan to meet the next day with Karl at the same time. Hopefully it will get colder and it will be snowing, so we have a great day tomorrow.

After supper Heinz and I look around for what to do next. Somehow we end up in the bar, next to the big fireplace, where we join other vacationers and have a nice evening.

"Do you plan to go to the Mardi Gras?" They are asking us.

"What Mardi Gras?"

"Look at the bulletin board."

Heinz and I walk down the hall to have a look.

It says *The town of Friedrichsroda invites everybody to come to the Mardi Gras on Saturday, preferably masked!*

"Heinz, this is a *must!*"

"Absolutely," he answers.

"Two more skiing days and then we should be in shape for Mardi Gras," I feel.

It's Saturday. Heinz and I go early, but the place is already packed when we arrive. We have to buy a silly cap because we are not masked. Some guys and almost all girls are disguised.

The music is terrific, mostly the oompa type, but also modern American and British music.

A dance called the Lambeth Walk is very popular, especially here in the East. The SED authorities go nuts when it is played; it is a West vs. East issue.

The MC does a good job. He announces, "Everybody out on the dance floor for the snake dance."

Women and men form a long line, both hands on the shoulder of whoever is in front of them. The music starts and the dancers snake dance around the ballroom and around tables and chairs. When the music stops, the dancers pick one of the nearest sitting young women or man and sit on his or her lap. It is great fun and I get a first impression of a few girls in the process, by the seat of my pants. When the music continues you dance together with your *sit-on* and finish the dance.

Suddenly I find myself dancing with a gorgeous girl. She dances *mit Gefühl* (with feelings). But because she is masked, I have to guess her age and how pretty she is. During the dance, I can tell she is my dream. I take my chances. With a figure and a voice like that, I don't think I can go wrong. And can she kiss!

At midnight with a drum roll and a great deal of apprehension, the masks come off, with a lot of ahs and kisses.

I have a winner! What a sweet thing! She is gorgeous. I am on cloud nine.

We dance and smooch all night and have a fantastic time. When the party is over early in the morning, Monika and I agree to meet after lunch at 1:30 in front of our hotel. She lives in Friedrichsroda and knows where the FDGB hotel is.

Today is Sunday and we just finished our lunch. I am all excited about my date and count the minutes. I still can feel when I was holding her tight. I really care for Monika, what a sweet and beautiful girl.

Suddenly an SED (Communist) functionary shows up and starts to make a speech, the stupid political kind of course. I could wring his neck.

He has now talked for an hour. I am constantly looking at my watch. I couldn't care less what he is saying. I feel like I am sitting on an anthill and wish I could sneak out, but the tables and chairs are tightly placed and it would be almost impossible to get out of here without making a commotion. If I walk out now, that may look like a political protest. One never knows how these party guys would react.

I will be very late for my date and I hate to have Monika wait. This is awful.

When I finally do get out and step in front of the hotel, Monika is not there. I check the lobby and every road around the hotel, no Monika. Why didn't she ask inside the hotel? Did she give up on me? Did she show up at all? Maybe she is married.

I will never know. It was not meant to be! I guess.

Rowing Again

“Join the club? Here in the East we do the next best thing. We join the *City of Berlin's Sports Group, Division Rowing*.

I realize I am totally out of shape. I remember that Kurt Lederman-- a young engineer who works in one of the other labs next to mine--has talked about rowing during lunch. I told him that I was rowing as a kid and again as a teenager, and like to join a club again.

Kurt brings me up to date. “If you like we can go together to the Rowing Group in Grünau. I go there on Saturday anyway and you can sign on. Bring along some rowing gear and we can row for an hour as a starter. Our ‘Club’ is at the Grünau rowing racecourse. We take the train to Grünau and then it's only a short one-mile walk. You are going to like it. You will meet a lot of oarsmen who were in many clubs throughout the city before the war. You may have raced some of them as a youngster.”

“Do the *commies* leave you alone there?” I wonder.

Kurt laughs as he answers, “I don't think there is one *commie* between us. But here is what does happen.

About once a month, usually on a Sunday afternoon, when we return to the boathouse from a tour and the boats are cleaned, a guy from the *party* shows up to teach us to be politically correct.

When he shows up it somehow happens that the bar opens. But we are polite; we sit around his podium and pretend to listen. We clap when no clapping is called for, and we yell *bravo, bravo* at every other sentence.

One after another, one at a time, someone walks over to the bar. Pretty soon we have our own party at the bar. The red party rep. can't talk loud enough with half of us singing at the bar. He then packs it in and we are back to normal for a month. You'll enjoy it. It's different, but it is almost as much fun as it was in the old days.

Cousin Reinhold's is Back from Russia

1950

“**H**elmut, your cousin Reinhold came home,” Mama is wiping her eyes as she is telling me the good news. “That is good news, even two years after Stalin had announced all German prisoners of war will be home, no later than 1948. Is he okay?”

“I don't know, Helmut. I got a card from my sister Emily; she is so happy that both boys are now home.”

“You know what, Mama, I hop on my bike to see him, I'll be there in half an hour, and then I get the real story.”

I sure like to know how he survived in Russia, not many German POWs did.

“Do you remember, Helmut, when Reinhold wrote us a Swiss Red Cross Card in 1947?”

"I do, Mama, the postcard had his writing on one side and I wrote back on the other side. And I wrote him then to remind Stalin to let him go home no later than 1948, as Stalin has promised. Remember Mama, how we looked at each other when we read,

"Helmut, I am so proud of you that you study engineering, so you can contribute to build our International Socialist Society."

"I remember it very well," answers Mama, "You speculated that Reinhold probably wrote this knowing that his mail will be censored and he wanted to be politically correct. You have so much in common that you thought you know Reinhold well, he would never think along those lines. But we were sure wondering then."

"Okay, Mama, I let you know when I am back."

"Helmut, tell Reinhold that I am very happy that he is home and say Hello to *Tante* Emily."

"I'm on my way, Mama, I won't stay too long."

I am going the same way to Adlershof as I did eighteen years ago on Papa's semi-racing bike. What an exiting ride that was. I was twelve years old then. Mama and I never told Papa, he would have gone ballistic.

I am on an old beaten up bike now--that's all I could get-- because our bikes have been stolen in the weeks after the war, when there was total anarchy.

Who knows who took our bikes, most likely Russian soldiers, or German refugees or migrant workers from Poland or Czechoslovakia? But I am alive and healthy, the rest can be fixed.

I arrive at Aunt Emily and Uncle Reinhold's apartment and chain my bike to an old-fashioned cast iron pump in the courtyard. I can keep an eye on it from their window. It is early in the afternoon and I hope cousin Reinhold is home. If we had a phone that would help, but our underground cables are now in Russia.

I am so excited to see him again. I wonder what he looks like and what shape he is in. The two of us have so much in common. We look somewhat alike and we think pretty much alike, at least we did until we lost track of each other during the war.

We both were students at the Knorr-Bremse in Berlin. We pedaled hundreds of hours together to go home from work, rain or shine, snow or ice. It is about 150 miles per week, from Monday to Saturday. Sometimes I had to take my violin along too, as a member of the student orchestra. Reinhold finished a year earlier than I and started to study

engineering. When I joined the German Navy in 1940 we lost contact, except for what Mama and Tante Emily reported.

Reinhold almost finished his engineering studies. When the war was finally coming to a conclusion and fighting was nearing Berlin his studies were interrupted. In the last few weeks he was drafted into the Luftwaffe. Shortly thereafter the Russians took him prisoner. He was lucky not to get killed. That's all I know.

I am thinking of the good times we had together as I climb up the stairs to the third floor. I stop at their door for a moment and collect myself. I am not quite sure what to expect of Reinhold. That strange message on that post card is still on my mind. Did he mean it literally or what?

I ring the bell and wait, the seconds feel like minutes. I am still in the past. Then the door opens. It is cousin Reinhold.

Within a fraction of a second, we grab each other by the neck and pat our backs, hoping our wet eyes will not show.

Tante Emily joins us, grabs Reinhold and me as the tears are running down her face.

We finally let go. Our faces tell how happy we are that the wait for Reinhold to come home is over.

Tante Emily suggests, "Let's sit down and be comfortable, I am sure you two have a lot to talk about."

"Reinhold I am so happy to see you safe and sound back home. That's the only thing that really matters. Remember all the years we pedaled back home from the Knorr-Bremse. We were so tired after work, especially going up the bridge at the power plant. Sometimes fine coal dust would blow into our eyes. When I was home you had to go another half hour to make it here to Adlershof."

"Ja, I do remember, Helmut. That's now over ten years ago. It was a wonderful time then. A lot of bad things happened in the meantime.

"How did you get through the war, Helmut?"

"You probably know that I was in the Kriegsmarine (German Navy) from 1940."

"Yes I do, but I never heard much else."

"Since I volunteered in 1938 for the "Baltic Fleet", my assignment was mostly in Norway, first on the coast and later on a destroyer. There wasn't too much going on, thank you. On the coast we were servicing mostly the artillery on patrol boats. We had plenty of time to go skiing

during the long winter. In summer we built ourselves canoes to paddle up and down the beautiful fjords and go fishing. It was like a long vacation.

Our task on the destroyer consisted mostly of convoy duty for the iron ore ships and troop transports from the North Cape of Norway to Germany. We were also laying mines or destroying free floating mines up and down the coast. The good time was when I spent the equivalent of three semesters of engineering on the Ship Artillery College in Kiel. That made the first semesters in Engineering College easy.”

“Let's talk about you Reinhold? I do know that you only had one more semester to go to get your engineering degree. But then the war caught up with you.”

“In a way I was lucky. I didn't have to serve because I was a student. But during the last few weeks of the war, when the Russians were close to Berlin, the Luftwaffe drafted me. The whole thing made absolutely no sense. For all practical purposes the war was over after Stalingrad was lost in January 1943.

Lucky for me, I was taken prisoner of war by the Russians before I got killed. I was sent to a camp near Moscow. Rather than sit there and possibly end up in Siberia, I let them know what my training was, tool-die-maker by trade and a semester short of an engineering degree, and that I was willing to help them to rebuild.

Eventually I started to work in a factory near Moscow, and soon became shop supervisor there. The Russians had a tremendous shortage of trained people.”

“Were you treated reasonably well, Reinhold? Did you get enough to eat? Did you have to go to some political schooling?”

“Initially it was pretty rough. The Russians didn't have much for themselves. The railroad was badly damaged by the retreating German Army.

Any available trains and passable tracks had to carry supplies to the Russian Army in Germany. On the way back the trains transported thousands of German POW's.”

“That's pretty much what happened here, Reinhold. Everything came to a halt. In those times, it is *everybody for himself*, especially in the cities. There just isn't anything to eat for weeks. If you have valuables take a trip out of the city and to the country, and try your luck there.

“I am sorry I interrupted you, what did you do then?”

Reinhold continues, "I took some classes on Socialism. I am now convinced that the Russians have the answer to a lot of things. The capitalists of the world are behind most wars in the last century."

"How can you say that Reinhold? The Communists were a major factor that the Nazis were able to come to power. At the last election, which was still democratic, the Nazis got less than 37% of the total votes. Many people that voted for Hitler voted for him out of fear for the Communists. In the major cities of Germany we had Communists goon squads in the streets, with red paint writing party slogans on houses and walls. With "Heil Moscow" and clenched fists greetings, they scared the daylight out of the ordinary German. Many figured Hitler is the lesser evil and can keep the Communists under control. Many only voted for Hitler so Germany would not become Communist and Germany a Russian satellite."

"I don't think you understand Helmut, there will be a transition period, and we are in it right now, when a stricter government hand is required to establish order. One has to be a little tolerant of that."

"Reinhold, that's exactly what the Nazis were saying, verbatim. You and I know what happened when you allow your government to take away your civil rights, for whatever reason. It will not stop there; it will be the beginning of loosing all your rights. It is one group first and then another and then the next, Reinhold.

"The safest system is a strong democracy, a system that people believe in, are willing to support and are willing to fight for. Then we all have freedom. That's the only thing that works!

"Party demagogues of any kind are our adversaries. Right now the greatest danger to the development of our new democracy in Germany comes from Communist Russia. Communists or Nazis are afraid of freedom of the individual, it interferes with their plans."

"Okay, Helmut that all sounds fine, but the capitalists will buy the government by bribing the officials. The votes really don't matter. We need a strong workers organization, which the Communist Party provides, to allow the people to rule."

While Reinhold is talking I remember how my outlook changed when I started to make a pile of money doing piecework. I was in business for my self, in a way. I loved to organize my work and develop better ways, to work hard and take lots of money home. In the socialist society one has no incentive. Why should one work hard when the lazy guy next to me makes the same money?

"Reinhold, I don't think you know what happened here in Berlin three years ago. The Communist Party sent truckloads of Communist workers to city

hall, which happens to be located in the eastern sector of downtown. The Communists packed the galleries and chanted for hours. All proceedings came to a halt. That was the end of democracy in Berlin City Hall and government by the people. The *West Berliners* had no choice. Under the protection of the Western powers they started their own City Hall in West Berlin. That pretty much stopped the Russian takeover of all Berlin. The independence and democracy of West Berlin prevailed. The East Berlin Government is corrupt. Full-fledged Communists and a bunch of opportunists do what benefits Russia or their pocket. People have absolutely nothing to say. What you have been told in Moscow is propaganda, Reinhold."

"That's hard to believe Helmut, I am positive that you are wrong."

"Okay, Reinhold, until you are a bit more familiar what is really going on here, don't commit yourself. Don't join any party or political group. Give it some time."

"You better cool it, you young hot heads," Tante Emily comes in. "I have a piece of cake left over. Sit down over here. How is everybody at home, Helmut?"

"We are all happy that Reinhold is home and healthy. I almost forgot I brought a picture along from an old birthday party. Look, Reinhold, you look as if I had an older brother."

"Sure looks like it. Yea, we did so many things together. We have to get together more often now that I am home."

"I am happy to see you back home Reinhold, but I better go now, it is getting dark. There are a number of creeps out when it is dark; many of them are in Russian uniform. *Aufwiedersehen Tante Emily*, I'll be back soon."

I hate to bring Mama the news that Reinhold has been brainwashed and truly believes that the Russians are here to bring us peace and a Socialist heaven.

"Mama, you wouldn't believe it, Reinhold has been converted into a Communist. He truly believes that the Russians will bring peace through their International Communism. I never believed that someone like Reinhold could be brainwashed. We had a long discussion and he doesn't question it whatsoever. I am disappointed."

Mama smiles and looks at me. "Helmut, take your time judging him. He can't possibly know the real world here. All he knows is what they told him. The course he took was probably for Russians and home consumption, maybe even belated war propaganda. And Reinhold has no way of knowing otherwise. He is a smart kid; give him a little time here in Berlin."

"What else can we do? I'll check up on him in two months.

"Mama, I wonder how Reinhold made out after two months back home and trying to put up with the red government in Berlin? I still can't believe how somebody like Reinhold can be brainwashed.

"Mama, I think I will see Reinhold, I wonder how much he learned in two months."

"I am curious too. Say Hello to Tante Emily and Reinhold too, of course." I hope Reinhold is home, I am coming unannounced. If he hasn't found out by now what is really going on in the Russian occupied part of Germany, what should I do? Should I get involved? Would it do any good? Should I let him find out by himself in time?

Tante Emily is home but she is expecting Reinhold to come over any minute. She brings me up-to-date.

While Reinhold was in Russia his wife had moved back to her parents. Reinhold moved in with his in-laws until he can find an apartment. He is helping out in the coal and firewood business of his father-in-law.

I can hear Reinhold entering the apartment.

"Hello Reinhold, *wie geht's?* How are you? I hope all is well."

"Oh Helmut, what a two months! I have been working in my father-in-law's business, selling coal and firewood. I have to deal with the state bureaucracy. Wagonloads of coal arrive in the middle of the night and have to be unloaded within one hour. How I get my crew together at this time is not their concern.

"Communist bureaucrats don't have sympathy for *Business People*. I have to sign for twenty tons of coal when I have no way of telling how much I receive. It is typical that whenever the train has to slow down or has to stop in front of a signal or at certain places, thieves climb aboard and steal a ton or two of coal. Coal is rationed and I have to account for the twenty tons in ration stamps. How can that work?

"The way they are operating does not have a future. This is not the way Communism is supposed to work.

"I decided to finish my engineering studies as soon as the East Berlin Engineering College opens up. The older ones are all located in West Berlin."

"Congratulation, Reinhold. You had me worried for a while!"

One of us made it to America

"You got what Heinz, a letter from America?" I have Heinz on the phone. "Yes, Helmut, It is from Heinz Gottschalk, I don't think you know him. He left our Company before you started. Let's meet in the cafeteria at noon. I have something interesting to show you. I can't talk right now, see you then." I wonder what the letter says, but any news from outside this Communist place is interesting. At noontime in the cafeteria the usual bunch is together again. Heinz is opening up a letter from the USA and hands several photos around to Fritz, Achim, Heiner and me.

Heinz explains to me--because I am relatively new--that this letter is from Heinz Gottschalk. "He worked here as a development engineer, he is about late twenty years old, like us. Two years ago he went over to West Berlin, never to come back to the Russian Sector again."

"Did Heinz Gottschalk ever mention any details to you? I understand you were good friends. For example, how did he manage to get to the USA? How do you become a West German Citizen? It's an interesting subject."

"Of course, of course, strictly academic!" Heinz grins and pretends to look under the table for spies. "Here is what I do know. You have to show up at one of the Refugee Centers in West Berlin to be registered. Then one has to go through a number of hearings by the West German and Western Allies' Authorities. You have to prove to them, sort of, that you are a legitimate refugee and not a Russian spy."

Fritz raises his hand, "Let me add a few more details, since I am a West German Citizen, because I live in West Berlin. Presently 3000 to 4000 East German Citizens register daily as refugees in West Berlin. You don't hear that here in the East. Most of them are young folks from the rural areas. The refugee system can't handle this volume. It now takes about a year to get processed. In the meantime the refugees are housed in barracks and schools. It is a difficult time for everybody."

I am thinking aloud, "Why would young people from the farmlands try to go to the West? Could it be those farmers in the East own their land on paper only? Most farms got incorporated into large

agriculture corporations, run by party member managers. The landowners work eight hours a day for the corporation, like farmhands. There is no future for youngsters.”

Fritz adds, “For them, being in a camp for a year and then unemployed in the West apparently beats being a son of a small farmer in the East.”

“Back to the letter Heinz, how long did it take Heinz Gottschalk to be processed?” I like to know.

Heinz shrugs his shoulders, “I really don’t know. After he left I didn’t hear from him until now. This letter is a happy surprise. Let me read to you what he writes,

“I am now several months in Detroit, Michigan, in the USA, and found a job as a tool designer. This is really not my specialty, but it is a good job and it pays reasonably well. I do my best, and in time I will learn to get faster. My bosses are patient with me. Right now, what takes my coworkers two hours takes me two days. These guys are pretty good, but they have done this all their lives.”

“Hey Heinz,” I interrupt, “let me see that photo.” I see the picture of what looks like a brand new car. On the back it reads, “My new car, a two year old 1948 Dodge.”

Heinz continues to read, “You wouldn’t believe it, but I am staying with an elderly lady in the suburbs of Detroit. She treats me like her son. I do all the odd jobs around the house, like plumbing, painting, you name it. I just finished preparing her vegetable garden for planting.

“Around here, I have never seen that many cars in my life. Here, a car is not a luxury; you need one to get around. I will keep you informed. What is going on in Berlin? Write me once in a while.”

Heinz looks around to all of us, “What do you say to that? He made it! Good for him!” We look around at each other, what an inspiring letter. I comment, “Anything **can be done if you really want it!**” In the meantime I am listening to the BBC's short wave broadcast of *English lessons to Germans* at eleven o'clock at night. Why? It can't hurt!”

Vacations 1951

*F*ritz is joining Heinz and me to go to the Baltic Sea during summer vacation. Heinz and I had so much fun in our winter vacation that Fritz is joining us. The pension Filicitas is our home, only a few yards from the beach.

We are now three bachelors who decided we go to the beach in summer and go skiing in winter. Last year Heinz and I had a ball skiing in Friedrichsroda. Word got around. This summer Fritz joins us and it looks like we will have a lot of fun again. The beach is full of good-looking girls. Music and dancing is at several places. In Filicitas itself, during breakfast and lunch, it pays to look around to see who is smiling at you.



Helmut, Heinz, Charlotte, Werner and Fritz
Charlotte and Werner went to Canada (later to USA).
I arrived in the U.S. in 1954 and Fritz in 1960

In the winter, Achim and Heinz Winkelmann have joined us and the five of us are skiing in the *Erzgebirge*. The snow condition could be better, so we have to look for additional entertainment.

Next to our table in the hotel are a young woman and a young man, in their early twenties. They are Communist functionaries and argue politics all day long. They may be lovers but they sure don't act that way.

We finished supper and are still sitting at our table and run low on what to talk about. Then I notice the girl next to us is by herself today. "You seem to be really up-to-date on politics." I am trying to sound as if I want to know. My other four tablemates sit back and pretend to be interested.

"I am glad you are interested. I just received the latest Party information. Come with me and I bring you up to date too. There is some interesting material I would like to show you."

Of course are we eager to find out, what does her room look like. The young lady takes the five of us to her room to show propaganda stuff to straighten us out. After listening to her for some time, I am bored. She still thinks we want to know. Only Achim, who is still faking interest, I can only guess in what, has moved closer to her.

I think it is time to go and I wave Heinz, Fritz and Heinz Winkelmann to come and leave. We are already near the door when Achim calls us, "I'll be right with you!"

We wait, and wait. The door is half closed when I notice the key is in the lock. Achim doesn't show up and it is very quiet in there, I am sure they want privacy. I close the door completely and turn the key from the outside. Expecting panic screams or pounding on the door because there are no phones in the rooms, we wait for a little. Nothing happens. We then tiptoe away. We will find out eventually if Achim has been converted to be a Communist.

It's no big deal; the cleaning woman will unlock the door the next morning.

The next day Achim appears for breakfast as always, a little disheveled, smiling, but giving no details away. Since he did not become a Communist, I wonder, what has he learned all night?

"Achim, what made you so quiet?"

"Helmut, cavaliers kiss but don't tell."

Munich? Maybe!

"This deserves to be celebrated, Heinz. Let's see if there is a place to go to in this burned out city of Dresden. Someone in the hotel ought to know. Let's find out."

"Yes, we do have a nice place to go to," they tell us at the desk. "It's a little out of town, that's why it survived. It is a scenic ride through the forest and up the hill. A taxi will get you there."

Heinz and I are in Dresden to pass a test for an advanced course for graduated engineers today at the University Dresden. We did well and I think we deserve to pat ourselves on the back.

"Helmut, the guy was right about the scenery. It is beautiful up here."

"Let's find out if he was right about the music too. Let's go in, Heinz."

We are early, only a few couples are dancing, but the music is terrific. It's the type I heard on the British radio when I was stationed in Norway.

"It will be a nice evening, Heinz. If nothing else is going on, the music alone is worth it."

"How about a drink on the bar, Helmut? From the bar we can survey this place and watch."

"You are chicken, Heinz. See the blond on the right, she is alone. She is a customer. It doesn't look like she works here, she's not the type. Let's sit at that empty table next to her."

She seems to be bored, nobody came to dance with her, but there are not too many people here.

"The next dance I'm going to dance with her. Are you going to dance too? Heinz, there are a few good-looking girls here, you are always so bashful."

I don't want to make it too obvious but I do notice the girl next to us has nice legs and she is well dressed, and on a Friday.

I get up as the music starts. She looks at me and smiles and we walk to the dance floor. Good figure too.

We dance well together; and don't have to talk too much. During the Slow Waltz and the Tango talking would only get in the way. Of course I go back for the second and the third dance. After the third dance

I think we are pretty much committed for the evening. We smile at each other and get warm to start a conversation.

"My friend and I passed a test at the University. Do you live here in Dresden?"

"No, I live now with my dad in Munich, but I used to live here. I am here to visit my mother. We would lose our villa if my mother would move to Munich too. That's what Communism does for you. I come here at least twice a year."

After the last dance the bandleader announces a break.

"Why don't we sit at the bar and continue our conversation there," I suggest, "and let's drink to the nice evening."

After the second Cherry liqueur the young lady announces, "Let's drink *Brüderschaft* together, my name is Gisela. I heard your friend Heinz calls you Helmut, is that correct?"

"Yes Gisela." While we lock our arms we do the *Brüderschaft* kiss. "This is your last day here in Dresden, Helmut?"

"That's what Heinz and I had planned, but I think I can stay until Sunday."

"Why don't we meet here tomorrow, Helmut, maybe at noontime, then we have all day?"

"I'll drink to that, Gisela." And I lean over to kiss my new date.

"I promised my mother not to be too late today, I have to go now. Why don't we meet here at noon tomorrow, we can eat here too, Helmut. *Auf wiedersehen, bis morgen, Helmut.*" I walk with her to the door and after one more kiss her taxi takes off.

She is different. Besides being good looking Gisela is confident, smart too, I think. We seem to be very compatible.

"What do you think of her, Heinz? Why didn't you dance with some of the other girls? Some of them seemed to be nice girls. By the way, I am staying till Sunday."

"No, I will leave tomorrow, Helmut, I am bored stiff. Yea, I think she is nice."

"Gisela and I will meet here tomorrow at noon. I think it will be a nice day. She comes to Dresden twice a year, maybe I can see her more often in the future."

I am thinking of Gisela and I am looking forward to my date.

I am at the restaurant on top of the hill the following day, early and eager, looking at every car that is coming up. It is still another twenty minutes, time stands still. The Elbe River is moving slowly and it is romantic here.

I hear the gravel on the road again, another car is coming up. It's a delivery truck, that can't be it. Did my watch stop? It takes forever for five minutes to pass.

Another five minutes, it is getting close, if she is on time. I'm sure she will be. I know. I feel great!

I am checking my tie.

The gravel announces that another car comes around the corner. A taxi, I can't see anybody inside, I'm sure it's Gisela.

I kissed her yesterday, but we had a few drinks. Today is another day. I don't know, what is the right thing to do today? I have to play it by ear.

The taxi driver opens the door, it is Gisela. I study her face and see her open arms, clear-cut thing. What a wonderful day!

Gisela and I have a table with a terrific view, half way around.

"They have excellent Trout here," Gisela tells me.

"Do you like wine with your dinner?"

"Yes, I do, Gisela."

It is terrific. Gisela and I still have a half-empty bottle of wine in front of us. The dinner was great. And we haven't stopped talking yet. I am on cloud nine.

Gisela tells me she is studying Textiles to work in her dad's business; he is representing a Swiss textile manufacturer in Munich. He had a transportation business with many trucks here in Dresden but the East German authorities made it impossible to continue.

Gisela fills me in, "He packed his personal stuff and started over in Munich. I followed him after he was settled."

"Munich is close to the Alps, do you go skiing a lot?" I wonder.

"Yes, with friends, my dad takes us there. We are in the Alps in about an hour. The weather and the snow are always good."

"That's the problem here in the East. The last two times, when I went on a skiing vacation with friends, the snow condition was poor."

"Why don't you come to Munich, Helmut?"

"I sure would love to. It would be exciting to ski together."

"I have to figure out a way to get through the Iron Curtain. The last few years the Communists planted landmines and tripwires, built watchtowers and who knows what; and somehow I have to get my Engineering books and personal stuff over too."

"Helmut, that's easy. You can send them to me in Munich and I keep them for you until you come. I can't wait to see you in Munich, Helmut, when we are back together again. Write a lot of letters to keep me up to date with your plans."

"Let's drink to our *Wiedersehen* in Munich, Gisela. *Zum Wohl!*"

Protest at my Russian Workplace

Herr Seifert steps into the laboratory at eight o'clock in the morning and slams his news paper on his desk. "Did you see this in the paper?" I almost fall off my chair and my coworkers almost get a heart attack.

Herr Seifert, a man you hardly ever hear speaking out loud, continues, "Our self anointed leaders tell us that the people unanimously declared they want to work Saturday and Sunday. Have you been asked? I haven't!"

All of us look up from our work. What is he talking about? This lab was so quiet that one could hear a needle drop until Herr Seifert came in.

What got this quiet man so upset? Herr Seifert, the model in composure and manners, speaking Greek and Latin, now he is out of breath, he is shaking and red in his face.

"Look here," he continues, and he points to the front page of the 'Neue Zeit', the East German daily paper.

"It says, the FDGB (Free German Worker's Union) membership requests unanimously that our government allow us to work the next Saturday full time and Sunday half time, so we can reach our goal of the five-year Rebuilding Plan."

Unanimously? Nobody asked me! I will not let them speak for me? Is this another attempt to take my rights away?

I call Heinz and Fritz to find out what is going on in the other labs. They report a similar commotion in all labs. I call my technician in the model shop. "What do you guys think about working Saturday and Sunday in the shop?"

"Not a chance," he replies, "We go on the barricades before we do what they tell us! Every one of us up here in the model shop thinks that way."

Not only is our lab in arms, the entire company is in uproar. Gentle and well-educated people are ready this time to speak up; we will not take it anymore!

At ten o'clock a Sign-up Sheet is circulating to vote 'yes' or 'no' to 'Work on Saturday and Sunday'. It has one 'yes' vote only, our lab mechanic voted yes. We suspected long ago that he is a member of the Communist Party.

"What is the fuss all about Herr Standke? Is it such a big deal to come in on a couple of days?"

I am looking down to him, "Herr Zonke, that's what you said last year, when we were asked to come in for an extra two hours. You suggested we don't have to actually work, as long as we come in, that will keep us out of trouble. Now they want us to work two extra days. I told you that last year, you give a Communist a finger and they will take an arm."

Discussion about protests goes on all day. I am sure not much work is done. Instead of gaining man-hours they lose them many folds.

In the afternoon the top FDGB functionary, Herr Hesters, circulates a memo through the company, telling us that there is some misinterpretation about the newspaper article.

All employees are invited to a meeting on the subject in the company courtyard tomorrow morning at ten o'clock. We will have a discussion first and then we will all vote on what we should do.

Our lab Director Dr. Domsch calls us together. "What do you think of this affair?"

Herr Bineck, always very outspoken and enjoying the opportunity to give our authorities a hard time, answers, "They blew it, let them squirm. Now everybody knows that they lost control over us, if they ever had any."

I add, "We made a mistake a few months ago, when we stayed two hours longer to help the North Koreans, supposedly. Even though we did not work but talked and looked at pictures, we were here as they had told us. Now they want us to come in for two extra days, including Sunday. I have reached the point that I will not come in Saturday and Sunday, come what may!"

This is it, we have to fight for what little bit of control we still have in this Russian occupied country, run by Russian trained German stooges. And this is called a Democratic Republic.

We are telling Dr. Domsch that we have no intention to deviate from our regular work schedule. Dr. Domsch, always the very polite--actually shy--gentleman, thanks us for our honest opinions.

At home I turn on the radio. In this case, to find out what is wrong in the East, I turn on the RIAS (Radio in the American Sector) station. I make it a habit to listen to the east and the west stations to find out what is really going on. To weigh the information properly and to remove the slant is becoming an art. With a little luck I get additional information from the English BBC station from London on short wave. I also like their 'English for Germans' program at eleven o'clock at night.

But with Russian tanks in the streets I don't think that this commotion will result in anything in our favor. Not this time. But one never knows what can happen.

Today all workers gather at ten a.m. in the crowded courtyard for the meeting and the vote. I look forward to see Herr Helsing weasel out of his dilemma. He is the top functionary of the FDGB and probably the connection to the Communist Party.

Discussion groups are forming and it gets livelier by the minute. We all wait for Herr Hesters to get on the podium. He is a lousy speaker and anything can happen.

Hesters walks over to the microphone, crunching the notes in his hand. He is opening the button of his collar to get more air. He looks tired.

"Dear colleagues!" Everything he says has little to do with what we came here for, which is typical for the speeches he makes. He is trying very hard to develop a dialog with somebody in the crowd, without success.

I think he feels lonely and abandoned.

In desperation he invites workers in the audience to come to the microphone.

This I got to see!

A model shop technician in a blue shop coat walks up to the microphone. He is a foot taller than Hesters. He has to pull the microphone up a foot and looks down on Hesters. He clears his throat a few times, scratches his head, but finally gets his act together and talks to us.

"I don't know about you, but I haven't been asked if I am willing to work the extra hours on Saturday and on Sunday. So how can it be unanimous? This is a lie. You FDGB guys can no longer be trusted to represent us."

A never-ending applause shows complete agreement with his statement.

As the tall fellow gets away from the microphone another blue collar worker comes up. He is nervous too, fidgeting with his nose. After pulling the microphone down to fit his size and waving to the crowd; he starts.

"We are being asked to work four additional hours on Saturday and four hours on Sunday to make the Five-Year-Rebuilding Plan a success. We are being told we have too many holidays that cut into the planned output: The first of May; Labor Day in all of Europe, the eighth of May; Day of Liberation, and the two Easter Holidays.

"I was not liberated. The Red Army brutalized my family when they entered Berlin. They had no intention to "liberate" anybody. When a man interfered with the rape of a family member he got shot, period.

I am not an educated man, but it seems to me that the high ranking and well-paid government planners should have looked at the calendar when they worked out the Five-Year-Plan. Take your plan back to the drawing board. Thank you!"

Everybody is clapping and many workers pound on their chairs to really make a racket. I am looking for Hesters. I find him in the shadow with his head almost down to his chest.

What applause. The speaker wipes his forehead while leaving the microphone, waving to the crowd, with a thousand workers clapping. He said what everybody thinks.

Herr Hesters can't take it any more, he goes to the microphone and announces, "Let's get back to work, the meeting is over."

The planned voting doesn't take place. The outcome is too obvious and Hesters doesn't want to have it on the record. Very little work gets done on the rest of the day. When I come home I listen to RIAS (Radio im Amerikanischen Sektor) I hear what happened in the country. What took place in my company today took place all over East Germany, RIAS reports, "People are telling their government, we didn't vote for you, go back to Moscow where you came from!"

The following day, I am back at work to design and develop precision microphones. All is quiet and my coworkers and I think the issue of working the extra hours has been settled, until our lab receives a new memo.

It is an invitation for all laboratory personnel to come to the cafeteria after lunch and hear Herr Hesters talk to us about progress in the Deutsche Democratic Republic--DDR, (East Germany). I wonder what he is trying to accomplish. He is getting on my nerves by his never-ending effort to bring us under control of the Communist Party.

Everybody in our lab stands around after we read the memo. We are sure that even Hesters knows by now he is beating a dead horse, but the SED (formerly Communist Party), probably told him to give it another try, this time without the workers, engineers only. I think the party is in trouble. And they are sending the Hesters out, that's all they got. But when you work for the party you have made a pact with the devil.

After lunch around six hundred people gather in the cafeteria, ready to see the spectacle of Hesters going under.

Eventually Hesters is stepping up to the microphone and is waiting for the unruly crowd to quiet down. He is facing six hundred adversaries. In previous gatherings this audience was fair to him, the underdog; I am not sure what will happen today. This whole affair starts to bug me.

Hesters stands near the microphone, cracking his knuckles and is waiting for the crowd to quiet down some more.

"Let's take a look at all our accomplishments," he starts. "In the DDR, Deutsche Democratic Republic, (also known as GDR, German Democratic Republic), we founded a ship building industry, which did not exist before here. We started to make our own steel; none was made before in this country. Our unemployment is near zero," (he did not mention that thousands of workers are dismantling our factories for the Russians). "Our food production is increasing from year to year. Is this not fantastic?"

Nobody answers. Much of the data he gives is in question, but nobody speaks up, nobody claps. The entire cafeteria is dead still.

Hesters waits and waits for a response. None is coming.

The thought starts to bother me, Hesters may get the silly idea that this absence of a response means we are in agreement with him? I hate this guy and what he stands for.

He continues, "For all these tremendous achievements we have to thank the leadership of the SED, and the socialist camaraderie of our liberator, the Soviet Union."

This is more than I can swallow. I stand up. There is dead silence now, and the eyes of six hundred people are on me.

"Herr Hesters, I am sure the progress you refer to is for real. But what the working men and women of the DDR accomplished was done in spite of the party's effort, not because of it."

The clapping does not stop for a long time. I must have said what everybody felt. I am aware that I just made a mortal enemy.

The meeting is declared over.

On the next day a new memo goes through our labs, "The working hours for the coming weekends will remain as usual." They backed down!

A lot of people I never met before pat me on the back.

I have to be very careful now not to be viewed as an organizer of adversaries. They will deal with that. We never found out why some people were never seen again. "They went to the West," is the standard answer. That tells me a lot!

HOW CAN I TELL MAMA?

Mama, Papa and I are celebrating Papa's birthday. It is not like it used to be. The Standke clan used to celebrate everybody's birthday, which meant a lot of birthday celebrations during the year. Today it is only the three of us--Mama, Papa and I--who sit at our kitchen table and try to celebrate Papa's sixty-fourth birthday.

Sister Inge is now in Australia with her husband Boris, a fellow from the Ukraine. He and many Ukrainians did not dare to stay behind when the German Army moved back. They were certain the Red Army would shoot them. I met Boris and his DP (displaced persons) compatriots for a few hours before Inge and Boris got married and moved to Australia.

He seems to be all right and I wish them luck in their new country. Inge wrote, when they arrived in Sydney after a six-week journey, that workers union people in Sydney did not let them off the dock, they were considered 'cheep foreign labor'.

Mama takes a deep breath, "I wonder how Inge and her husband are doing in Australia now?"

"I do miss her, her laughs and her can-do-anything spirit. Why would our government not let us travel to the West to be at the wedding?" Tears are rolling down her cheeks. "What kind of a government do we have that will not let us travel within Germany?"

I try to console her although I question it too. "Mama, I am certain she is better off in Australia than here. Knowing Inge, she will figure out in a hurry how things work there. She makes friends easily. She learned Russian in a short time, and she will learn English too in a hurry."

Papa has not said a word so far. He is concentrating on his cigar. He avoided to look at Mama and me and pretends to see something interesting out side our window at the fourth floor. Besides clouds there is really nothing to see, sometimes a sparrow maybe.

We say nothing for a while, I think of Inge and the time when we were all together.

Why isn't it any more, what went wrong?

Then Papa has the right idea, he turns the radio on, and we have music; happy and lively music to get our spirits up.

For a long time I have been trying to tell Mama and Papa about my future plans. I am afraid it will hurt them, I am sure it will. I tried to make the best out of our political situation here in the East. But when I was told, I can advance in my profession when I join the SED (Communist Party). I know for certain that I don't have a chance in the East. Why should I stay!

Mama and I have never had any secrets between us and I have to tell her now, I have to.

"Mama, I don't know how to tell you. I have thought about it a long time. I plan to get to the West too. There is no future for me here."

"Does it have to do with the letters you are writing to Gisela in Munich, Helmut?" Mama looks at me. She already knows.

Papa is putting his newspaper down and looks at me, "There is a lot of unemployment in the West, Helmut, what makes you think you can find a job?"

"Papa, last week, I got a call from a former college, Herr Salzmann, who now has a good position in West Berlin at the headquarters of the AEG (German General Electric). He called me to come over to West Berlin for an interview, for a position as an Assistant Chief Engineer in the main vacuum tube division in the city of Ulm.

They liked everything what Herr Salzmann said about me. First they thought that getting the papers to become a West German citizen would not be too difficult. But after hours of phone calls the personnel department gave up. That's the problem, Papa; we live in East Berlin, that's what is wrong."

"It's too risky, Helmut, I would not do it if I were you."

"Helmut, don't pay attention to what Papa says. Because he is afraid to change we are still in this dinky apartment here."

"We could not afford a larger one, Auguste, I was not against it. Remember, I was out of work a long time during the depression."

"Oskar, for the money you spent in the pub we could have lived more comfortably. But that's all in the past. All I am saying is, Helmut, if you think it is the thing to do, do it!"

Mama is shaking and her face is wet with tears. Papa has crushed his cigar and walks out of the kitchen.

What did I do wrong? I want them to stay together when I am no longer here.

After a few minutes Papa is coming back into the kitchen and sits down again. Mama has dried her tears and I feel a little better about what I stirred up.

Papa breaks the silence. "Helmut, you have been writing to Gisela for some time, is that a serious thing?"

"I don't know yet, Papa, but it looks promising. We only met for a day, but we wrote many letters over the last few months. She is an interesting girl, and I am looking forward to get her letters. You will like her. She offered to keep the packages for me I will send to Munich, like books, clothing and stuff which I need when I am in Munich."

"Helmut, do what you think is right for you! Munich is not out of this world and one of these days we can travel again," Mama is encouraging me.

Mama continues, "My brothers, my sisters, my mother and I did the same thing forty years ago when we moved out of Pomerania to Berlin. My father did not want to come along. I have no idea what happened to him after we left."

Papa adds, "My father came from Pomerania too, to look for work in Berlin, and I don't think it was the wrong move."

"Did you make any plans yet, Helmut?" Mama wonders.

"No, not in detail, Mama, but I will go in winter, probably after Christmas. That will be several months from now, let's not worry about it. Let's celebrate Papa's birthday now."

Good-bye 1952

"Mama, don't worry about me! I have to go now. Heinz, Achim and Heiner are waiting for me at the train station."

My friends and I plan to go skiing in the Harz Mountains near the East-West German border. In a week or so, after I get familiar with the area, I will try to ski across the border to the West. My friends will not come along, and on my own I will do whatever it takes.

Mama and Papa have known for some time that I will try to go over to the West some day. That time has come!

I trained a lot to be physically fit, and I am mentally prepared. If I have to I am ready to ski for days.

"Helmut, I wish you the best, make it over safely." Mama starts to hug me. "Write us as soon as you can. I hope you will succeed in everything you try."

Mama and I hug each other one more time, and it is a long hug. I hope not, but it may be the last time that we see each other.

"I come with you to the house door, Helmut," Papa tells me and takes my skis. I grab my little bag and Papa and I go down the stairs from our apartment on the fourth floor. For almost thirty years I have been going up and down here. I remember the children growing up here with me, and when Felix had his first motor cycle, a big *Red Indian* that he was so proud of. Felix and his brother Anton didn't come back from the war.

Will I ever be back?

Papa and I walk along the snow-covered courtyard and through the dark doorway without speaking a word. I pull the heavy solid door open. In front of the house Papa and I stop. It is dark at eight o'clock in the evening in January 1952.

"Write as soon as you can, Helmut, and good luck. I cross my fingers. I hope you make it without any serious trouble Helmut." Papa and I hug too which has not happened for years.

"I will write as soon as I can, Papa. Don't worry if it takes a couple of weeks or so. I stop at Fritz in Nürnberg first when I am on the other side. I will write you from there. After a few days I will then go on to Munich. Take care of Mama, Papa. I'll make it!"



1952, I am thirty one

Although it is dark at the door, I see Papa wiping his eyes.
I have to go!

Will I see Mama and Papa again? It is a strange guilt feeling to leave Mama and Papa behind; they are not the youngest anymore. It is not like going on vacation. I hope I will be successful in the West and can make it up to them, somehow, some day.

I am at the end of the block, under the street light. I turn around and wave one more time. I cannot see Papa anymore in the dark, but I know he is looking at me and I know he is waving back.

A little luck will do it!

"We should be in Elend in two hours. Did you listen to the snow report for the Harz Mountains?"

Heinz, Achim, Heiner and his wife Ursula and I are on the train to the Harz Mountains in central Germany. Our destination is a little tourist town of *Elend* (Misery), close to the east-west German border.

"Yes, I did," Heinz answers. "They had lots of snow in the last week and more is still to come until early February. We should have snow on our entire two-week vacation. It looks good for us vacationers and for you too, Helmut."

I am in luck, it's a good start. I had hoped for at least six feet of snow near the border, to bury the tripwires, land mines and whatever else the East German Border Patrol has planted at the east-west German border to keep their own citizens in.

"Getting nervous, Helmut?" "No, I am now on vacation for a few days, ask me again at the end of the week, Heinz."

Heinz, Achim, Heiner and Ursula-- my sport and vacation buddies and working colleagues for the last two years--and I will ski for a few days like ordinary tourists. In four or five days, I will then ski across the border at night to West Germany. At the railroad station in Elend, we find out where the FDGB (Free German Democratic Union) hotel is, that is where my friends will stay. I am no longer a member of the union, because I quit my job. I found a tourist inn close by.

"Why don't you swing by here tomorrow morning and then we go skiing together. Find out at your hotel where the good slopes are, guys. See you tomorrow!"

My inn is a little dilapidated, but the owner is very friendly, and the food is pretty good. I don't mind, I know that small business people in the east don't have a choice. If they are too prosperous, the state knows they have been cheating on taxes.

If the location is good, the business becomes attractive to the state and it is confiscated. That's the East!--The socialist worker's paradise. Successful business people are declared rich capitalist outlaws and they have no rights. My inn owner shows a low profile too and hopes that times will change. I don't blame him.

It is a beautiful morning. After breakfast in the nearly empty dining room I walk around and study the scenic pictures of this area and the maps of the Harz Mountains on the wall. A large relief map gets my attention. It shows everything in fine detail. But all of it is old and the east-west border is new and not shown on any maps. Later in the week I have to talk to the owner about it, when I know him a little better and he knows that I am not a state investigator. I have to find out where the border really is.

I see my friends coming up the street and are ready to ski.

Coming out of the inn I call, "*Guten Morgen*, how is everybody?"

"We got some information for you Helmut," Heinz answers. "It could be important for you. We got it in our FDGB hotel. (The FDGB is closely connected to the East German government). You should get an official Tourist Identification paper for this border region. Go down to the Official Tourist Office in the market square, it is for this border region and it's for the asking."

"That's good to know! Thank you! With all this snow, I think this skiing vacation will beat the ones we took the last couple years. Remember, Heinz, when we applied to get a forth week of unpaid vacation we got the runaround? But we always managed after we finally talked to the personnel chief himself. That short fat Zelski guy with that funny accent."

"Yes, Helmut, and we always got our two weeks skiing and two weeks swimming at the Baltic Sea. Life isn't all bad here in the east."

"No, it wasn't, thanks to you guys. We had wonderful vacations the last few years. But this time I want to do more, I have to move on!"

Skiing was perfect the last few days. It is late in the evening and with a beer in hand I study that relief map of the region again. If I only knew, where the border really is? The inn owner stands behind the counter and is cleaning up. We are alone. I am sure he guessed by now what I am looking for.

Looking at the picture I ask, "Where is the border actually, I want to be sure that I don't cross it by accident."

"No, you better not, be careful."

Unless you stand close to us, you would miss our smirks.

"Look here, this small south-north going river is the border." And he points to a narrow valley. "It is very close to our neighboring town *Sorge* (Sorrow)."

"I drink to that, pour me another beer. By the way, I will check out tomorrow, let me pay my bill now, sir."

I didn't sleep well last night. Am I nervous? Nah! Not me!

It is another beautiful day. This is it! I pat my pockets. I got my wallet with my new Tourist Identification slip and a bag of candies. That should do it. I don't want anything on me that can interfere with my tourist look; especially should I get stopped by the border guards or should I become a *lost tourist*. My little bag and a few other things I leave behind at the inn.

After lunch I meet my buddies. They will come along going west for a few hours and keep me company.

It is an almost perfect day. A little overcast and it may even snow some more. But I wish it will be clear tonight, I like to see the stars to orient myself.

Heinz, Achim, Heiner, Ursula and I left Elend after lunch and have been skiing west for over two hours now. There is a thick pine forest on the left and fence posts barely sticking out of the snow on the right. The road must be several feet below us.

We haven't talked much and time goes by. Every one of us has his own thoughts.

"You better think of going back now to your hotel," I mention, "it's four o'clock and it is getting dark."

We come to a halt. "Do you know your way, Helmut?"

I point my ski pole straight ahead, "This is west. You bet I know my way!"

I push my poles into the snow and take my right glove off.

"Ursula, Heinz, Achim, Heiner, thanks for coming along. Wish me luck. I will write to you from Fritz in Nürnberg as soon as I can."

After a long handshake, I continue west and they turn back to their hotel.

I am alone now. The signs 'WARNING! BORDER REGION!' are still on my right. Does that mean I am going parallel to the border?

It is getting darker. The sky is a little lighter in front of me, where the sun went down, that must be west. Once in a while, I see a house on the right, but all houses are vacant, their owners have been moved out. On the left the tall pine forest is still with me.

Suddenly, about half a mile ahead of me, I recognize two characters on the side of the road. In a flash they have disappeared. They looked like border guards and probably spotted me too.

There is another house on the right, but this one seems occupied. Smoke comes out of the chimney. A woman with a bucket of water steps out of the front door and pours a bucket of water out on the snow.

I yell, "Is this the way to Sorge?" pointing ahead of me.

"Yes, it is. Go straight ahead, you can't miss it."

"Vielen Dank," I call back, loud enough to be heard by the characters in front of me. When I come to the trees where the two guys had hiding I hear, "*Halt*, do you have identification?"

"*Selbstverständlich!* (Of course)", and I open my wallet with my east marks showing and hand him my Tourist Identification slip. (Thanks to my friends.)

"Is this the right way to Sorge, sir?"

He hands me my paper back, "Yes, it is, turn left on the intersection down the road. Don't go right, that's the border."

"*Vielen Dank, guten Tag!*" I say with a poker face.

That is the best piece of information I heard all week!

Down the road I turn left as they told me, they may be watching.

I am in Sorge now. According to my inn owner in Elend the border is not far from here.

Shall I wait until it is very dark and then do what the cops told me not to do, or do I go right now in direction west while I have twilight for a little while and take my chance?

I am at the railroad station and a big beautiful antic cast iron clock on the platform shows it is five o'clock.

I know the narrow gage rail road--the Brockenbahn--used to go north to the Brocken, the highest point here in the Harz Mountains. When it became a border region after the war the train operation stopped. But the station restaurant is still open.

I decide to continue to go west from here now. I know the Brockenbahn goes north, that tells me where to go.

Outside Sorge the road has become narrow and leads into a dark forest.

What are those furrows in the snow? It looks wild pigs are having a hard time dragging their belly through the deep snow. They can be mean; I don't know when they have young ones, hopefully not in winter. I think I'm safe, I can move better on skis than they can run in that deep snow.

It is now totally dark. I can no longer see my feet, or make out the road except by the faintly lighter sky in the dark night between the trees above me.

All I can do is keep going straight ahead as best as I can.

It must have been hours that I moved around trees, over and around hills, pretty much feeling my way along. In the darkness I can't read my watch, but it really doesn't matter.

It that a river down there? Is that the border? Somewhere below me I think I hear water running. The relief map showed a river in a deep narrow valley. I must be standing at the top edge of the bank, which leads down to the river. How steep is it? I poke around with my ski pole to feel how steep the bank is and if my next step is safe. I don't want to fall down a vertical cliff. I turn sideways on my skis and step down a couple inches at a time. At each step the snow crunches and I am afraid that the border guards can hear it, if this is near the border. I wait a while after each step; I have all night, to let the border guards believe an animal made the crunch. It takes a long time when I finally reach the flat bottom. When I stop, there is only the muffled sound of the river; ice and snow must be covering it.

It feels I am alone in this world. Is this the border?

Crossing that river is going to be a challenge. With my ski pole I feel and poke. The ice is about two feet below where I stand.

It seems to be strong enough to carry me. As long as I am on skis it is probably safe.

I slip down onto the ice and find it strong enough. I hope the bank on the other side is West Germany. It is only a few more feet to go. Crossing the river is no problem; it is completely covered with ice. Now on the other side I can feel another ledge; also two feet high above the ice. With my skis on I try and try to make that first two foot step to get up on the bank; and get exhausted in the process. I can't do it with my skis on; I have to take them off to crawl up the bank.

I manage to take one ski off and place it up on the ledge. I have to balance on one ski, the ice is still holding. Now I have to stand with the other foot on the ice to take the second ski off. It all goes so fast; I break through the ice and I am up to three feet deep in ice water. The good news is, it isn't any deeper, and I didn't lose my other ski under the ice. I manage somehow to place the other ski also up on the riverbank.

Now I can crawl on hands and knees and on my belly out of the water and up the icy slope, pushing the skis ahead of me. By the time I get to the top of the bank I am breaking out in a sweat.

The horizon in front of me is a little lighter. There must be a town or city, maybe a West German one?

Moving along on skis again I am back in a forest and everything is dark again. I try, but I am not sure which direction I am going. I don't have a clue what time it is. A little glow in the east would be very welcome.

Don't get sentimental. I remember what I always told my seamen on the destroyer, "We quit when the job is done!" Now it is my turn.

My candies are gone, did I eat them or did they go down the river? I could use a few now.

Almost as a surprise, all of a sudden I am in a ghost town with no person in sight. I wish I knew where I am. I ski down the empty street and come to a town square. Only a few street lights are trying their best in this icy panorama. All is covered with deep snow. Not a living thing around. The feeling creeps up on me that I am still in the East.

A bulletin board on the other side will probably tell me. It is too dark to read any of the notes on the board.

Darn! On top of the board I can see the clutched hands symbol of the SED Communist party.

What am I going to do next?

Slowly I ski on through the town.

Have I not been here before? I don't know yet what it is; but it looks familiar. I go on and I think I am almost out of town when I see another large beautiful cast iron clock up high. Isn't that the same railroad platform I saw five hours ago?

That beautiful antic cast iron clock is telling me, "It is only ten o'clock! What is the problem? There is plenty of time to get things done tonight, like now!"

That's right! I know now that I am in Sorge at the railroad station. And I know what the cops did not want me to do. Now is the time to do just that!

Let's have a beer first, Helmut, you have to drink something. Then we get going!

I step into the railroad station restaurant. There are only half a dozen or so border guards sitting on the tables and play cards. As I step into the light, I get a first look of myself. Ice crystals cover my boots and

pants up to my jacket. Everybody stops playing and all look me over. I sit down and order a beer, paying no attention to these clowns. When I get my beer and pay in East German marks they ignore me and are back to playing cards.

I need an alibi. I wave the waitress over and ask her, "To go to Elend is that the road from here to the left and then under the overpass to the right?"

"Sure is!" That's all I need. That should pacify everybody in this room.

The beer is good in East Germany. I am ready to tackle this thing once more. I know what to do now and I am in a better position than I ever was to day. I look one more time up to the clock. It is only fifteen minutes past ten.

I put my skis back on and watch if a border guard is following me. I don't see anybody, but just in case I go under the railroad overpass and disappear on the other side in the dark, as if I would go back to Elend.

To make sure not to get lost again, I climb up the bank to the railroad tracks. Not much snow is up here, I guess the wind blows it away. It is still pitch-dark but I can feel my way between the rails.

I am going north to the Brocken if I would stay on the track. Somewhere along the way I have to turn west.

I must be several miles out of town by now when I see a search light slowly turning around in the distance. It must be close to the border. I get down from the track and down the bank to find myself between young pine trees. They are about six feet above the snow, just right to hide behind in the shadow when the searchlight is pointing my way. Every time the light is pointing the other way I can move ahead a few trees while I am in the dark. I keep going west and have the searchlight far behind me now.

What is that flash of light ahead of me? Now it is gone! Here is another one. What can it be?

Now I can see the light moving, it must be a car. It is a road, that's where I have to go. I am picking up strength and determination. But let's be extra careful now. Don't make a dumb mistake I am telling myself. I stay low to not be a target above the trees. Once in a while another light indicates where the road is. It cannot be too far any more; I can hear the cars now.

Standing on the road now, I wonder. Am I in the West?

I follow the road for another mile when I come to a road sign, but it is too dark to read it. After a few minutes I can hear a car and a flash goes across the board. BRD is all I could read and that's all I need. It stands for Bundes Republic Deutschland, West Germany.

I DID IT!

One cannot trust people in uniform in border regions, let's go for a few more miles.

I feel so good; I am not tired at all.

After half an hour I am in a small tourist town. I need a place to stay over night. Under a streetlight, I can tell time. It is twelve o'clock, the first midnight in West Germany.

I pass up a number of fancy hotels with dance music, they sure they do not want me in there the way I look now. Down the street, the next inn looks like it will be open for skiers.

The door is open but most lights are out. A woman is just about to close the door and lock the place up.

"I just came over the border from the east, where can I stay in this town? Do you rent rooms?"

"No, we don't rent rooms, and most places are closed by now. But if you don't mind, you can stay here in the dining hall. I bring you a couple blankets. It will get cold when the potbelly stove gets cold. Can I get you something to eat?" "That would really be nice; I have not eaten for twelve hours. Whatever you have. I have West German money, I can pay you."

"Don't worry about that! I make some sandwiches for you."

I am in heaven. Eventually the lights go out and I try my best to be comfortable. My wet boots, socks and my wet ski pants are hanging over a chair. It gets colder and colder and I shiver as the night goes on.

I am glad when the night is over and daylight comes through the windows. There is commotion in the kitchen and I get dressed. My pants and sock are still clammy; they will dry in time.

"Have a hot coffee and breakfast, you feel better then!" The lady of the house is watching out for me.

"How can I get to the next rail road station? I want to go to Nürnberg," I ask. "Take the bus at eight and in half an hour you are at the railroad station. The bus stops in front of our door, right here."

"*Vielen, vielen Dank!* This is a good day. It is my first day in West Germany!"

Stories of my Life By Helmut Standke
Pages 315 to 400

CHAPTER SEVEN

West Germany

1952-1954

A New Life

"Where are you Helmut? Are you in the West? How are you?"

"Fritz, I am in the west! I am at the railroad station and will be on my way to you in a few minutes. I will arrive in Nürnberg at two o'clock. Can you pick me up so I will not get lost in Nürnberg? My boots are still wet and my trousers are still clammy, I will tell you all the details when we are together."

"Sure, Helmut, I'll pick you up. Have a good trip!"

Friedel and Fritz met at the Baltic Sea when Heinz, Fritz and I were on vacation there in summer 1950. They married a year later and moved to Nürnberg. Since Fritz was a West Berlin citizen, moving to the west was no problem for him.

I had mailed several cameras to Fritz from a West-Berlin Post office to sell in the west to finance the period until I have a job.

When the train arrives on schedule in Nürnberg Fritz is picking me up. On the way home Fritz tells me what he has accomplished in the meantime, he really likes it here.

"You got a nice place, Friedel and Fritz."

"Take a look in here Helmut, our addition to the family. This is Gaby, our little daughter."

Friedel and Fritz are doing well and seem to be happy.

"You better get out of your wet clothes and boots, let me take care of it, Helmut," Friedel worries about me.

I also don't want to look too bad when I meet Gisela again when I get to Munich in a few days. I have to wear the same stuff I wore when I skied over the border. I also like to look like an ordinary person; I don't have West German papers yet. Who knows what kind of trouble I could get into?

"Fritz, I like to write a short letter home to my parents that I am safe and sound with you, so they can stop worrying. Can you fix me up with paper?"

"Of course Helmut! I sold one camera, as you told me, now you have some money to get you started."

"Thanks, Fritz. Can I call Gisela from here to tell her that I am here and when I will arrive in Munich?"

"Go ahead, Helmut."

I have a long and happy conversation with Gisela.

We plan that I will be in Munich on Saturday at noontime, in a few days from now.

"My father and I will come to the railroad station and pick you up, Helmut. We have rented a room for you. It took us a while to find one, they are hard to get. I am so happy to see you again."

I am looking forward too. But before I can commit to anything I have to get a job. Maybe I need West German papers first; I have to find out about that.

It is Saturday and the train arrives in Munich. I wonder if I will recognize Gisela. I haven't seen her for almost a year.

"Hello, Helmut." It feels good to hear Gisela's voice. I am glad she spotted me first. She wears a funny hat and I had to look twice to recognize her.

"It's nice to see you again, Helmut, I was looking forward to that hug since Dresden.

"My dad is waiting in his car at the curb," Gisela answers after catching her breath. "We brought your big package along with all your clothes, so you have something to wear."

I shake hands with Gisela's father, a well-dressed gentleman, middle aged, with a pleasant smile and a firm handshake, I like him.

Gisela and I sit in the back of their Mercedes and we are holding hands. With her father in front of us there is little else we can do.

"Here is our phone number, Helmut. Call me after three o'clock whenever you want. I am taking classes in "Textiles" during the week. How about making plans to go skiing next weekend? Usually my dad drives me to places in the Alps and brings me back in the evening."

"I look forward to it. In the meantime I try hard to get a job."

My room is pleasant, very quiet, but ice cold. My landlady brought in a kerosene stove. I have to get kerosene. I found out that this stuff costs a fortune, and the room never does get warm.

The next morning I walk around the neighborhood a little. The Isar River is only a block away and there is a park all along the river. Everything is neat and clean and kept up well. The German Patent Office, which used to be in Berlin, is next to it. I peek and for a few Marks I can get a weekly pass to use the reading room. I can do all my job applications here, in a quiet and warm place.

Tomorrow I will go to a former colleague who worked at the Russian place with me in Berlin. He got a well paying job at Siemens' new headquarters here in Munich. I left my application and am told to come back tomorrow.

"We like your background and you would be a perfect fit for some openings we have. But right now we have a freeze on hiring white color employees. See us in a couple of months or so; if you had West German papers that would be very helpful."

"Thank you very much."

I have to sell another one of my cameras. I don't get much for them, the camera store buyers know that I have to sell. I don't know where all the money goes. I am already on a margarine and bread diet; nothing left to save on food. Come to think of it, that's still a lot better than what I had in the British POW camp.

I have written at least thirty job applications. All I have to show for it is one letter, asking me to come to Frankfurt for an interview.

I see Gisela on weekends, either her dad drops us off to go skiing or the three of us go some place, like the Bavarian Porcelain Manufacture, the renowned Deutsche Museum, or one of the nice parks here in Munich. It is always fun to be with Gisela's father, but Gisela is sometimes argumentative when the three of us are together. I don't like it, in fact, I hate it! Especially when she argues about something she doesn't know a thing about.

I am now over two months in Munich and I still don't have a job. I have sold four cameras and I am down to my personal camera. This one I will hang onto.

I must be doing something wrong, I need advice. I think I will go to the Information Office in City Hall and ask them what they think I should do.

The information guy in the lobby has nothing to do; he is sitting in his cubicle and looks like he is bored stiff. Perfect!

"I am a refugee from East Germany; I came over the border a few weeks ago. I tried to get a job but I was unable to do so. I am almost out of money, what do you suggest I should do?"

"Let me get you the person that you should be talking to, he will take care of you. Do you see the office "Ministry of Interior" over there, they will tell you what you should do."

When I tell my story to the big, hairy Bavarian officer behind the desk, he laughs. Which is a good sign, I think. At least he doesn't have me arrested as an East German spy.

"Listen, young man! You did this all wrong. In a few days, after Easter, go to the office on this card," and he hands me a card with Information for Inner German Refugees, "and ask for a train ticket to the Refugee Camp for Germans in Giessen. There you will get your West German citizenship papers that you need before you can do anything. Don't be bashful, that's what they are for. In the meantime, don't jaywalk and let my cops lock you up. If they find you without West German identification they will have to.

Good luck to you, we are glad to have you!"

"I thank you very much!"

What a nice Bavarian.

There has to be a Better Way!

"Gisela, I don't have a choice, I have to get my West-German citizenship papers first. Even the people at Siemens told me I have to be a West German citizen to be eligible for employment. Next week I take a train to the refugee camp in Giessen."

Gisela doesn't seem surprised, "I know that too, Helmut."

"Munich has not worked out for me."

"Do you want me to keep your other boxes until I hear from you Helmut?"

"Yes. I will write to you as soon as I know, or maybe even have a job, Gisela."

Time will tell if this is our last weekend. One never knows! I do like her in a way, and she helped me to get to the west.

We have another long hug, as we had in Dresden, and I wonder what the future will be. Neither of us is making any promises.

I have no trouble getting to the refugee camp in Giessen, north of Frankfurt. I am standing in line with a dozen refugees, all of us trying to become citizen of West Germany. This is a large facility. It looks like it can hold several thousand people. I am admitted in minutes. I get a card with a refugee number and lots of forms to fill out to be returned to the Admittance Office in an hour. My new address in this camp is my refugee number, my barrack and my room number.

Large signs on the wall say, "Don't talk. There may be East German spies in this camp."

Many barracks are empty, because it is difficult to cross the border the way I did. Most refugees go to Berlin, which takes nothing at all. Between three and four thousand people register every day in the refugee camps in Berlin. Therefore it takes about a year to process a refugee in Berlin. I am told it takes between two to four weeks here in Giessen.

The administration communicates with us refugees over the speaker.

When a refugee number is called, we have to go to the assigned barrack for a hearing.

The first week has gone by and I am still milling around with hundreds of other refugees, and I am still waiting for my first call.

The food is pretty good; by the standard of my weeks in Munich it is terrific. It is a typical army operation, but nobody is yelling, everybody hopes that no late glitch will mess things up.

From others who have been here for some time I have learned that the security departments of West Germany, Britain, France and the USA are involved in the clearing of refugees here.

These refugee camps attempt to separate East German spies from refugees and classify the refugees into A) Proven cases, B) Believable cases and C) Doubtful cases. Most refugees are class B; they are entitled to get help in the state employment offices, and they are eligible for rent controlled housing. Class C refugees are allowed to stay in West Germany and become citizens. Collecting intelligence data is an additional endeavor here.

Finally I am called and show up for my first hearing. About twelve people sit opposite me on a long table.

"Why did you leave East Germany? Can you prove that you were in danger of any kind?"

"No, I really can't prove it, but I had embarrassed the SED party functionary in front of six hundred people and feared retaliation. When another outspoken employee was not heard from for a week I decided I better get out while I can."

The meeting takes over an hour and I answer many questions.

"Please wait outside for a few minutes."

When I come back in, the foreman of this committee reads the conclusion.

"Based on what you have presented we will classify you as a class B refugee. This makes you a citizen of the Bundesrepublik Deutschland. The other committees will have to confirm our decision, which is a formality, but it will take another week or so until this becomes final. Please read and sign that what you presented to us is true."

Within a week I finish most hearings. The American hearing is the final one.

"Have a seat, *Herr Standke*."

I sit down; facing two well fed Americans. They have about a dozen manila folders in front of them. What a dossier!"

We read you have worked for a Russian Company in Berlin, tell us about it."

"It is actually the former German General Electric, the AEG. But the Russians took it over at the end of the war and declared it has become Russian property."

"What kind of work did you do there?"

"I worked in the acoustic laboratory as a development engineer. During my time from the end of 1949 to the beginning of 1952 our laboratory developed mainly sound analyzing equipment."

"Yes, did you also work on under water sound equipment?"

"No. Our lab was told to consider it, but we refused to work on obviously military applications. That was the end of it."

"Thank you Herr Standke. We would like to talk to you some more, outside of this refugee operation here, do you mind? It is only a few days and you can stay in one of our villas. You will be well taken care of there, good food, sport facilities, a library, it's better than here."

"No, I don't mind at all, sir."

"A taxi will pick you up tomorrow morning and will bring you back here in a few days. We will take care of the paper work with the camp here; you don't have to do anything."

I haven't had such good food for years. The American Army in the neighborhood is conducting this intelligence operation here. "It will take only a few days, fellows," we are told.

There are eight of us and we are playing volleyball all day, every day. This is a vacation!

On Friday afternoon a jeep comes and takes me to the American Army headquarter for an interview.

"Can I get you some cafe, Herr Standke?"

I normally don't drink café, but maybe I'll like it. "Yes, please!"

The middle-aged officer laughs and puts a big mug in front of me.

"I was a commandant of a German officer POW camp, what did you do?" We are chatting about the last war, the cold war and what can be done about it. He seems to be a really a nice guy.

"Let me see," he continues, "at the Russian Company in Berlin you reported that no work took place on under water sound analyzing equipment, Herr Standke."

"That's correct; our lab was almost unanimous in refusing to work on such equipment. Our Communist technician was for it."

"Do you remember the name of your personal manager? Herr Standke?"

"I had to deal with him to get an additional week of unpaid vacation. He is short, a little fat, with a dark complexion, bald, but I can't think of his name right now. It's a two syllable Polish name that I remember."

"Is it Zelski?"

"Yes, yes, that's his name, I do remember."

"Can you tell me something about difficulties in obtaining special materials for manufacturing, Herr Standke?"

"Yes, it is a mess. The purchasing department, which is run by SED people, substitutes everything they can't get with an inferior material that is available. Engineering is not informed about the change in materials."

My US Army man grins, I don't think I told him anything he doesn't already know.

"Herr Standke, I think that's all I have. It was nice talking to you. I wish you good luck in the West!"

A jeep takes me back to the villa and I am taken by taxi back to the refugee camp the next morning.

"We got all we need; it will take about a week to wrap up the citizenship paperwork." I am told in the Refugee Camp Office.

"If you have a forwarding address, we can mail it to you. We can also write you a railroad ticket. Would you prefer to go back to Munich? But your best chances to find work would be in Westphalia, Herr Standke."

"Yes, that will be better. I have an aunt in Westphalia, in Gladbeck; I can stay with her until I find work."

"That's okay; give me the address to mail your citizenship papers to you. I have the tickets ready by tomorrow morning at ten o'clock, when we discharge about one hundred new citizens. A bus will take you then to the railroad station, Herr Standke,"

"Vielen Dank, von hier aus weiss ich weiter." (Many thanks; from here I find my way.)

I am a free man!

In the West

"*P*rost (cheers), Helmut, welcome to the west! What took you so long?" Cousin Horst is joking. The schnapps glasses of Tante Grete, my Cousin Horst, his Father-in-law Karl and mine bang together, "Bottoms up!"

I am at my welcome party, sort of.

Tante Grete wipes a tear away, "Remember, before the war, we used to come together all the time. That's when Werner was still alive."

I sit next to her and try my best to comfort her. She is now crying out loud and shaking and can't stop.

Werner was my age; we were the oldest in our two families, and we were always together. Then there were my other cousins, Kurt and Horst and my sister Inge. In the mid thirties, every Saturday I went over to them on my bike and all my three cousins and I sat in front of the radio to listen to the funny musical program from Köln (Cologne).

Things changed when the war broke out. I joined the German Navy but Werner continued to live at home until 1942 when he got drafted by the German Army and was sent to Russia. He died within a week on the front.

Tante Grete remembers the time when she got the terrible news. I am rubbing her back that's all I can think of; I am lost for words.

Karl, who is Aunt Grete's age, does not say anything but reaches for the schnapps bottle and pours another drink. "Let's concentrate on the future, Grete, bottoms up!"

"Horst, how did you become a coal miner? You were a machine fitter before the war, weren't you?"

"Not quite, Helmut. I had another year to go in my apprenticeship program when I was drafted. After the war I left for West Germany in 1947, I didn't think East Germany was ever going to make it. The only companies hiring here in the west at the time were the coal mines.

They lost so many people to the German army and through the constant bombardment of the Ruhr district cities by the Americans.

The coalmines offered shelter, food and training. The pay is about a third higher than for regular work. Of course I hired on. What could I do on the street?"

"I know, Horst, you can't do that for very long."

"The best part was that the "Mines" helped coal miners build their own house. All I had to do is commit myself to work for the mine for twenty-five years. The Coal Mining Company supplied the material at a very reasonable price, at small payments and low interest. They organized groups to do masonry, carpentry, plumbing and electrical work, with a trained craftsman in each group. Almost all labor was done this way. Come on over tomorrow and I will show you how we live, Helmut."

"I am now five years with them. It is hard when you start working in the coal mine, but I got used to it. Then I met Irmchen, Karl's daughter." Horst pats Karl on the shoulder, "and we got married. Irmchen will be here later, then you can meet her and see little Werner, Helmut."

Horst and I talk about coal mines and I have a million questions. He is trying his best to answer them.

"You know what, Helmut, why don't you come down with me. Sometimes they have tours, but I have to get permission. You should really ask Karl; he has been a *Kumpel* (collier) for thirty five years so far and is still going strong."

Karl hasn't said much. But he does reach for the bottle and is about to fill the glasses up again. Tante Grete puts her hand over her glass, "I pass, Karl."

"Bottoms up, guys!" Karl wipes his mouth and continues, "Horst you never get permission to take anybody down during production. You come with me, Helmut! I work the night shift with a few other seniors. We open up another gallery, three thousand feet deep. It is warm down there but when you have enough to drink it's not too bad. Its warm here too, isn't it? Let's have another drink!"

Of course you would have to stay the entire shift down there with me."

"Yes, that would be terrific, Karl, I would love to see that. When do we go?"

"Let me tell you a few more things."

"The lower part of the shaft is not finished yet, so we have to climb down on ladders the last hundred meters. The gallery is now over one kilometer long. But the layer of coal is less than one meter thick, so we have to crawl a kilometer on our hands and knees along the one meter high gallery. Let's drink to that!"

"I sure would like to see it, Karl."

"Okay, Helmut, I pick you up tomorrow at nine in the evening. I bring a set of working clothes and kneepads, so you can change in the washroom at the coalmine. It's a deal!"

"Grete, make Helmut a miner's gallon café jug tomorrow, Helmut will need it."

Irmchen and little Werner have arrived. Irmchen is a doll, very good looking and a very dedicated young mother.

Werner is a cute and sharp little three years old boy. Horst is bossy to Irmchen, maybe it's the schnapps. She only looks at me, shrugs her shoulders and laughs. Irmchen has trouble giving Werner some medicine. He recognizes he is the center of attention and acts up.

"You try it Horst, it's your son." All of us have a full one-ounce glass in front of us. Little Werner is trying to reach up to the table to get one too.

"Let me handle it Irmchen, I figured him out." Horst goes to the kitchen and comes back with a schnapps glass filled with Werner's medicine. Little Werner gets hold of it.

"Cheers, Werner," we all lift our glass and look at Werner, "Bottoms up!" Little Werner does what we all do. He even makes faces after the drink, like the rest of us.

"Yes, he is my son, a chip off the old block!"

"How long are you going to stay here in Gladbeck, Helmut?" Karl wants to know.

"I should receive my citizenship papers in a few days, and then Tante Grete suggested I go to the State Unemployment Office in Essen, the largest city here. I'll find out then."

"I guess, Helmut, you are getting tired of sleeping on my couch?"

"Not at all Tante Grete! I am so grateful that you allowed me to come."

"Your mother wrote me a long letter, Helmut. I think this is the best way."

"And you have been cooking all the Berlin specialties that I haven't had for a long time. Maybe I can make it up to you at some time."

It is dark outside when Karl comes in to pick me up for my visit to the deep coalmine. He hands me the bundle of work clothes and I take Tante Grete's big café jug. That thing is heavy, and I will drink all that?

"The mine is not far from here Helmut. Do you see that big wheel over there in the moonlight, a few blocks away? The lift cable goes over the wheel and an elevator will take us down three thousand feet."

It is a giant wheel, and it is spinning fast. We enter the coalmine through the gate and stragglers of the last shift come towards us on their way out. It is too dark to recognize anybody.

"*Glück auf!*" (Good luck and come up!) It is the miner's greeting as we pass. I pay attention what Karl does and act as if I am one of them.

"Let's go to the tool crib first to get our lights, they charge them overnight and we always get a fresh one." I stand in the background and Karl gets mine too.

After we change we walk over to the elevator and meet the other five of Karl's colliers. We are on time at the lift, that's when the shift starts, Karl had explained to me.

"Now hang on, Helmut, it is like a free-fall, three thousand feet, it will take only seconds, keep your legs stiff."

I am glad Karl told me; otherwise I might have been on the floor when the elevator came to a stop. "This is as far as the lift goes, Helmut, watch the lamp on your head, grab your café jug with you thumb only, so you have both hands for the ladder." It is a small platform to get from the elevator to the ladder. I am getting the hang of it to turn my head in the direction I want to see. But there is plenty of light.

After shifting from ladder to ladder five times all of us arrive on the gallery floor. It is hot down here. I go down on my knees like the rest of the group and start crawling into the dark. I see several rows of five-inch thick timber wedged between the gallery bottom and the ceiling, about one-meter apart.

"They keep the three thousand feet of dirt above us from collapsing and burying us, Helmut," Karl is turning his head around when he speaks to me. I am very interested in what Karl tells me and what I observe around me. But the coffee jug is becoming a drag.

Parallel to us, between the next two rows of timber is a conveyer system. Beyond that, between the next rows of timber is a two foot diameter sheet metal duct, bringing fresh cool night air to the end of the

gallery, Karl is informing me as we go. "Did you notice, Helmut that we are moving slightly uphill? That makes it easier to move the coal and the methane gases downwards to the shaft from where they can be pumped to the surface.

Once in a while I see a broken timber support. Isn't that timber supposed to keep the mountain above us from crashing down? But nobody seems to be concerned. Karl has been doing this for thirty-five years, he would know if it matters. I hope he has seen it. Eventually and after crawling through a number of puddles we get to the end.

"We arrived," calls Karl. It took us at least one half hour to get to the one meter high wall of coal in front of us. The conveyor system starts to shake and several miners, on their knees, start to chip away at the coal with pneumatic hammer/chisels. In seconds hell breaks lose. The pneumatic chisels and the conveyor make a terrible racket and the air is filled with coal dust. Visibility is down to six feet.

I sit back; I don't want to be in anybody's way. It is much worse than I imagined it would be. The dust is so thick that I am almost choking.

Karl crawls over to me, and yells into my ear, "You want to try that chisel?"

The miners are spread across the width of the gallery to move it another two meters deeper into the mountain during their shift. The coal is shoveled onto a conveyor and moves in jerks toward the shaft to be taken up by an elevator.

I take Karl's place and he shows me how to pull the trigger and jam the pounding chisel deep into the coal near the top of the gallery.

"Keep pushing, push, and push!" I keep the trigger down and the chisel is pounding deeper into the coal.

"Now push and pull the chisel up and down and break a block of coal out of the wall. Not bad, Helmut. Do you want to take my place?" he asks me with a grin.

"Karl that would kill me! That chisel weighs a ton and shakes my arms off. And the dust! And the noise!"

Karl laughs and takes his chisel back and is back at work with the rest of the colliers. These guys don't seem to notice the heat, the noise or the dust. I am now stuck here for the next six hours. But what an experience.

After three hours it is lunchtime. The racket stops and the dust settles a little.

While we are munching on our sandwiches Karl tells me how he was buried in the mine for days, but his miner buddies dug him out in time.

All of a sudden he points to a light in the distance coming closer. "That's the supervisor; he comes here once during the shift. Turn your light off, Helmut. Crawl back into the dark and hide behind the air ducts. Come back out after he has left, you are not supposed to be here."

I have a heck of a time to get over the duct; it's less than a foot between the duct and ceiling. I hide flat on my back in the dark, and wait. The rocks above me almost touch my nose. A big one is only hanging on one side and tilting down already. I have to lie still until the supervisor has gone. The rock is about a foot square and two inches thick; this thing must be close to thirty pounds. I hope it hangs on a little while longer until I am out of here.

It seems forever until the supervisor's light disappears in the distance and I can come out again. I am back and the noise and the dust are back. It is terrible! How can anybody work in this environment?

I wouldn't work here for any money. After a long while the noise stops.

"You did it, Helmut! You were holding up all right. Let's go home and see daylight for a change. It always feels good to see the sun come up again."

"Fresh air, Karl! Clean and cool fresh air again! I don't know how you can work in this heat, dust and noise?"

"Helmut, this is nothing. We are only a few guys. During production the entire length of the gallery is occupied by hundreds of coal miners, all running pneumatic chisels and shoveling coal; and the gallery will be much longer when it is completed."

"Thank you Karl. That was an experience last night. It will last me a lifetime."

"Helmut, don't mention it. I knew you were interested in it.

I Have a Job!

1952

"You must have good news, Helmut. You have happiness all over your face. Tell me, did you get a job?" Aunt Grete asks.

"You were right Tante Grete; the State Employment Office in Essen is the place to go for a job."

"Yes, they are the biggest here in the Ruhr region, Helmut."

"I was really lucky. I had to stand in line and a young engineer in front of me had managed to get a better job offer from Siemens and was not going to start his job at the German General Electric (AEG). He was going to tell this to the office manager to change the paper work.

That's an opportunity for me, I figured. I suggested that we both go into the office together; I like to take that AEG job. Our backgrounds are nearly identical."

"The office manager had no troubles with that. He made out a new application for me and suggested I go to the EMG Company, a subsidiary of the AEG, with my resume and apply for this job right now. Take the next train to Olpe and the bus to Wendenerhütte. The EMG is near the bus stop."

"And, did you get the job?" Aunt Grete is eager to know.

"At the EMG I talked to the chief engineer at least for an hour about my background and where I studied.

I got the tour and I was impressed. They build automatic transmissions for high-speed diesel-hydraulic locomotives and oil wells and manufacture other hydraulic and electro magnetic industrial machinery. It's pretty much what I like to do.

Then we shook hands and I was hired. It's about time I am lucky again!"

"I wish you luck, Helmut, it was a long struggle, wasn't it?"

"It looks good Tante Grete. I move tomorrow and start to work on Monday.

"In the EMG personnel department I was informed about places for rent. I signed up at a butcher shop with Room and Board.

"It worked out, Tante Grete, thanks to you. *Ende gut, alles gut!*" I hug my two-armful Tante Grete and pat her on the shoulder.

"I write to you in a week or two and keep you up-to-date. I am positive it will turn out."

During my introduction on Monday I meet everybody in the engineering department. Almost all engineers are bachelors from East Germany, like me.

"Where do you stay, Helmut? Is everything okay?" My boss, Hans Schreiner" asks. He seems to be concerned that everybody in his group is happy. "Join the club," I hear.

"I have room and board at butcher Weber in Gerlingen, Hans."

"Then you are well taken care off, Helmut!"

I hired in as a design and development engineer two weeks ago. The job includes design analysis and working on a drawing board.

A fancy drawing board it is. The table can be adjusted high and low, and horizontal and vertical. Karl Zimmer, the engineer next to me, shows me how to operate this thing. It is much easier to work with than the old fashion boards.

It's a nice clean job, and I feel sorry for the coal miners like my Cousin Horst and his Father-in-law Karl. I don't know how any human can tolerate the noise and the dust they have to endure nine hundred meter deep. I am choking when I think of it.

My company is located near the small town Gerlingen in Westphalia, next to a forest with lots of wildlife. My desk is at a picture window looking out to the forest. One of my neighbors here lives in the forest; it is a weasel, a real wild weasel. Half the department stood by my window the other day and we all watched him perform trying to catch his tail.

I live in Gerlingen, a small town within a twenty-minute walk from my job, where everybody knows everybody.

I am new here and I am the 'Berliner'. I live in a half-timbered house at least one hundred years old.

The ceiling in my room is low; I have to walk with my head down, like I had to on the destroyer. The butcher shop and the slaughterhouse are downstairs.

My landlord has a new house in construction down the road.

I looked at the new house and think I can move in a few weeks from now. It looks very nice and is only a few hundred meters down the road, next to other beautiful new homes.

The food is good and I am almost a member of the family. At noontime I walk back to town for dinner.

In the morning it is a twenty-minute nature walk to work, between a forest on one side and fields on the other. I sometimes leave early in the morning to enjoy nature. I plan to get up very early next Sunday to take black and white pictures of the dew covered spider webs. They are pieces of art just when the sun comes up.

All is quiet and peaceful on the way to work. Only a few people are on the road at a quarter to eight, on our way to the EMG.

Walking to work early in the morning through the fields and forests is a joy I have been missing in the past. I sure like it here.

At the Company Picnic

*M*y new work place, the EMG, has its annual picnic. A dozen busses take the employees through the Westphalian countryside, through picturesque villages with half-timbered houses, over forested hills, and valleys with grazing cows on green meadows. Our destination is a restaurant on a lake for a swim and for lunch. I am only four weeks with the company and I only know my colleagues in the engineering department. We sit together in one bus and tell jokes and have fun. We are lucky today; it is sunny and warm, and after lunch most of the employees go for a swim or play ball on the beach.

In the evening the busses take us to a country club for dinner and dance. During dinner we technical guys sit at one table and talk and have a good time. We also talk about what we did during the war and how we ended up at the EMG. Almost all of us came from the Russian Zone (East Germany) and left because we felt it has no future and it is a

depressing place to live. Communism kills the incentive of people who want to better their life.

Hans reminds us, "Let's look to the future guys, the Russians are far away, cheers!" Hans is so right.

After dinner the dance music starts. I turn to Hans, my boss, but also a good friend by now, "Hans, what's the blond girl's name that sits on the management table?"

"That is Fräulein Schlechtinger; she is one of the accountants, Helmut. Isn't she nice?"

"Ja, she is very nice and looks terrific."

I met her a few times on the way to work in the morning, and I look forward to walking together with her. Time flies when we walk. "Is she engaged, Hans?"

"I don't think so. She is friends with everybody but nothing seems to be serious." She is dancing all the time; she is popular and has many friends. If I want to dance with her I have to be near her before the music starts. I've got to be there first.

I made it and make my bow when the music starts; "May I ask for the dance, Fräulein Schlechtinger?" I follow her to the dance floor and look her over. She does have a beautiful figure; very slender and walking straight and proud. We would make a nice couple, I think.

We dance and talk about life in Gerlingen and her family. I think she is terrific. I don't want to talk too much. I like the way she dances.

"The music is going on a break now; may I invite you for a glass of wine at the bar, Fräulein Schlechtinger?"

"That's a good idea, Herr Standke," she answers with a smile. I know by now that Fräulein Schlechtinger is different than the girls I met in the past. The more time we are together the more I hope that our relationship may become a lasting one.

"Do you have plans for tomorrow, Fräulein Schlechtinger? Is it possible that we can go for a walk through the beautiful countryside? Everything is so natural and pretty here."

"We can go to the lake for an afternoon swim. It is less than an hour on a bike. It is a nice ride. I am sure my brother doesn't need his bike on Sunday. Why don't you come over to our house, Herr Standke?"

After we return from the bar we sit together near her place and continue to talk and dance till midnight when we are going home on our bus together. I talked Fräulein Schlechtinger into going home on our engineering bus. After arriving in Gerlingen Fräulein Schlechtinger and

I have to get off the bus. I am only a few steps from Weber's Butcher Shop, where I live, but Fräulein Schlechtinger has to go along a lonely road to get to her home.

"May I walk you home Fräulein Schlechtinger? It's late and you shouldn't walk alone. Some drunken characters may come out of the pub by now." She knows that I exaggerate, nothing ever happens in Gerlingen. We start walking toward her home. It is only a ten-minute walk, and it is a warm night and the moon is bright. We walk arm in arm. I think it is very romantic and hold Fräulein Schlechtinger a little closer.

We are almost at her house when we have to cross the Bigge creek on a narrow bridge. We stop and look down at the reflection of the moon in the water.

"What are your impressions of Gerlingen, Herr Standke?"

"We don't have to be so formal Fräulein Schlechtinger, why don't you call me Helmut?" I pulled her closer. She doesn't seem to mind.

It is customary in Germany, if a girl and a boy offer to be called by their first names; it is followed by a friendship kiss.

"I like Gerlingen!" I answer; "I like it better every day."

Winger -fest

(Grapevine Harvesting Festival)

Whenever possible Magdalene and I walk home together after work. "Magdalene, we know each other now for three months, we should celebrate. How about doing something special for the weekend."

"We've done nature walks, biking, swimming, visiting my sister, what do you have in mind, Helmut?"

"Those are all fun, but let's do something special."

"You said you have never been on the Rhine River, Helmut? At the beginning of October is the grape harvesting season at the Rhine region. The towns along the Rhine River really put on a show. I have been there many times. Yea, the two of us at the Winzer-Fest, that would be lots of fun. It's not far from here either and the time is perfect.

Early Sunday morning Magdalene and I take the train to Köln (Cologne) and arrive in an hour. We plan to take the Rhine River Steamer in Koblenz and have to change trains. In the meantime we have an hour to see the city of Köln, or the burned out rubble that once was the city. The seven hundred-year-old cathedral, only partially destroyed, is the only tall structure within miles. Expert opinion is that it can be restored, if funds become available before it is no longer salvageable.

After an hour on the train we arrive in Koblenz and Magdalene and I embark on our Rhine River tour on an ancient side-wheeler.

"Magdalene, thanks for the idea to take this tour. Look at the green grapevine covered slopes, the many old castles, the happy old-fashioned music and the laughing people on the steamer. This is Happy Time!"

"I am glad you like it, Helmut. Look, here on the Winzer-Fest Program it says that the Winzer-Fest this weekend is in St. Goar, our next stop."

"Let's get off in St. Goar, Magdalene! It looks like a lot of other passengers want to get off here too. This must be the right place."

At least one hundred people disembark. St. Goar is a pretty old town and well kept up. Over hundreds of years they learned how to put on a show. It is a small town, the space between the mountain and the Rhine River allows only a few streets.

But every house is decorated and music is everywhere. The restaurants are filled with happy wine loving people.

Magdalene and I peek in all shops and we discuss what we see. We find we have the same taste for decorations, furniture, and crystal and about all we see. I think it wouldn't take us long to decorate a house. The next display window is set back a few feet and shows a fancy table for two with burning candles and wine and glasses. "Magdalene, look, isn't it romantic?"

With my arm around her waist I pull her a little closer. I am sure nobody can see us in here; I have to steal a kiss. I feel so good!

"Helmut, we better find a place to sit, it looks like the restaurants are getting crowded, look at all the people."



We managed to get a small table for two in a corner; most guests sit on long tables. The place is packed. Big parties from the cities up north come here once a year to the Winzer-Fest. Magdalene and I watch what is going on.

On some long tables only women sit, and on others only men. We find out they are bowling clubs from the north, and once a year they take the club piggy bank to the Winzer-Fest. The old fashioned *Rhein-Wine* music will never go out of style in this neighborhood. Everybody is dancing and singing along. The bowlers have no trouble to find a dancing partner. I wonder if they talk about bowling when they dance. The busy waiters bring more and more bottles of wine.

It must be the wine; everybody has a good time. The two of us have a bottle too; we sit very close, and sing and dance along with the rest of them.

The music is on a break and the dancers catch their breath.

“We are having so much fun together; I will miss all this when I am in America.

"Helmut, I have to tell you this. I have an uncle in America. He has applied for a visa for me to come to America too, five years ago. Last year the quota was filled, but we were told that I would receive my visa shortly, probably in 1953.”

“I have an application to go to Australia, Magdalene. I have been told it is almost approved. If the housing situation would be better here, we could stay right here, but millions of people were bombed out or kicked out of their homeland; it will take generations until the availability of housing in Germany is normal. It is not going to happen in our lifetime. We will never have our own house here.”

“My uncle in America told me that too, five years ago, when he was here on a visit. It has not changed much. That’s why he offered Emmi and me to come over.”

“I will cancel my application to go to Australia. Between going to America or Australia is a clear-cut case Magdalene. You go to your uncle, I will find you there.

“But that is a detail. Don't worry about it; we will be together in America!”

Then the music starts and Magdalene and I are dancing again and a brilliant firework has started.

“What time is it, Helmut? We better hurry to catch the last train!”

This is the Right Girl

Magdalene and I sit in the living room in her home late in the evening and think about the engagement party tomorrow. Her parents went to bed a long time ago.

Magdalene opens the little box with the two golden rings. "Let's try them on."

Tomorrow, Easter Sunday, we will be engaged. The rings we bought are golden wedding rings with the fiancée's initials on the inside. The German custom is that the ring will be placed on the left ring finger during the engagement ceremony. Our engagement ceremony is a relatively small family affair. The ring will be moved to the right ring finger at the wedding ceremony and will then be worn on the right ring finger.

With the rings on our fingers we hug and kiss and think about our future in America.

"Helmut, you should write for the application forms to immigrate to the USA from the American consulate in Frankfurt. You will then get a number. You need this number regardless who the sponsor is."

"I didn't know about this number. I will write to the American consulate right away."

It is past midnight now; Helmut, you have to go home. Tomorrow is an important day for us. Be here before noon. My mother and I will have everything arranged for the party."

"It will be a happy day for us. *Gute Nacht, bis morgen* Magdalene."

On my way home, I dream about a future with Magdalene.

Our Engagement, Easter 1953

On a beautiful Easter Sunday, I walk to Magdalene's home. Magdalene introduces me to some of the guests. Everybody congratulates us and wishes us a bright and happy future.

Her family comes together in the dining room and my future Father-in-law fills the champagne glasses to offer a toast while Magdalene and I exchange our rings.



“It is too bad that your parents are not here, Helmut,” Magdalene’s mother mentions, “We would love to meet them. Don’t you think it should be possible for them to come here for a visit? They could stay with us.”

“I think it should be possible, now that my father has retired. I’ll write them and tell them to come. Otherwise Magdalene and I are in America and who knows when we can come back again. I will work on my mother; she is the more adventurous. She will make it happen. Many thanks for the invitation.”

Mama and Papa in Gerlingen

It is almost four o'clock according to the railroad station clock; only a few more minutes until Mama and Papa will arrive here in Magdalene's and my new hometown Gerlingen.

I look at Papa's postcard. "Everything went well to get the permit to travel to the West. Gerlingen is only sixty miles east of Cologne," Papa writes, "so we take the Cologne Express Train to Hagen and transfer to a train to Gerlingen. We will arrive at five minutes past four. Mama and I love to see you and Magdalene, *Dein Vater*."

This card is special. I can't remember that Papa ever wrote to me. Normally Mama keeps me up-to-date with what is going on in the family.

As usual Papa's handwriting is in perfect *long hand gothic script*, it looks like it has been printed. I am sure he researched the train schedules. When he writes he will be here at five past four, it will be five past four.

I left work early to be here when Mama and Papa arrive, and help them to get to Magdalene's parent's house. It is very close, only the rails and a road with a fence are between the train station and their house. Not much is going on at this little station, only a few people are waiting for the train. When the stationmaster with his red cap comes to the edge of the platform and looks down the track, I know this is it. Magdalene's dad is stationmaster in Gerlingen. He waves at me and then does his thing.

We can hear the train come. It is a rail bus, a modern and clean two-car bus on rails. The old steam locomotives, which survived the war, are almost all retired.

When the train comes to a halt the doors open wide and I see Mama and Papa step out. They seem to be in good shape the way they look and walk. I had been wondering how they would be.

Mama or Papa would never tell me in the mail. They would never let me worry about them.

"*Willkommen in Gerlingen, Mama und Papa*, I am so happy you could come." Big tears are rolling down Mama's cheeks. We stand on the platform and hug...

Then I hug Papa, he stands up straight, but his eyes show it. "Glad to see you again Helmut, especially at this happy occasion."

What a change, when I left Berlin in that dark night one and a half years ago. I wasn't sure if I will ever see them again.

The train has moved on, and Magdalene's father comes over.

"Papa, Mama, meet Magdalene's father, and meet my parents." I am still not quite sure what I should call my father-in-law to be.

"You look healthy, but you could use a few pounds," I tell my parents.

"*Finchen* will take good care of you," my father-in-law answers; *Finchen* is my mother-in-law's nickname he always uses.

Mama looks around and seems happy what she sees. "It is all farmland and forested hills as far as I can see, that's the kind of country I grew up in. I sometimes miss the farms and forests."

I point to the house on the other side of the track. "The house over there is Schlechtinger's. Let me carry your suitcase Papa. It's only a short walk to the underpass to get to the other side.

"We had a nice engagement party, too bad you were not here, but we will make up for it now.

"How was your trip? Did you have trouble at the east-west border, Papa?"

"No, we went through the check point in Berlin to get on the train to West Germany that was all."

"Mama, you will like your daughter-in-law. Magdalene is a really sweet girl. I couldn't live without her anymore. I know you always wondered if I would ever find the right girl. Mama, it was worth the wait."

"When you wrote you found a good job, Helmut, I figured you will start looking around. I am happy for the two of you."

"I took off from work for a couple hours. Magdalene is at work. You will get to see her later when she comes home."

"Mama, see the lady in the door over there, that's Magdalene's mother, Adolfine, I am sure you two will get along well."

"*Willkommen, kommt rein!*" She invites us in. "I am glad you could come, feel at home, and be comfortable. I think Magdalene and Helmut get along very well, they will be a nice couple."

A few minutes later Magdalene walks in.

"Mama, Papa, meet your daughter-in-law. Remember what I wrote to you about her?"



Oskar **Magdalene** **Helmut**
Auguste **Brigitte** **Adolfine**
Eduard

When I put my arm around her and give her a kiss, Mama starts to cry again and Papa is smiling every time he looks at Magdalene. I think Mama and Papa are happy about their new daughter.

Today is the annual Gerlinger fair, and Magdalene's father took Papa along. The Gerlinger voluntary fire department has a tent too, and Papa is in his element when he can talk and drink beer with the Gerlinger firemen. To Papa it is like the old days when he still was Fire-chief in Berlin.

"I am so happy to have met you, Magdalene," Mama takes her hand; "I know you and Helmut will be happy and have a good future together.

It would have been nice if the wedding would be here before you go to America. I missed Inge's wedding when she went to Australia.

Are you sure that you have to go to America? But you have to know what is best for you."

"Mama, Magdalene had planned to go to America before we met. She got a number and the immigration visa will be in her name. We think her visa will be here in a few weeks. Who knows what would happen to the paper work when the name is changed now. I hope I can follow her soon."

"It would have been nice to be at the wedding, but as long as you are happy, that's all I wish for," Mama answers.

Mama and Papa have a wonderful time. Our parents get along very well, and we are a happy big family. Magdalene and I feel good about that too. We never had any doubt.

But three weeks go by so fast. Mama, Papa and Magdalene's parents have become good friends.

Mama, Papa, Magdalene and I are at the railroad station and we have to say good-bye.

"I wonder if I will see you again Helmut," Mama hugs me and dries her eyes.

"Be always good to Magdalene; promise!"

Tears run down our faces as we hug each other one more time. Magdalene and I help them board the train and we wave until the train is out of sight.

I hope they will stay healthy and we will see them again.

We have to get Wheels!

Vrrrum-Vrrrum! Tires screech and a big BMW motorcycle comes from behind and stops next to me.

“*Guten Morgen, Herr Standke*, do you want a ride to work?” It is Alex, the senior field technician of our company on his big BMW motorcycle.

“You bet Alex. Every time I see you on your BMW I am jealous.”

“Whenever you are ready to buy a motorcycle let me know. I know where to go and what to look for.”

Vrrrum---Vrrrum. “Hang on Herr Standke, and lean down with me in the curve.” What a wild ride to work! Kind of scary. But I trust Alex; he knows what he is doing.

Every engineer in our design office has a motorcycle, but me. But first I have to get a driver’s license.

To get anywhere out here in the country you need wheels. To take the train to the town with a driver training school will take me an hour. And the train goes only a few times during the day. To go there by motorcycle would take a few minutes. What a waste! And I can go anytime I want to! I have to discuss this with Magdalene on our way home after work; that’s when we dream and talk about our future.

In the afternoon I call Alex to my desk. I design large clutches for the mile-long iron ore conveyor belts in the harbor of Narvik, Norway. Alex will be the person to install them and to service them. I know how cold it can be up there and how miserable it is to work in the open.

“Come over to my drafting board and take a look at the electrical junction boxes Alex, I designed them larger, remember you asked me to? You can fit your hands in there now.”

“That looks much better now Herr Standke, *vielen Dank*. By the way, do you like to see my pictures of my trip to Italy?”

“I sure would like to see them Alex.

“I am impressed. *Sehr interressant!* That tower of Pisa is really about to fall over. It looks like you had a wonderful trip. I wish I could see Italy too. Alex, do you mind if I show the pictures to Magdalene? I wonder if I can convince her that we too should make the trip to Italy too.”

“Of course, Herr Standke, and say hello to Magdalene.”

On our way home I ask her, “Magdalene, if we had a motorcycle, would you be interested in a trip to Italy? Alex just came back and he gave me his pictures to show them to you. Once you see the photos I bet you would like to see Italy too.”

“Yes, I like to see Italy, but you don’t have a motorcycle.”

“So--, let’s get one! I have been talking to my buddies in the office and I have a fair idea what we need.”

“I know, Helmut, they all have motorcycles and with their wives and girlfriends make tours together.”

“Alex suggested looking for a trade-in at the motorcycle shop in Olpe, our county capital four miles down the road. He volunteered to take me there on his BMW.”

“But you need a driver’s license first, Helmut. To get one takes about thirty hours of instruction in the classroom and twenty hours of actually driving a car.” “I know, I know.”

“And then you don’t know how to ride a motorcycle, Helmut. You can’t just take off?”

“Give me four weeks and then we go. Viva Italia! I learned the most important words in Italian already.”

“What are they, Helmut?” “Cinque litra benzino. That should do it.”

“What does that mean? Helmut.”

“Five liters of gas, that’s what a motorcycle tank holds.”

That was a few weeks ago and I got a driver’s license in the meantime.

One day Alex came up to my desk.

“The motorcycle shop called me, Herr Standke. They got something that may be what you are looking for. Let’s take a look. It is only a year old, but it is a prewar model. We can zip down there during the lunch hour before someone else buys it.”

“I don’t care about the model. If you don’t mind, Alex, let’s go!”

I like it. It will do what I want it for, if Magdalene helps with a few hundred marks for a couple of months, I will buy it.

Now I ride my motorcycle to work and I am practicing to ride it every minute on a lonely country road.

To get to the company gate, I have to shift down to first gear, and make a tight turn and then go up a steep hill.

It is tricky. One morning the motor died on me in the slow turn and I had trouble to get it started again. I think two hundred of our four hundred employees walked past me and gave advice. Did I have to bite my tongue!

But I am making progress.

The Schlechtinger family and I finish dinner. I have been part of Magdalene's family now for months. Magdalene's mother asks, "Helmut today is Hildegard's birthday, can you take me on your motorcycle to the hospital in Siegen? I like to bring her a birthday present. It is only twenty miles."

Hildegard is Magdalene's younger sister and she studies baby nursing at the hospital.

"Of course I can, hop on *mutter* (mother). I know my way to Siegen, but you have to tell me how to get to the hospital."

She is a gutsy lady. I had better be extra careful now.

This is not the time for me to make a mistake with my future mother-in-law sitting behind me on my motorcycle. I have to convince her that Magdalene and I will be safe to make the tour to Venice and Florence and to the rest of northern Italy.

We have to tell her one of these days.

I go slow and take it easy in the turns.

All goes well. Hildegard and my mother-in-law to-be are happy. Within a couple of hours I am back in front of their house.

"Thank you, Helmut, always be as careful as you were today."

"I am glad to help out, call on me any time, *Mutter*."

Magdalene is happy her mother and I are back. "How did it go, Helmut?"

"Good, good! No problems whatsoever. I rode the bike as if your mom had raw eggs wrapped up in that parcel."

Magdalene spreads Alex's photographs on the table. "Take a look, mother, these are the photos that Alex took in Italy a few weeks ago."

"Alex did? I heard he and his wife were going. Did everything go well?"

"Look at the pictures, mother, wouldn't you like to be there?"

"I never got that far, but I would have liked to go."

"Mother, Helmut and I have the motorcycle now; we sure would like to go. Alex says there is nothing to it. In Italy the weather is good, the

roads are perfect, and the people are friendly. Alex thinks we are missing out on a lot if we don't go."

Alex grew up in Gerlingen and is a respected person. His opinion means something.

I don't say anything; I let Magdalene do the talking today.

Magdalene's mother looks at the two of us, "I hope you two know what you are doing. I'll tell father about your plans."



Magdalene, lets go!

Off to Italy

I took the bike apart for inspection to be sure it is dependable. After replacing the chain, I think it is now okay to go over the Alps with it and to Italy.

We return Alex's pictures and listen to his good advice for an hour. Monday morning we take off as planned. Our suitcase is heavy and stored on the carrier I built and bolted to the bike behind the rear seat.

The motor has a nice steady baritone sound. I am convinced we are now in good shape.

A visit to Fritz and Friedel in Nürnberg is planned; it is on the way. They took care of me when I arrived in the west. Fritz was a great help by selling some of my East German cameras so I had West-Mark to get started. I stayed with them a few days to recuperate after I arrived from East Germany after skiing across the Harz Mountains.

They are happily married now for two years and have two little girls. I like to see them again and Magdalene likes to get to know them.

Late in the afternoon we arrive at their apartment and it is a happy occasion to see everybody well.

We leave the following day. The weather could be better; we have a light rain. The weather report promises it will get better. We plan to make it to the German-Austrian border today. On the Autobahn I go sixty mph, that's my max speed. At that speed the raindrops hit my face hard and it hurts. The goggles don't help much.

"Are you okay, Magdalene?" It is almost impossible to communicate at that speed and the wind noise.

The rain is cold and it rains pretty hard when we reach the Austrian border.

At a small hotel I pull over. "What do you think, Magdalene, should we stay here overnight and continue when the rain stops?"

Magdalene has trouble getting off the bike; she is frozen stiff.

"Let's stop and stay here until the sun comes out." She tells me.

It rains all night but stops for a moment the next day at noontime. The Zugspitze and the Olympic ski-jump in Berchtesgaden are now visible.

“I think we should take off, Magdalene, and try to get as far south as we can. Maybe even to the Brenner Pass.” That is the border between Austria and Italy, high up in the Alps.

“Let’s do that. We stop when it gets too bad. In Italy it will be sunny and warm, I hope. Don’t go too fast, the cold wind goes through everything.”

We are passing through Innsbruck; I wish it wouldn’t be raining. One of these days we have to come back to Tyrol.

Magdalene is right; the cold goes to the bone. In the afternoon I start to look for a place to get warm again, maybe even stay overnight. It is near freezing.

We have been climbing on these serpentine roads for almost two hours now and there is no place to stay.

Suddenly a fancy Hotel, ‘*Zum Weissen Rössl*’ (To the White Horse) comes up.

Many expansive cars are parked in front, but no motorcycles. I think that is a good sign; Magdalene and I deserve a nice evening and a decent dinner.

It is nice, everything is first class. We do the best we can to dress up for the dining room. English is spoken at several tables near us.

“Is that a steak that they have, Magdalene? It smells delicious. Let’s have what they have, steak and red wine. We live only once! Now is a good time to start!

The steak and the wine are what we need. “I feel wonderful, Magdalene. How about you?”

“Everything is perfect. Let’s hope the weather will be better when we get to the top of the Brenner Pass.”

“It better be, but the pass is high enough that we will have snow up there.”



Our Sun is always shining!

*I*n the morning the sun shines through the window, it is not a bad day to go over the Brenner Pass on a motorcycle.

The steep and curvy road, with many miles in repair, is hard on the motor bike, but the sound of the engine tells me all is well.

We reach a plateau with a big sign, *Top of Brenner Pass*, 1374 meter.

Most cars and tour busses stop and allow people to walk around and play in the snow in July. Not far from us are eleven thousand foot peaks, covered with permanent snow.

“For the next three weeks it will be warm, Magdalene. Let’s take our time on the way down; the scenery is too beautiful to rush it.”

Many turnouts give me a chance to pull off the road and park next to the many tour busses to take pictures.

“You guys are so lucky to stop where you please and take all the pictures you want, we in the tour bus have only few opportunities to take a

picture. In the bus we have been watching you, how free and independent you are on your motorcycle.” That’s good to hear, the effort to get up here is worth it.

After many hours of alpine scenery the road goes through farmland with orange fields and vineyards, and tall cypresses along many roads, we are now in Italy. Begging children try to get money from us when we have to slow down in traffic. Alex has warned us to watch out for beggars. The last few hours we had lots of them.

It is getting dark and I start to look for a place to stay. At Lake Garda we come to a fancy hotel. This is the first decent place I have seen for the last hour and I don’t know what to expect down the road.

“We better stop here, Magdalene,” I suggest. It is beautiful but looks very expensive.

After dinner Magdalene and I walk through the romantic town. When we see hotels with signs *Recommended by the German Automobile Club* and *Recommended by the Royal British Automobile Club*, we know now what we should have looked for.

But we sit close on our private balcony with a bottle of wine and look over the dark lake in the moonlight, dreaming about the future. It is a bargain.



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The romantic Garda Lake

Venice

The plan today is to go south along the scenic West Side of the Garda Lake, then turn east to Verona, and go then to Padua and on to Venice. It is a beautiful ride. It is the scenery, the sunshine, and people in the field waving at us. It is a perfect day.

In Venice, I do not get very far. After crossing the bridge, we enter the city and have to stop at a plaza and park our motorcycle. Half a dozen boys yell and shout that each one has the best place to stay in Venice. After starting to talk with one, all others compete. Eventually we follow one of them to a nearby apartment. From the outside the houses look dilapidated. However, when Magdalene and I get into the house we start to learn of the charm this city has.

“Magdalene, look at the marble entrance and the beautiful mahogany furniture; and all the mirrors. It’s a place for a king.”



With each day, we like Venice more. We walk without concern for traffic, surrounded by countless works of art and all in sunshine. With

Magdalene on my side, it all has a special meaning. Even street maintenance workers enjoy their city, they sing while at work, with opera ready voices.

We have to move on after three days, to another city filled with treasures, Florence. It takes the better part of the day to get there. But all roads we have seen so far are in top condition. I haven't seen any detours at all. There are many in Germany, with many chances to get lost when road signs are missing, which means wasting much time.

It would take us weeks to see the most important art treasures in this city. We live in a beautiful villa in the center of the city and are in walking distance to everything we can possibly see in three days. We must go on. It is not far to travel from Florence through the pretty countryside to Pisa. The city of Pisa is a paradise for photographers. The main attraction is of course the leaning tower. It really is leaning a lot and it looks it may fall any day. I hope it can be saved.



Genoa is our goal today, and after a couple hours in Pisa, we move north and up the coast. The road is cut into the coastal rocks and one tunnel follows another.

Today we rest with some sightseeing, but tomorrow we travel north to Milan on the no speed limit Autostrada.

Genoa is a big city with an ancient harbor, but we do want to see at least the impressive Cathedral of Milan before we travel on to Lakes Lugano and Como in Switzerland.

The Alps are visible to the north of us and in a couple of days we will be home. The scenery is lovely and we meet travelers from all countries.

We leave early today to cross over the Alps at the St. Gottard Pass at about two thousand meter. Snow is still covering the pass and Magdalene and I am throwing snowballs at each other. We are happy that everything has gone well on our trip, and in another day we will be home again.

The last two days of the trip, back in Germany, it rains on and off. The roads are now slippery and potholes are filled with water and can not be seen. I take it easy and pay full attention. But we make it!

Slowly we pull up in front of Magdalene's house. Her mother is already waving, she probably heard us coming.

"Am I glad to see you healthy and happy back home." Magdalene and her mother are hugging and kissing each other and are glad that we are home again.

All is well that ends well!

I Have to Say Good-bye

I wish I could look into the future, at least into the next year.

After a wait of many years Magdalene got her immigration visa to America. A couple of weeks ago she was ordered to come to the American consulate in Frankfurt for a physical checkup and a smallpox vaccination.

Everything is in order now. Magdalene has to board her ship tomorrow in Bremerhaven. She and I will leave for Bremerhaven by train tomorrow early in the morning.

Magdalene and I are in her living room with a glass of wine. It is our last day together in Germany and we want to be together the last evening as long as we can. It is hard to believe that for a year--or longer--we cannot be together again.

Her parents went to bed some time ago and we sit very close and think of all the good times we had together.

“Let’s have another glass and drink that we will be together again in America and let’s hope it will be soon.

“Cheers, Magdalene!”

“Cheers, Helmut! We had such a wonderful year in 1953 with all the traveling we did. I am sure we will be lucky and it will not be long until we are back together again.”

“Wasn’t Italy terrific? I still see us in Venice on the San Marco Square, looking over to the Lido. Remember that little *ristorante*, packed with Italian families, where we had dinner at ten o’clock at night.

“And remember the hundreds of doves, when they took off when the Great Clock Tower rang eleven o’clock in the morning. I felt for a moment that they are going to attack us. We found out that at eleven o’clock it is feeding time. Yes Magdalene, how you ducked and covered your head and snug up on me? One of these days we have to go back to Venice again.”

“Helmut, I think I know what I will do when I get to Uncle Klaus in America. I will tell him that I am engaged to you and that we would like to get married in America.

“I am sure that’s all I have to say. He is such a good Uncle he will do anything for us. He is my sponsor and I am sure he will sponsor for you too. The quota for immigrants from Germany has now been increased, I am

told, and that should help to get the immigration visa in less time. I will give him your Immigration Application Number.”

“That’s sounds like a dream, Magdalene. Yes, maybe we will be together and be married by the end of the year. I can’t believe it.”

“You better get home now, Helmut, the train will be here very early, and we can’t be late.”

Magdalene is right. It is long past midnight. I close the door without making a sound, and let my motorcycle quietly roll down the road until I get past the railroad overpass. Then I let the clutch come in to start the motor. I don’t want to announce to the neighborhood with my noisy muffler how late I have been with Magdalene.

At five o’clock in the morning Magdalene and I wait for the train to Bremerhaven. It is a gloomy, dark and cold morning.

Magdalene’s father is the stationmaster here in Gerlingen. He is on duty and comes over to us. He is hugging Magdalene over and over; tears are rolling down his face.

“*Mädchen, ich sehe dich nicht mehr wieder!* (Girl, I will never see you again!) Try to come back for a visit soon. I don’t know how much time I have left. My dad died of asthma when he was fifty-nine; I think that’s when my time will be up.”

“Come on dad, you will be around a long time. With the medications we have today asthma will not be much of a problem. We will be back before you know it, and we will bring a bunch of your grandchildren along.” I can hear the train coming, it is huffing and puffing in the distance and it is closing fast. Magdalene’s father wipes his eyes; he is on duty.

The train pulls in, one more hug and the stationmaster has to be at his place. In his long blue heavy overcoat and his red stationmaster cap, he does represent the authority here at the station.

Magdalene has a heavy suitcase and I lift it on board. The big trunk was shipped two weeks ago to the ship. Magdalene waves to her dad and he waves back with the station signal.

Magdalene pulls down the window on the other side to wave Good-bye to her mother, to Sister Emmi and Brother Heinz who stand in the window of their house. She waves and waves until we can’t see them anymore.

It is cold and windy outside. Snow covers trees and fields at the beginning of January 1954.

“I hope the ship will get out of the harbor in this weather, Magdalene. The Atlantic is bad in winter; waves can be taller than a house. I hope you don’t get sea sick, like I do. I wish you luck.”

The weather seems to get worse the closer we come to the coast. “What will happen when we can’t get out, Helmut?”

“Today is Thursday, if they can’t leave the pier today they are in trouble. No sailor will go out on Friday--and on the thirteenth on top of that-- and in this weather. I am sure that will happen on your Greek ship too. My guess is the ship will go out shortly before twelve o’clock at night, just before Friday. Come what may!

The skipper will hope for better weather as long as he can. But then he will have to get all the tugboats he can find and the tugboats will give everything they’ve got to pull your ship away from the pier and out of the harbor.”

The closer we come to Bremerhaven the closer Magdalene and I sit together and press our hands.

The train slowly moves down the track onto the pier and comes to a halt one hundred feet from the ship. But the pier is at least a foot under water. A dry path has been improvised by placing luggage carts next to each other from the train to the ship allowing us to walk to the ship and keep our feet dry. The wind is blowing hard that force the ship against the pier.

“It will take a miracle to get your ship away from the pier now,” I tell Magdalene as we board this beautiful ship. The ‘Olympia’ is a brand new Greek liner.

In two more hours, all non-passengers have to leave the ship. We spend the time on deck and I hold Magdalene close. We talk about the good time we had last year and the family we will have in America, maybe even by the end of this year.

“I wish I could take you along and we get married on the ship, Helmut.”

“We have always been lucky Magdalene, it may not take long.”

“This is the final notice for all train passengers to get back to the train,” I hear the announcer.

“Magdalene, I have to go.” I am interrupted by the train’s whistle.

“We write each other at least once a week.”

I manage a final hug and a kiss in a hurry.

“The train is whistling again. Good-bye Magdalene, have a good trip!”

On the way to the train I stop one more time and turn around. I can make out Magdalene waving at me between several hundred passengers on deck, all waving. I manage to take one more picture of her and the ship.

But now I have to run to the train, it starts to move while I am getting on.

“Good-bye, Magdalene!” I yell into the wind and blow one more kiss.

A Letter from Magdalene

Every day I have been looking for mail from Magdalene for four weeks now, but I guess she is very busy in America and has to tell her relatives a lot about what is going on at home. Of course it takes almost two weeks for a letter to get from here to America, at least five days alone to get by ship across the ocean.

She sent a picture post card when she arrived in New York. “It was a rough trip and took ten days,” she wrote. “I am in the Greyhound bus station and am waiting to get on the Greyhound bus. We will leave in about an hour. Arrival in Phoenix is in three days. *Ich hoffe wir sind bald wieder zusammen* (I hope we are soon together again).

Auf wiedersehen, Deine Magdalene.”

So far, so good!

It is rough here too. There is ice and snow outside, and coming home from work on a motorcycle on the ice-covered road is almost a

balancing act on a trapeze. Fortunately it is only two miles and there is no traffic to speak of. I would like to walk the road I always walked with Magdalene, along the tall trees next to the railroad track on one side and open fields on the other, but the road is covered with several feet of snow and nobody can walk there now.

I step into my bachelor apartment I rent from an elderly widow in the center of Gerlingen.

There is a thick envelope on the table. It can only be from Magdalene. It is now several weeks that I didn't hold her in my arms. I miss her a lot.

It is a long letter and has lots of pictures of her, her relatives, and Phoenix and the area surrounding it.

I make myself comfortable and enjoy the photos; Magdalene next to a cactus ten times taller than she is. I remember them from the old 'Tom Mix' Western movies.

On the other photo she is relaxing under a palm tree. "*Sunset in the desert in my new cowboy outfit,*" I read on the back. She looks cute in it, ready to make a movie in Hollywood. Now I really miss her a lot.

"This is Onkel Klaus with Tante Lotte and me on his motor boat on the desert Canyon Lake," it says on the back of one of the photos.

This must be heaven!

She looks good swimming and sunning on the beach at that Canyon Lake in bright sunshine and in a bikini suit and surrounded by palm trees. And this in February!

I feel warmer already in my cold room, but I will go over to her family soon to show them these pictures, in case they didn't get their mail yet. The one in the bikini I will keep for myself. I am not sharing it with anybody.

"And now to the really good news Helmut," she writes. "When I talked to Uncle Klaus about you, he wanted to know what kind of a fellow you are. I told him that we would like to marry here as soon as you come over."

He and Tante Lotte liked the idea very much. They have two boys, Klaus and Ralph, but no daughter. They would like the wedding reception to be in their house, with all their friends joining us. I have met many now. I know you will like them too.

Uncle Klaus got his accountant to prepare a financial statement and sent the immigration papers to Washington as your sponsor.

Some people in Washington told Uncle Klaus that engineers have priority right now.

Uncle Klaus suggested for you to get ready. He was told that your visa would most likely be approved before the end of the year. It will not be long! I joined the Edelweiss Club, a group of *Bavarian Schuh Plattler* dancers. I am making a Dirndle outfit for myself. We will dance the *Schuh Plattler* with them. Bring Bavarian Lederhosen with suspenders and a Bavarian hat along. I do not know where you can get them in our area, but you will find out.

The Edelweiss Club is a bunch of nice young people of German/American families; we have lots of fun. I got your letters, keep them coming, *Deine Magdalene.*”

I should go over to Magdalene’s family with the letter and the pictures. It is also dinnertime.

It is a short walk along the Main Street and then over the little creek. On the bridge is where we kissed the first time. I wasn’t sure how she would respond on that bridge and in the moonlight. It still gives me a warm feeling. It was long past midnight and there were only the two of us. It was meant to be.

Another half-mile and I am at the railroad overpass, about a hundred yards away from Schlechtinger’s home. It goes uphill a little. Here is where I let my motorcycle start itself after letting it quietly roll down to this point when I went home long past midnight.

I meet Magdalene’s mother and her older sister Emmi in the kitchen. Emmi and Magdalene are very close. Emmi is a little reserved, but has a warm personality. Her husband was killed in a traffic accident on the Autobahn when they were just married for a couple years. It happened a few days before I arrived in Gerlingen. That was two years ago. Emmi has a three-year-old daughter--a lovely little girl-- and they live now with Emmi’s parents again.

Magdalene’s mother, Emmi and I sit around the table and I show them the letter and the pictures. “Magdalene seems to have a lot of fun at my brother’s place,” her mother points to the photos. “Yes, that’s our Magdalene, always laughing and having fun. She is never afraid to tackle anything and always comes out on top.” I could not agree more.

“We could use some of that sunshine here,” her mother mentions, looking at the pictures. Emmi smiles at me and adds, “Helmut, it looks like you will become my brother-in-law this year. ”I am looking at Emmi and

put my hand on her arm, "Emmi, I feel you became my sister-in-law a long time ago."

"Let's hope all goes well with Magdalene and you in a strange country, learning another language and different customs," Emmi worries a little.

Her mother takes care that; "They can always come back. Don't worry Helmut!"

Do I Start Packing?

To live in Gerlingen has become boring, especially without transportation. Almost every day I am with Magdalene's family. I sold my motorcycle in spring, which is the only time when there is a market for a used motorcycle. I was lucky to find a buyer. It has been raining on and off almost every day since May. It is now August. I see the sun only on the pictures I get from Magdalene. "This is sunny Arizona in America," she is writing.

On weekends, when it's not raining, Magdalene's mother, Emmi, little Brigitte and I have long walks through the forest and the fields. We talk a lot about Magdalene and how good she looks on the photos.

I take many pictures here too, most of them from little Brigitte and the scenery around Gerlingen, trying out yellow and UV filters to improve the looks of the sky.

On some weekends, Emmi and I convert her upstairs kitchen into a darkroom and we develop films and make prints with my homemade enlarger, and mail many of them to Magdalene.

At work it is the usual. I am finishing up my drawings for the big 'Iron Powder' clutches for Narvik, Norway. We believe they are the biggest clutches of this type ever built.

The director of development, Dr. Grebe, asked me to come to his office. He expects an important visitor from America tomorrow.

"Herr Standke, a Mr. William Lear from the USA will visit us tomorrow. He is the president of Lear, Incorporated and has a license to build iron powder clutches as we do.

"I plan to show him what we do in this field, especially the big clutch you have designed to control the iron ore conveyor belts, including the cast iron rotating transformer and rectifiers that control it.

"We want to make a good impression. Have a display of the drawings on your board. I am intrigued with the cast iron rotating transformer, but I really don't know what Mr. Lear wants to see."

"Okay Herr Dr. Grebe, I'll be ready."

The next day, around ten, Dr. Grebe and his visitor come into the design department. This must be Mr. William Lear. He is a lively fellow. The fast way he walks. He also talks fast and emphasizes his speech with both hands. Dr. Grebe's secretary cannot keep up with him to translate English into German. He is about fifty five or so, medium size and wears thick glasses. I like the suit he wears. What a fit, what a beautiful material. It must be mohair, silk or something like it.

I hear him say that he invented automatic pilots for aircraft and he is considering the use of our small servo clutches for them. He mentions that he is also an experienced pilot with over four thousand hours of flying time.

Boy, what a guy!

"Flying in southern California is a joy," he says, "the weather is so perfect and predictable." He says, "Thank you," as he leaves. Now I am impressed, I never heard anybody say 'thank you' to me for just doing my job.

The following day I go to Dr. Grebe's secretary, to find out what the address of Lear, Incorporated in California is. I don't know exactly what I am going to do with it, but one never knows.

"Hilde, in case I may have to mail something to Lear, Inc. do you have the address?"

"Sure Herr Standke, I just wrote them a letter. It is Lear, Inc. Santa Monica, California, Bundy Drive. By the way, this Mr. William Lear wants to be called Bill Lear; in America, they call everybody by their first name or

by their nickname. By the way, you can have his business card, I no longer need it.

“Thank you, Hilde.”

“Don’t mention it. *Wie get es Magdalene?* She is a classmate of mine.”

“Very good Hilde, you should see the pictures she sends. I’ll show them to you tomorrow. Thanks again!” That was three weeks ago. Today I got a number of forms from the American Consulate to fill out and to submit a chest x-ray, proof of a recent smallpox vaccination and a report of a physical examination by a doctor. I do not have to come to the consulate; I can have all the medical work done at our county health department.

I wonder how long it will take from the submittal of the paper work to get my visa. Maybe I better think about packing.

Magdalene’s Sister Emmi and I look over all the things that Magdalene could not manage to take along and all the additional stuff, which I have. It is a lot. Some of it is delicate, like china, crystal and some other things.

“How will you get all this over there, Helmut?” Emmi wonders.

Magdalene’s father comes over too. He is always helpful and positive. He is the one who introduced washing machines for the families in Gerlingen many years ago, and Gerlingen is only on the local maps. He manages the nonprofit Electric Power Association in Gerlingen. At the end of the year a nonprofit organization has to pay back the leftover money to the members of the association. He convinced the association members to spend it on washing machines before the men take it to the pub, or before the priest comes and wants to finance someone’s trip to heaven with it.

Most families belonging to the Electric Power Association signed up to buy a washing machine.

In Berlin I never saw a washing machine in an ordinary household. Mama washed everything by hand, and so did every other woman I know.

“You got a lot of stuff! Helmut, you need a big box.” And Magdalene’s dad points to the table. “About this size. I talk to Johannes, our carpenter, he can make us one. You have to have enough room for padding material too. It would be a shame to break any of the china. Let’s do it right!” Yes, let’s do it right!

I come home from work and I find a large envelope in my room. It is from the American Consulate, dated October first 1954. I do not dare to guess. I turn on the light and sit down.

My hands are shaking and I can't get my pocketknife to open the envelope.

Yes, it is my immigration visa. That was fast! It took only six months; I think I broke a record. America looks friendlier and friendlier and comes closer day by day.

I will be in America in a few weeks!

"We marry and move into our own apartment a few days after your arrival," Magdalene writes.

I have to sit down and try to imagine what my life will be from now on in America and with Magdalene as my wife. And we will have a family in a few years and a bunch of kids running around. That will be fun.

I'll find a job, that's no problem.

And here is another problem solved. I get rid of my engineering director Betke. When I came to work on my first day I was told that the four hundred Marks salary we had agreed on was a mistake, they will pay me only three hundred seventy eight. I determined that I would be out of this place at the first opportunity.

Then I met Magdalene.

When I asked for a raise after having been a year and a half with the company and after I received my patent for the explosion proof clutch for coalmines, he complained that I spend too much time drinking my coffee in my break time. That's not his darn business. Let him design the clutches from now on.

I am supposed to give a four-week notice before the end of the quarter. I give him the next couple of weeks. Take it or leave it! If he doesn't except my resignation gracefully I quit on the spot. I think I am overly fair to this guy.

If only my English would be further along. I have to prove my English teacher wrong when he gave me an F years ago. I will take care of that!

New York, New York!

"The first opportunity to sail to America is on a French liner, the *Isle de France*," the travel agent tells me. "It leaves on the third of November from Le Havre in France at four o'clock in the afternoon. How does that sound?"

"Sooner would be better, but I'll take what I can get!"

"Do you want me to write the tickets for the railroad to Paris and for the ship to New York for you? If you leave in the afternoon here on the second you are in Paris in the morning of the third. From Paris to Le Havre are only a few hours. You can buy the ticket to go from Paris to Le Havre in Paris at any Metro railroad station when you arrive in Paris."

"Yes, write it up, please."

It is a funny feeling. I am now committed to go on the ship to America on the third of November 1954. For good! It's final!

"When do I arrive in New York?"

"That will be early in the morning on the ninth of November. Have a good trip, *und viel Glück in America Herr Standke!* (Lots of luck in America Mr. Standke!)"

The time has come to say Good-bye to Magdalene's mother and dad, and Emmi. I will miss everybody, but Emmi the most; she has become my second sister.

"Think of Magdalene and me on the twentieth of November Emmi, it will be our wedding day!"

"I know, Helmut, it is all set, Tante Lotte and Onkel Klaus arranged it all, Magdalene wrote. All you have to do is show up and say yes!" Emmi tells me and all of us laugh.

"I wish I could be there, Helmut," I hear Magdalene's mother, "make sure the two of you come back to visit us soon. Have a good trip. Say hello to Magdalene, my brother Klaus and Lotte. We will send a telegram for the wedding; *und viel Glück für Euch beide.* (Lots of luck for the two of you)." Then she turns around to wipe off her tears.

I hug Emmi one more time and kiss her on the cheek.

Magdalene's dad and I leave and walk over to the Gerlinger railroad station. I turn around a number of times to wave over to the house with Magdalene's mother and Emmi waving back.

"Helmut," Magdalene's dad tells me as the train pulls in, "when you and Magdalene have children, don't let us wait too long to come back for a visit. I love to see and get to know my grandchildren. With my asthma I hope I will be around to see them."

"I promise! Magdalene and I will love to show them off to you."

One more solid handshake with my 'father-in-law to be' and I am on my way. I keep waving until I no longer see anybody, and then close the window. I sit down and close my eyes.

A new phase of my life is ahead of me.

Although there are several people in the compartment, I have nothing to do with them. I am busy. I close my eyes and I start to sort things out.

I am about to leave Germany behind. When I will be back, if ever, I do not know.

Mama and Papa are still in Berlin and I think they are doing okay, for now. At least that's what Mama writes. Things have improved in East Germany--the Russian zone--but will never be normal. Most food is still rationed, there is no selection and often the store is out of it. The rations are small and the quality of the food is often poor. And this is nine years after a war which should have never happened.

Papa is now sixty-six years old. He was a mailman until recently and had to climb stairs all day long. I think he must be in pretty good shape, but he is a man who would never complain.

I am not so sure about Mama. Sister Inge in New Zealand and I write once-in-a-while and we worry what would happen to Papa should Mama get sick. Papa doesn't do much for himself, Mama does all the cooking and washing she did all her life. Mama worries she has cancer, the pain in her side is sometimes severe. So far no doctor has been able to help her. I wonder what Inge in New Zealand and I in America can do for them. Inge divorced Boris; he was together with his Ukrainian compatriots more than he was at home, and he became difficult.

Then Inge met Desmond, a very nice New Zealander. They married and moved to New Zealand where Des inherited a part of his parent's farm. Inge fell in love with New Zealand and is very happy there.

Papa is now retired; maybe we can get them out of there one of these days. Permission to leave East Germany is usually granted to retired folks, because they forfeit their social retirement payments from East Germany in the process.

The train is rolling on and on. It is dark outside. We crossed the Belgian border a few hours ago and it can't be too far to Paris anymore.

I wonder how long it will take until I get my first job. What will it be? For a starter I will do anything, including a job in the shop as a craftsman. And I will study English day and night.

It is now getting lighter in the east and the train slows down. This night sure went fast. Yes, it is Paris.

Paris doesn't look much different than Berlin. The schematics of the Metro stations on the wall are identical to the schematics of the Berliner S-Bahn. All is easy to understand and self-explanatory.

It is my first time in Paris and I have a few hours to get to the Eiffel tower and take a good look at Paris from the top. It is a big and beautiful city. (Could be cleaner in the side streets, I notice.)

I am anxious to get to my ship and am happy when the train leaves to Le Havre. It goes all the way up to the pier, very much as the train did in Bremerhaven, Germany, when Magdalene left for America in January.

The *Isle de France* is a big, white and beautiful ship. It is the pride of France and had the Blue Ribbon at one time.

On the pier next to the ship I show my ticket and identify my luggage.

I share a small cabin with three Frenchmen. I am glad nobody smokes. They all seem to be the quiet type and are in their own world, probably thinking of the recent past and the future. That makes four of us.

One of them introduces himself as Andre. He speaks English well and some German and we can communicate.

"I immigrated to the states years ago." He tells me. "I started a business in New York when I arrived and I am still there. Where are you headed for in the states?"

"I will go from New York by Greyhound bus to Phoenix, Arizona," I answer.

"Good, very good. You are doing the right thing, I wish I had gone west when I came over, but I have my business now in New York, it is too late for me to change.

Let's get something to eat."

I like what I hear. Up to this point I had no idea that 'where' in America makes a difference.

I slept like a log on the ship which made up for last night on the train. It is a beautiful morning. The ship has arrived in Southampton, England, the last stop in Europe.

Many passengers are on deck and we look down to the pier far below. A few new passengers come on board and several American cars are loaded by crane on board and are maneuvered below deck. Those cars are huge. The crew has trouble getting them through the hatch.

Andre joins me and starts to talk. He is a pleasant and interesting fellow and I am eager to learn. I get inside information from a successful immigrant who has apparently done well adopting his new country, something I have just begun to do.

"You are an Engineer? You should not have any trouble *making it*. Go west! Remember! That's where the new America is. There are more opportunities in the west. The east is more like Europe, a lot of older people with old ideas, and a lot of dead wood.

"I wish I were your age and could come along with you."

For the next five days, when I am not on deck dreaming about the future or looking at the sunset, I have many talks with Andre. I am interested in all he says. I am forming a colorful mosaic of America in my mind, an America I only vaguely have dreamed about in the past.

Tomorrow morning the *Isle de France* will be in New York. All immigrants have to assemble today in the large dining room to get all formalities in order. About ten immigration officials sit on a long table to check whether our papers and other immigration requirements are in order. Whether fifty US dollars minimum arrived in cash by wireless, if the travel ticket from New York to the final destination arrived, and whether all information matches the papers from the American consulates.

The documents better be in order, or the American authorities in New York will not let me off the ship.

There are no problems and I will be in New York tomorrow morning

"Wake up Helmut," let's hurry on deck. You will remember the view for a lifetime," Andre calls, "we are just about to pass the Statue of Liberty."

There she is, the **Statue of Liberty**. I am impressed.

The *Isle de France* is very close to the Statue of Liberty as we pass. She is a tall lady and everybody on deck looks up to her, especially the immigrants.

The pier is close and in a few minutes, we will be in America!

CHAPTER EIGHT

America!

This is New York 1954

Tall buildings and other big ships are all around. Hundreds of passengers and I get off the *Isle de France*. Many of them are immigrants.

People around me speak French, English, German and who knows what. This is America!

I try to spot a woman in the crowd who is looking for me. She is supposed to help me to get through customs and to take me to the Greyhound bus station.

It looks like I am on my own with my big box and my large suitcase. The woman did not show up.

The instructions tell me to get a customs inspector when I located my luggage. I have been told that getting the papers signed is a formality. I manage to get the attention of one of the inspectors.

He looks at the box and orders his assistants, "I want to see what's in this box, cut the steel straps and pry it open. Let's see what is on the bottom." The workers remove the lid and turn my box up side down. They lift the box up and the contents spill out on the concrete floor.

Oh-my-God, how much of the china and the crystal did break?

"Where are your three cameras you have listed on the content list?" When I show him that one of them is an antique, which I should have thrown away years ago, he signs the customs release form and leaves me with a pile of my stuff on the floor.

It took me a week to pack it. Can I fit it all back in the box and get the lid back on? I am glad Emmi and I wrapped all china and crystal in towels or lots of paper as Magdalene's father had suggested.

It is a miracle. Nothing seems to be broken and I get it all back into the box without too much trouble.

Is there someone with a hammer, nails and a strap to put the lid back onto my box? I am a long way from Phoenix and I do not want to spill it again.

I recognize the strapping tool that one worker carries and point to my box, "Please!" It takes him a minute and all the nails are back in and a number of straps hold the box together again. Now I feel better.

"Thank you, sir." I like to give him a good tip; he made it possible to get my stuff to Phoenix. When I look at my coins, I wish I would know which one I should give him. I try to be generous and hand him two of the largest silver pieces I have.

He walks away. I guess it was okay.

Two burly characters pick up my box and my suitcase, move them to the other end of the hall and fling them down a conveyor belt that leads down a steep slope to the street sixty feet below. I hurry down the stairs next to the conveyor belt. When I arrive at the street, I find my box and suitcase on the sidewalk.

Taxis come every few seconds in an endless stream and move people and luggage. Although the taxis have wide double doors, they are not wide enough for my big box.

Magdalene had written that under no circumstance should I leave my luggage with anybody. Now what!

People are in a hurry here. They have to walk around my box and suitcase and are bumping into one another. They look at me and shake their heads. I start to perspire, what should I do.

Out of nowhere a fellow with a large pad appears. "I am an agent for the railroad," he claims. He wears no uniform and does not look very official. "This box can only go by train; it is too large for anything else. Where does it have to go?"

It makes sense to me. When I read 'Southern Pacific Railroad' on his pad, I feel much better. I read about this railroad company in many western books I used to read as a youngster. I remember having seen it in the old Tom Mix western movies as a kid. It feels as if I meet an old acquaintance. This fellow must be okay.

"This box has to go to Phoenix, Arizona, 510 E Flynn Lane."

"Sign here, give us a week and we let you know when it arrives in Phoenix. Have good trip!" It all takes a few seconds and a truck disappears down the street with my box.

Will I ever see our china and crystals again?

I am about to get a taxi to get me and my heavy suitcase to the Greyhound bus station, I figure the taxi driver will get me there wherever it is.

"Sind sie Herr Standke?" A woman in a heavy overcoat looks at me.

"Yes, I am. You must be my escort?"

"I didn't know that your ship was early, I am sorry. It looks like you did okay. Let's get out of here and take a taxi to the bus depot on Times Square. Your bus to Phoenix leaves at two in the afternoon, we have lots of time." I am happy she arrived, late or not.

That bus station is a busy place.

"Watch your luggage," I hear the guard at the station tell us. "I heard you speak German, you are probably new here. My grandfather was German; I still understand most of it.

‘You have to watch your luggage here; it is not a good neighborhood. Have a good trip!’ The guard is a grandfather type—but armed to the teeth with two big caliber revolvers at his hips—he tips his cap and walks away.

I look after him and cannot believe it. He has the large pistols at his side and a bat in his hand. Not even the guards at the Russian Company in Berlin walked around like that.

"Herr Standke, take a look at the neighborhood, I will watch your luggage," my escort suggests, "We are at Times Square, and Broadway is around the corner."

I have over an hour to look around downtown New York and pay close attention where I go. Do not get lost here, I tell myself. Never have I seen that many cars in my life. And they are big.

It is noontime and this place is crowded. People hurry and seem not pay attention to others next to them. They all hurry and are absorbed only in themselves. I look down the side streets; they are all busy.

New York is not for me! Berlin is a sweet little country town by comparison. I wonder what Phoenix is going to be like. The pictures I saw showed palm trees along the streets, that is more like it. I will know in three days.

"It sure is a busy place," I tell my lady-escort when I return. "I recognize this area from the news reels; nice to see it with my own eyes."

"Yes it is big; it took me years to get used to the traffic," my escort answers.

"I think you can check in your luggage and get on the bus now, Herr Standke."

"Thank you for helping me not to get lost in New York."

"You are in good hands now, Herr Standke. Have a good trip. I wish I could come along, but I have family here now, they need me. Good-bye, Herr Standke."

"Auf Wiedersehen! Vielen Dank!"

New York to Phoenix by Bus

It is getting dark early and I cannot see much of New York. All I see are rundown areas. What a disappointment! I guess the Greyhound bus has to travel through sections where the bus customers are.

One of these days, I have to see the real New York, the theaters and music halls I have seen on pictures and in films.

The bus keeps rolling day and night. It stops only every four hours for twenty minutes for the driver and us to have a chance to eat and drink something and stretch our legs.

When forty people all at once storm into a little restaurant on the road, the girls behind the counter have trouble keeping up with the sudden traffic. It is often in the middle of the night. I have given up trying to order something. What am I doing wrong? Do I speak too slowly when I try to do a good job? The girls behind the counter start talking to the person next to me when I still try to order. Now I grab a bag of chips and a coke and pay without saying a word. I haven't figured it out yet.

In Saint Louis, I transfer to a different bus. The bus depot is crowded and noisy. I try hard not to miss any announcements and possibly miss my bus.

Groups of students get on the bus too. I wish my English would be better, my vocabulary is very limited and I have trouble keeping up with a conversation. They all talk so fast.

However, everybody is very polite and understanding and does not seem to mind when I stumble to find the right word. Many of the young men want to hear what Germany is like now, and what really went on under the Nazis and during the war. They know that war propaganda has little to do with reality.

Except one fellow, he is still on the warpath. His friends try to moderate his talk and are afraid that I may get insulted.

He is not older than twenty. That means he was ten when the war ended.

I recognize the type. I saw them as young Nazis and as young Communists. Slogans are all they know. Most of them are misguided believers, incapable or unwilling to find and consider the facts.

I wish I could speak better English, but I realize that my struggle now is a good opportunity to learn.

I try to stay calm; it helps that I probably understand less than half of what he says.

“Why did you invade Poland?” he wants to know.

“I didn’t!”

“I mean, why did the German Army invade Poland so the west had to declare war on Hitler?”

“Hitler and Stalin partitioned Poland down the middle and their armies invaded Poland from the west and from the east within days. Why was no war declared against Stalin? He also invaded Finland the year before?”

“The Communist army came to defend Poland,” he claims.

“Is that why the eastern half of Poland was given to Russia by President Roosevelt in Yalta? And twenty million Poles of east Poland had to leave their homeland, as ordered by Stalin with the blessing of Roosevelt and Churchill?”

All young men sitting near come closer and wonder what is going on.

I finally interrupt his talk and ask, "What seems to be the problem Mr.? You have won the war. That was over ten years ago, let's be happy about that. Can I buy you a coke at the next stop?"

His friends pat me on the shoulder, "Welcome to America!"

Oklahoma City, I am more than halfway through America after two days of traveling day and night. It is a big country. I am developing an ear for English. It is amazing what a few days of exposure to English all day will do. Many words I had learned over the years are coming back.

Announcements in the bus depot say that Albuquerque in New Mexico is snowed-in and we may have to travel over El Paso in the south at the USA-Mexico border.

I hope that will not delay my arrival in Phoenix. I am supposed to arrive at five o'clock at the Greyhound Bus Station in Phoenix.

This is El Paso, a major bus depot. I go outside to my next bus to check on my luggage. The luggage is next to the busses. My suitcase is easy to spot. It is the biggest. I find it still in front of my old bus. Good thing I checked. I carry it myself to the Phoenix bus. I could have lost it.

In El Paso, I manage to sit in front of the bus and next to the driver. He is middle age and heavy set. It is hot in the bus and he took his jacket off. His muscular hairy arms with big hands control the steering wheel. He has a poker face, no matter what the traffic is, it never changes. I am sure he can handle any situation.

I have a terrific view. The scenery is very different. Ice and snow in the central and eastern part of America have changed to green trees, green bushes and sandy areas with giant cacti. I peek over to the driver side and notice we go at seventy miles per hour. That is over hundred kilometers per hour. It does not seem that fast when we go through the desert, when I can see thirty miles of straight highway in front of me. There is no straight road for thirty miles in Germany.

It is two o'clock in the afternoon when the bus stops in Tucson, Arizona.

"How far is it from here to Phoenix?" I ask the driver as we get off the bus.

"It is only a couple hours from here, we are on schedule. Is anything special going on in Phoenix that you came all the way from Germany?"

"Yes, it sure is. My bride will be waiting for me at the station. We have our wedding in a week."

"You picked the right season in Phoenix to get married and have your honeymoon here. Good luck to you. Are you going to stay here?" "I am not sure. If I can get a good job here, I probably will."

I walk around Tucson and see palm tree lined streets and green lawns in front of the houses. It is a friendly clean little town.

Back on the bus and rolling again. I check my watch; we should be in Phoenix in an hour. I lean back and close my eyes and I see Magdalene. Only a few more minutes and we will be together again, for good! I have not been with her since January. That is a long time. I miss Magdalene, and her laugh and positive friendly nature. I miss being together with her to cuddle up, to plan and think about our future. It is only a few more minutes.

I am seated in front of the bus again and enjoy how green and clean everything is near Phoenix. It is five o'clock when the bus comes into the Greyhound Bus Depot in Phoenix.

I cannot see Magdalene or anybody here who is looking for me. I look around as I pick up my suitcase. Is there another stop in Phoenix maybe?

Did they forget I would arrive at five?

Boy, it looks like they did forget.

I wonder if I can figure their telephone system out, I do have the number. Someone long time had pounded it in to me. **Be Prepared.**

I have plenty of coins in my pockets. I think I am in luck; it is ringing. I hear a woman's voice; this must be Tante Lotte. I can speak in German to her.

"Tante Lotte? Hier ist Helmut. Ich bin hier auf der Greyhound Bus Station, kann mich einer abholen?"

"Oh my God, Helmut, we thought you would come later, we will be right there, okay?"

"Kein Problem, Tante Lotte."

I have no idea how long it will take, I might as well be comfortable. I sit down at the nearest table and look at the paper in front of me. I am now on the road for ten days, what is going on?

I try my English. I am surprised what I can read. It should not be too difficult to learn how to read. Speaking English is another matter.

Who is tapping on my shoulder?

"Magdalene! Magdalene! It was a long time without you. I will not let that happen again." I hug and kiss her and hold her tight.

"Helmut, this is my cousin Gisela, she has a car and will take us to Tante Lotte and Onkel Klaus."

I don't see much of Phoenix while we go.

"Tante Lotte, Onkel Klaus, here is Helmut! The wedding is on!" Magdalene announces as we enter the house.

The Wedding

*W*e have to go to St. Francis Church to meet the priest,”

Magdalene tells me. “Onkel Klaus has made all arrangements for the wedding with the Catholic Church. The priest has reservations. It has never happened before that a non-Catholic was married in front of the altar in a Catholic Church.

“And we perform weddings in the morning, and not on a Saturday evening,” he has told Onkel Klaus.

“They are all working,” Onkel Klaus answers him, “You have to make an exception.”

“But I want to see them first and instruct them about a Catholic Marriage.”

I have to attend several lectures because this is going to be a Catholic wedding in front of the altar and I am a non-Catholic. I wonder what he will lecture me. Are we not all Christians?

The church is pretty; I like the baroque playful style.

Above, in the tower, the bell sounds seven o'clock when we open the big and heavy door for our first lecture. I try to close the door gently, I do not want to disturb anybody, but that heavy door closes with a bang.

Magdalene and I stand at the end of the isle until our eyes adjust to the candlelight. A few people sit near the altar and pray.

I hold Magdalene's hand and I feel how special this moment is. In a few days, we will be married here. I look around; this church must be quite old. Gilded sculptures are everywhere.

Magdalene explains to me what all the figures represent and mean as we walk down the isle on that thick red carpet. I press her hand and enjoy the feeling of walking down the isle with her.

It is all very interesting but today we do not have the time. We have to meet the priest in the side room.

“My name is Brother Gregory,” the priest introduces himself and tells us he is from Ireland. This does not help me to understand him any better. He appears to be a nice fellow, kind of small and timid. He has a friendly face and speaks slowly with a pleasant voice. He has very soft

hands. I have to be gentle with him next time when we shake hands again.

“Sit down and be comfortable,” he tells us and points to a table. He places a thick black book on the table and sits down next to me.

I try to read the article he tells me to read. The book is printed in an ancient script--similar to many old books I read in Germany. I have no trouble reading it. The words are new to me. I have no idea how to pronounce them and what they mean.

“What is the meaning of *resurrection*,” I ask. He clears his throat, wipes his forehead and then explains it to me in his pleasant voice. There are many more words, which I like to learn. The priest and I spend the next hour working on my vocabulary and pronunciation. I learned a lot this hour. I hope Father Gregory doesn't mind.

I am back for the next lecture the following day. After going through a few more words I think I like to understand before I should go on, the priest declares I am ready to be married in the Catholic Church. He looks worn-out. I hope I have nothing to do with that. No, cannot be, he is a teacher, that is his job. Is it not?

Today is the day. Magdalene is at work until four o'clock and Onkel Klaus is in his store until six. Tante Lotte and I--she came home early from their store--are busy fixing up the house for the reception. It is hectic but fun and I think of our wedding later in the evening. We expect many people, all friends of Onkel Klaus and Tante Lotte. I met some of them at the wedding shower a few days ago. Normally wedding showers are for women only, but this time men were also invited so we all get to know each other.

Tante Lotte and I are flying through the house but somehow manage. It is getting late and I worry if Magdalene will be home on time. She has to take the bus; one never knows about busses.

Everything seems to work out. Magdalene is putting on her lovely white wedding gown. I try to get used to that stiff collar around my neck and try to remember how to tie my bow tie and make the ends come out even. The last time I wore a bow tie was when I was seventeen and went dancing. My God, that was seventeen years ago.

*Mr. and Mrs. Nick Hubenthal
request the honour of your presence
at the marriage of their niece
Magdalene Schlechtinger
to
Mr. Helmut Standke
on Saturday, the twentieth of November
nineteen hundred and fifty-four
seven o'clock in the evening
Saint Francis Xavier Church
4715 North Central Avenue
Phoenix, Arizona*

*Reception immediately following
at 510 East Flynn-Lane*



It is lovely. Many flowers decorate the altar. I stand near the altar with my best man and am surprised how many people are in the church. All stand up when Onkel Klaus and Magdalene come down the aisle. Onkel Klaus smiles and he is very proud to have the honors. Magdalene is so pretty.

I meet Magdalene in the aisle and we continue to walk to the altar.

I wish I could understand more of what the priest is saying. "Repeat after me," I hear him say, and then he talks for a minute in English. I can understand only some of it. How can I remember all he tells me? And then even repeat it? I improvise as best as I can and sprinkle in some English words. But now I hear it loud and clear, "You may kiss the bride!" I guess we did all right. Everybody is clapping.



Magdalene, Helmut, Gisela, Tante Lotte, Onkel Klaus

Tante Lotte and Uncle Klaus's house is full of guests when we return from church. Everybody wishes us happiness and good luck in our new homeland. Food and drinks are plenty. Everybody sings along with the music in English and in German.

Putting the Cake



Helmut

Magdalene

Gisela

Onkel Klaus

Job Hunting

Onkel Klaus and I are back from the Public Service Company to get a job for me.

"How did it go?" Tante Lotte asks us when we step into the house.

"I didn't get the job Tante Lotte. I was told, "We like your resume and would like to have you, but you are really over-qualified for the jobs we have open right now. We wish you luck for the future."

"Don't feel bad, Helmut, better luck the next time."

"Don't worry, Tante Lotte, I saw an opening for a tool designer in the paper. Thanks for the help Onkel Klaus; Magdalene is waiting for me to come home for dinner, thanks again."

It is early in the morning and I am on the bus on my way to 'Bee, Mold and Die', a tool and die making company near the airport. In the lobby, I ask the girl at the desk, "I am applying for the job you advertised in the Arizona Republic."

She points to the building behind me, "See the supervisor in the engineering building across the road, he'll take care of you. Ask for Ted."

Did she say engineering building? It looks like a small shack to me.

"May I speak to Ted please," I ask a group of six people in the room.

"I am Ted," a fellow about my age answers. He is in shorts and leaning over a drawing.

"My name is Helmut Standke, I am applying for the job you advertised in the Arizona Republic, I was told to see you."

All the young men in the office look up and are curious who I am.

"Are you an engineer Helmut?" he asks.

"Yes sir, I am."

"We are trying to get a number of proposals out and we need help. Take a look at these drawings; do they make sense to you?" "Yes sir, they do!" "When can you start; how about next Monday?"

"Yes I can, what is the pay?"

"We have a forty hour week but we often stay longer to get the job done. We pay x?x?x? dollar a week."

“Can you repeat that please I didn’t understand?” He has a funny accent, which I have never heard before. He repeats and I still do not get it. What did he say?

Its okay, I will find out at the end of week. This time it really does not matter much, I got a foot in the door.

“Did you come by car, Helmut?” Ted wants to know.

“I came by bus from downtown. I don’t have a car yet.”

“Ted, I can pick up Helmut and drop him off again, I go through downtown,” one of the young fellows volunteers.

“That would be nice Frank. Okay, Helmut, we are all set, see you Monday morning. Tell Frank where you live and where you can meet.”

I got my first job in America; I got my foot in the door.

“I got the job Magdalene!” She lets the door go and we hold each other.

“How much do they pay?”

“I don’t know. I think he said forty, I am not sure.”

“Helmut, I am so happy, now we both have a job. Is it a good job?”

“I doubt it; the place doesn’t look like anything we worked at in Germany. I do not care; it’s a start. Someone will pick me up in the morning and bring me back. I think we now need a car.”

Frank picked me up at seven Monday morning and we talked on the way to work.

“I can help you out when you have trouble with English, Helmut. I learned a little German from my parents. I hope the long hours we work will not bother you. Usually we work to seven in the evening and until two on Saturday. What can you do? It is not easy to get a job here in Phoenix.”

The job is simple; a draftsman should be able to do it. I wonder if this is a serious proposal.

Today is Saturday, payday. How much did I earn? Ted passes out the paychecks and I don’t see any happy faces. I study my paycheck, forty dollars minus deductions for seventy-two hours of work. On my slide rule I figure that is fifty-five cents per hour. That is not much. But I have improved my English a lot during the first week.

I got a foot in the door. The fellows I work with are friendly and very helpful. I am earning not only money.

“How is the job, Helmut? Getting any better?” Onkel Klaus wants to know when we visit him on the weekend.

“No! It did not! I am now three weeks with them and it is still eleven hours a day. Ted, our supervisor, sometimes works until two in the morning. He thinks he has a career at this place and there is nothing else in Phoenix.”

“He is probably right; this is not an industry town. Summer is around the corner, all who can will be leaving for the California beaches or the mountains. It is getting awful hot here.”

“I will keep the job for now. I haven’t found anything in the paper yet, but I am looking.”

“If you don’t mind a job other than engineering, Helmut, go to the State Employment Office. What do you have to lose?” Onkel Klaus suggests.

“That’s a good idea Onkel Klaus, I’ll try that tomorrow. I wonder what my fellow workers will say when I quit?”

“Have a seat,” the fellow at the SEO desk tells me as I hand him my resume.

“I have a lot of jobs, all kinds. I don’t know why people say there are no jobs. Sometimes you have to try a few before you get a good one. You work now for *Bee, Mold and Die*? How do you like it?” “I don’t.”

“That’s what I thought. You have a nice resume; I wish more people had one like it. I have an opening for a shop supervisor. It is a new place around here and I know little about them. If it does not work out, come back and we will try something else. Would you like to try it?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Here is the address; it is near the airport too. Talk to Mr. Regan, he is the owner. Give it a try!”

On my way back to work, I stop at Regan Precision Heating Elements.

“Mr. Regan?” I ask the middle age man with thinning gray hair behind the desk in the front office.

“Yes, that’s me. You must be Helmut Standke; the employment office has called me. “We are just starting out and you will be on the ground floor,” Mr. Regan tells me. “We used to be in Milwaukee and moved down here. My present supervisor wants to go back to Milwaukee in two weeks when all the machinery has been set up.

“I need a replacement. Take a look at our stamping dies here, can you set up the stamping press with these dies?”

“I most certainly can, I have designed and manufactured dies just like it.”

“When can you start, how about Monday? That gives you and Tom time to work together for a couple weeks.”

“What do you pay Mr. Regan?”

“We work forty hours a week and your pay is forty-five dollars. Is Monday okay?”

“Yes Mr. Regan, I will be here Monday at eight.”

I whistle on the way home. I doubled my hourly rate. I hope that nothing will be wrong with my new job. That big hall was almost empty, only a dozen women working. Never mind. I doubled my rate if nothing else.

Now I have to figure out how to quit in America. Onkel Klaus told me it is much simpler here than in Germany. When I get back, I will ask my supervisor Ted. I understand his Texan English much better now. He is really a nice fellow. I feel sorry for him. I do not think anybody has a future here.

“Ted, what is the proper way to give notice here?”

“It is very simple, Helmut. Just tell me you quit.”

”Okay, Ted, I quit!”

Everybody in the room stands up and looks at me.

“Did you find a better job, Helmut? How did you do that?” I hear from several coworkers.

“The State Employment Office has lots of jobs, the guy told me. I didn’t have any trouble.”

“Congratulations, Helmut!

“The last one in and the first one out! Congratulations Helmut!” Frank shakes my hand. “Did I hear you say State Employment Office? Thank you very much Helmut. I wish you good luck wherever you go!”

I found a Better Job

A line of Chryslers and Chevies shows up in front of Onkel Klaus's house for a few hours and eventually I buy a two-year old good-looking Chevrolet.

Onkel Klaus had called a few car dealers and asked them to come to his house and show us some late model low mileage cars. Now I can drive to work.

I arrive at my new work place '*Regan Precision Heating Elements*'. I am early; it is so easy to drive to work. The door to the building is open and I walk right in.

"You must be Helmut," a man my age tells me, "I am the foreman, call me Tom. Mr. Regan probably told you about me. He will show up at around ten or so, and then we will hear his excuse why he is late."

Tom is about my size too and seems to be an easy-going friendly guy; I think we will work well together.

"Care for a coffee?" Tom pours a cup for me too and points to the cream. "Let me give you the tour."

He is a nice fellow.

The two of us—with our coffee cup in hand—walk over to the all-women assembly area.

"Meet Helmut, your new foreman. He will answer all your questions and show you how to do your job from now on."

I smile at them and nod my head. "Nice to meet you!" One of the first phrases I learned in my English lessons.

"Let me show you the tool room, Helmut. Sometimes we get a job when we need some of these stamping dies. We have never used them here in Arizona. Regan told me you are familiar with them?"

"Yes Tom, I am. Why don't you move to Arizona too, it seems to be very nice here?"

"I have my family in Milwaukee, and the better half of the company—Regan's former partner—is still there. The two partners split. Regan's wife is ill and has to live here in Arizona.

“ I wonder if Regan is capable of running this part of the company. Make sure you always get your money.”

“Thank you Tom. Do you mean it?”

“Yes, I am not kidding.” I wonder what kind of a job this will turn out to be. This is supposed to be the land of unlimited possibilities or something like that. I never gave a second thought to not getting my money in Germany. Does that really happen here in America?

It is about ten when I hear Mr. Regan’s voice, “Tom, Helmut, come to my office, please.” Mr. Regan yells through the door to the shop. I do not care for his command tone.

Tom turns to me, “I wonder what it is this time.”

Mr. Regan leans back in his chair when we step in. “I stopped at Goodyear Rubber to discuss our proposal for the tire mold heaters. Tom, you did not think it could be done. Why don't you two look at it again. We need this job badly.”

“Yes, Mr. Regan,” Tom answers. “Let’s go to our office, Helmut.”

On the way we get another coffee. A drafting table and a desk are in the tool room too and this makes it the engineering office. Tom puts his coffee down and picks up a good size book issued by the supplier of the chrome-nickel wire. I am familiar with chrome-nickel wire; I made electrical cooking plates out of it for all my friends on board of mine destroyer.

“The proper way to design our heaters is to go by this book, Helmut. If we go along these curves for power, material and wire size, we come up with a reliable heater and we will have happy customers. Goodyear’s specification must be wrong, that heater will burn out.

Weeks ago I told Regan that. He is so eager to get this order that he will take it regardless what we tell him. What can we do? That’s why I am leaving.”

I agree with Tom’s analysis, according to what this book tells us. I am new at this business and I am not going to second-guess Tom.

We are just about to go to the front office when Mr. Regan comes to us. “Can it be done, Helmut?”

“Tom and I analyzed the Goodyear tire mold heater again, and according to the heater bible it will fail.”

“Okay guys, here is what I have decided,” Mr. Regan is telling Tom and me. “We are going to make two prototypes. Tom, you can then

show Helmut how the swage machine works. Let Goodyear decide whether our heaters are okay. Let's start now."

Mr. Regan does not wait for us to answer and walks away. He is the boss.

"It is his show and his money," Tom mumbles. "But he has a point. I can show you then how we make this type of a heater. The swage machine is very unique."

At the end of the day, we hand Mr. Regan two five-foot long heating rods, made to the Goodyear drawing. "Good luck Mr. Regan."

"I will drop them off tomorrow morning guys. Thanks for the fast work."

That was two weeks ago.

Tom left for his home in Milwaukee last Friday and I am now the supervisor. The assembly people have many questions. "Let me show you!" is my standard answer. It is easier for me to demonstrate than to explain it in English. The women seem to like it better too. We are a small outfit, only twelve altogether. I make sure that everybody knows now what and how to do it. The work is moving along until ten o'clock when Mr. Regan walks in.

"Let's all come together, I have the work assignments for you!"

He is turning the place upside down; he doesn't care that everybody has an assignment. Now I have to spend another two hours retraining my crew to do it his way.

"How is the brazing coming, Helmut? I would like to ship the heaters as soon as possible."

"I silver brazed several hundred and have about a hundred more to go. I am short on brazing rod."

"I'll get it, keep working."

"Make sure the brazing rod is to US Navy specification Mr. Regan. I could use another bottle of acetylene too while you in the supply store."

After lunch, I am back at our welding and brazing bench and I do not see the silver alloy but some brass rods instead.

"That's the wrong material, Mr. Regan! That is not to the navy specification. I have to have the silver alloy. It is also much faster to work with and does a better job."

"The silver rod is very dear; this brass will do. We also have to substitute the acetylene/oxygen with natural gas and air. We have to save money!"

“Mr. Regan, you can’t do that! This brass and natural gas combination does not work! Normally the silver alloy will creep into all joints and will seal, because it is very liquid at the higher temperature. Brass and natural gas will make a poor joint; I cannot guarantee the brazing joint will seal. Remember these immersion heaters are for the navy.”

“Go ahead, Helmut, I’ll take care of the responsibility stuff.”

I don’t think Regan has a clue what he is doing. What do I tell the US Navy inspector when he makes his weekly call? I am not going to lie about what I think of the quality of our products. I would not want this stuff on my ship. One can tell it is not to print by looking at it! Mr. Regan comes into the shop. “Helmut, we are lucky. The two prototype heaters I took to Goodyear two weeks ago have not come back and I heard no complaints. They must be happy with them. Get production started! Let’s crank ‘em out! A truckload of stainless steel tubing will arrive this afternoon, as will the refractory and ceramic parts. Let’s go!”

I feel for this guy. How can he assume the heaters passed, maybe they are on the shelf in receiving inspection and have never been tested. In Germany, more than once did I have to look for items that were shipped to us. I found it buried under a pile of packages in receiving, and we were a lot smaller than Goodyear is.

I now have second thoughts about finishing the heaters with the wrong brazing alloy.

I think Regan is the type of guy who would not admit that it was his order to use the substitute material should things go wrong. I should have argued about it. I wish I would be more fluent in English.

I am cutting stainless steel tubing to five-foot length pieces like crazy. When I look at this mountain of cut-up stainless steel pieces, I shiver. It must be a fortune.

I am getting nervous.

Mr. Regan comes into the shop. Tom would say, ‘What is it this time’?

The mailman comes through the open door too and drops off a long parcel. One of the girls takes care of the mail and she opens it. “Look at this!” She yells.

Mr. Regan and I walk over to the mail bench and look at the open package. Mr. Regan’s hands shake. Nobody can say for sure that these are our prototype heaters, burned to a crisp. They are blue and gray discolored, warped, and bent all out of shape. Several big blisters are at a

number of places over the entire length. Mr. Regan is holding on to the bench to stop his hands from shaking. My inner voice reminds me, *Get out of here!* I disappear in the tool room; I do not want to see this fool any longer, and the burned-out heaters and the large pile of expensive cut-up stainless steel tubing. “Why didn’t he let me run the shop? I would have loved it! For God’s sake!”

It is lunchtime and I am on my way out to my car, passing Mr. Regan. “Helmut, I lay you off for rest of the day, see you tomorrow.”

“No, Mr. Regan. I quit! Now! You owe me thirty-seven dollars and fifty cents.

I stop in front of him and hold my hand open, while he still has any money. He pulls out his wallet and pays me.

“Sorry Mr. Regan! Good-bye!”

Is it Time to go farther West?

“There are no good jobs for me here, Onkel Klaus, but I saw hundreds of jobs for engineers in the Los Angeles Times. I could apply for many of them. I am a specialist in iron powder clutches, which Lear, Incorporated in Santa Monica also makes. Mr. Lear was in Germany and I met him there. I will try Lear first.”

“Helmut, you are not ready to drive to Los Angeles. You have only four weeks experience of driving a car. The road is bad and narrow. It will take at least eight hours to get there. The traffic is heavy in Los Angeles. You better stay in Phoenix, at least for a while longer,” Onkel Klaus worries about us. Tante Lotte puts her hand on my arm. “Listen to Onkel Klaus, Helmut!”

“I will take the Greyhound Bus. I found out it leaves at ten at night and is in Los Angeles at six in the morning. I will find out in LA which bus goes to Santa Monica. I have a map and I know where Lear is, it doesn't look difficult.”

“Tante Lotte, we have to try California,” Magdalene adds, “Helmut thinks he has a good chance in Los Angeles. He has given up on Phoenix.

“We would prefer to stay here with all of you and the Edelweiss Club and our friends but we have to have good jobs.”

“I will leave Wednesday evening and will call you later to let you know what happened. Don't worry about me.”

“We wish you luck Helmut, have a good trip.” Tante Lotte concludes.

I am on the bus to Los Angeles. It is a long and boring ride through the night, like the bus trip from New York to Phoenix.

I try to sleep but I can't. The thought of what I will find in Los Angeles is on my mind. I am only prepared to go to Lear, I am confident it will work out.

The driver announced a while ago that we crossed the Colorado River and now he pulls over for a break. It is a tiny restaurant. Except for the restaurant and a streetlight, it is dark all around.

Most of the other passengers are students or workers, dressed in jeans and casual clothing. I look different, double-breasted suit, fancy shirt, tie, and polished shoes and I carry a brief case instead of a bag.

I am taking some of my engineering drawings and calculations along for my job search. I plan to let it speak for itself, and then I do not have to struggle along in English.

My companion travelers want to know if I am on my way to a studio in Hollywood.

“No, I am looking for an engineering job in LA.”

“Join the club.” They invite me to come over to their table to join the group of students. They want to know where I studied, and where I am coming from. I get good advice of what and what not to do in America. The break is over in no time. “Good luck to you!” I hear from all of them.

We are back on the bus and continue to roll through the night.

The sky is getting lighter in the east, and I smell gasoline and diesel fuel and my eyes start to burn. We must be close to Los Angeles.

The bus pulls into the Greyhound Bus Terminal in Los Angeles at six in the morning. At the information desk, I am told which bus to take to

Santa Monica. In Hollywood, I transfer to the Santa Monica Municipal Bus line. "Ask the driver when to transfer!"

With the map on my knees I follow where the bus goes. It continues west most the time. I am early and decide to get off at the Santa Monica Pier. I remember the Frenchman Andre on the ship to New York telling me, "Go West in America, that's where the future is!"

That is what I have been doing the last three years since I skied out of East Germany. Six months ago, I left West Germany and Europe altogether to cross the Atlantic to go west to America. Then I crossed America to go to the West Coast. Here I am at the most western edge of America. The Pacific Ocean is in front of me; a few more steps and I will get my feet wet. The cool ocean air feels good again; it reminds me of the good days on board a ship. This thing about the good future in the west better start now, I am at the ocean, the very West!

Whom am I going to meet at Lear?

But should I get the job I will come back here to find a place to stay, right at the Pacific Ocean, next to the Santa Monica pier. That fresh air wakes up my spirit. What a place to take pictures to send home to Mama and Papa. Mama and Papa in Berlin could show the pictures to relatives and neighbors and explain to them where I am in the world.

Its nine o'clock and time for me to take the next bus to Lear, Incorporated on Bundy Drive. I have to walk a few more blocks from the bus stop to Lear, when a lady in a fancy car drives over to the curb, lowers the window and calls, "Do you want a ride?" It is a pleasant friendly voice.

I bend down to take a look. She is not much older than I am, well dressed and has a friendly smile. She stopped for me, a lonely pedestrian. That is a good sign, I think. I hop in, why should I not? It goes uphill and it is a long way along an airport. She tells me she is looking for a salesman for a vitamin company. "Are you interested?" She hands me some sales literature with a clover leaf. "It is all natural! You can make lots of money!"

"No, I better keep doing what I am good at, but you can wish me luck for the next hour at Lear!"

"Over there is Lear, Incorporated, you arrived! I do wish you luck young man!"

I walk into the lobby of Lear, Incorporated and look around. I am the only visitor. What a difference to the places in Phoenix. Leather chairs, fancy wooden polished tables, nothing but the best. I remember Mr.

Lear's elegant suit when I saw him in Germany. Wherever I look, there are nice things all around.

"Can I help you?" a young blond receptionist brings me back to what I came here for. She looks good too, well-dressed, hair done well. She is cute. This is a classy place!

Today is my lucky day!

I put on my best smile, "My name is Helmut Standke, and I am looking for a job as an engineer. I got your address when I met Mr. Lear in Germany." I show her Mr. Lear's card.

Apparently, I passed muster and she smiles and tells me, "Have a seat Mr. Standke. Let me make a phone call."

Aircraft pictures are on the walls, many with Mr. Lear. If I can get a job here, that will be a good start.

"Mr. Standke. Mr. Bill Carr will be with you shortly to talk to you, good luck!"

"Thank you very much," and I smile back.

It does not take long when a heavy set man with a goatee and a Hawaiian shirt enters the lobby and comes over to me. I am not sure what to make of it; I have seen people dressed like this only at Mardi Gras.

"Mr. Standke? I heard you met our boss in Germany?"

"Yes, we met when he was looking at my design of large iron powder clutches."

"Let's sit down at one of the tables over there," Mr. Carr invites me.

"I have drawings and an analysis of some of the clutches with me," and I unfold a drawing.

"Very interesting," Mr. Carr remarks looking at the drawing. "They are big alright. However, we do not make clutches in Santa Monica; our division in Ohio makes this type of clutches. But I am very familiar with them.

"My group works on advanced projects that Bill Lear dreams up. I like that you worked many years in the shop," Mr. Carr comments reading my resume. "I have two Swiss engineers who work on a gas turbine for an auxiliary power unit. Right now we start to develop some of those units with gasoline engines, does that interest you?"

"Yes, very much Mr. Carr."

"Call me Bill, Helmut. Today is Thursday, can you start on Monday?"

"Yes sir! I will be here Monday morning, Mr. Carr. I call my wife in Phoenix to start packing and we will drive out here, no problem."

“Look across the road, my group is in the back of that aircraft hangar over there. See me first when you come in on Monday.

I have to start you out somewhat low to get you in, Helmut. Don't worry! I'll get raises for you frequently. It will be three hundred fifty when you start. Is that okay?”

“Yes Mr. Carr! Thank you very much!”

“Okay Helmut, see you Monday morning!” We seal it with a handshake. What a big and powerful hand he has. Another good sign.

I did it! I did it! I wish I could yell it out. Now I have to find a place to stay before I can call Magdalene. I have to find a place near the beach.

Getting back to the beach by bus takes only a few minutes, I start to find my way around here. There are hundreds of small motels and hotels getting ready for the season. It is in the middle of April 1955 and the price will go up in a few weeks.

For the last two hours, I checked out more than ten motels or small hotels. All charge between seventy to eighty dollars a week. It does not look good. I do not make that kind of money now, and I am not a tourist.

I am hungry too; my last meal was at two o'clock in the morning in the desert, and I did not eat much.

Near the pier are many men milling around, looking like circus wrestlers. I get myself a couple hot dogs at a nearby place. In my double-breasted suit, with a tie and a briefcase I look funny between these almost naked deep tanned muscle men. They look at me like a curiosity, but don't really care.

I am getting nervous. It is three o'clock and I still have not called Magdalene.

While eating my hotdogs I see a red brick hotel at the end of the block that has a *Vacancy* sign out. I walk over to find out. Sixty-two dollars per month reads the sign in the window. That is unbelievable. I hope it is not a mistake.

“Yes, it is correct, plus fifty cents cleaning fee,” I am told.

This is it! Everything is in place! “I'll sign up. I have to move from Phoenix and will be here Saturday or Sunday.”

“That's okay, payment is in advance. You can pay me now.” Everything is settled; now I can call Magdalene.

“Helmut? How are you doing Helmut? How did it go?”

“Magdalene, I got the job, for three hundred fifty dollars, that's a lot more than I made in Phoenix. I got a motel for sixty-two dollars per month, right at the beach. But I have to be at work on Monday morning.”

“Then I have to quit right now, it’s almost quitting time. They will not like it when I don’t give them any notice, normal is two weeks at the bank.”

“I guess they will not like it, but it can’t be helped. Start packing. I will be back tomorrow morning and we can pack all day. We will drive to LA on Saturday morning. Then we have all day and an extra day should we need it. Tell Tante Lotte and Onkel Klaus too.”

“I will quit right now, I hope it will be okay, it’s almost quitting time.”

“Yes, and I have to hurry back to the Greyhound bus station; I am still here at the beach, *es ist kaum zu glauben* (it is hard to believe). You will love it, honey. I miss you! Bye!”

California, Here We Come!

To sleep last night on the bus back to Phoenix was impossible. The day at Lear and in Santa Monica was on my mind all night. What will our future be in California? I feel very confident that we are doing the right thing.

Is Magdalene awake? It is not even seven o'clock yet. I have to tell her all the details; we did not have much time on the phone yesterday because she had to quit her job in a hurry. Did everything go well? When I open the apartment door, I can hear that Magdalene is in the kitchen.

"Honey, it looks good. We have to go to California. I have the best impressions. Did you manage to quit your job yesterday?"

"Yes, I did. The bank did not like it, but they understood. This happens here all the time. I even got paid for two weeks vacation I had coming."

"That'll keep us going until I get my first pay check. Lear seems to be a good place to work. You should see the lobby; everything is first class. My boss offered me three hundred fifty dollars per month and called it a low starting salary. That is a lot more than I made here. He promised me frequent raises. It is a small group but they work on Mr. Lear's pet projects.

"I found a motel right at the ocean, you walk across the street and you are at the beach. You can look at the ocean from our window. You have to see it to believe it!"

"I am so happy for you. To work for a good place is much more fun."

"Yes, to go west is the right thing to do."

"Is that motel a decent place, Helmut?"

"Yes, it is a good size motel. They also charge less per month than others in the neighborhood charge per week do. I looked at many of them. It has a large combo-living room with a picture window to the ocean, with a double bed that you can pull out of the wall, a small kitchen and a bath. The kitchen is tiny, but that doesn't matter."

“Helmut, I can’t wait, we will be so happy there. I wish it wouldn’t be such a long way to travel to Santa Monica.”

“Don’t worry. We traveled over the Alps and through Italy on a motorcycle, now we have a car. We’ll get there, somehow.”

We have been packing for two hours now and have so much more to go.

“I don’t know how we can fit all this stuff into our car, we really need a truck. Forget the boxes, Honey; we have to pack it right into the car, into every corner. Small things can go under the seats.”

Magdalene and I brought all this china, crystal, flatware, down bedding, slide projector and screen, tools and other stuff over from Germany, now we have to fit it into our Chevrolet somehow to get it to California. We could leave some of it at Onkel Klaus’s place, but we try hard to take it all along.

“Try to keep the rear window clear, Honey.”

The car looks like a boat, the hood is high and the trunk is low. I don’t think there is room for another hand-full. I sit behind the wheel to check if I can look over the hood to see where I am going.

"It'll be all right!"

It is early on Saturday and Magdalene and I take off. I hope it will not get too hot in the desert. It can get hot, even in mid April, I am told.

On the way to highway 60, we stop at Onkel Klaus and Tante Lotte’s place to say *Aufwiedersehen*.

“I can’t stop worrying about you,” Onkel Klaus remarks, “You drove a car only for a month, Helmut. Call us right away when you get there.”

“We’ll do! Wish us luck Tante Lotte; we will call when we have arrived.” I wave as we pull away.

The car is loaded beyond capacity; it takes forever to pick up speed. Something has shifted in the back and my rear view is now blocked. I have to stretch my neck to look over the hood.

We will get there! Come what may!

Highway 60 to Los Angeles is a two-lane highway and to pass one of the many trailer trucks with my overloaded car is a struggle. It takes forever. I cannot pass at all when the road goes uphill. But I am not in a hurry! We have all day!



A new highway is in the planning stage and maintenance on the 60 has been neglected. Some sections have become a gravel road. Small narrow bridges cross over a great number of flood channels in the desert. Meeting a big truck on these narrow bridges really shakes the car, particularly when the tail end of the truck passes you.

“You have been driving for hours now, Helmut, how are you holding up, getting tired?”



“No, I am fine. I wonder where all these big hay trucks are coming from and where does all that hay go? They go sixty miles per hour. Now we are stuck behind another one.

“I think I can pass it now.”

I move over to the oncoming traffic lane and flash my bright light. I wait for the truck to blink his light; the signal that there are no oncoming cars ahead and it is safe to pass.

Now I can go. I am about halfway past, when a car comes up and out of those flood channels towards me. The car was hidden from view up to now. I don't have the power to pass in time and there is no time now to fall back behind the truck.

It will be a tight fit for three cars on that two-lane and narrow road. At least the truck and the car drivers move to their edges of the road.

I stay close to the truck and squeeze between the giant front and rear wheels of the truck on my right as far as I can. My right fender is within inches behind the truck's front wheel. *Steady as she goes.*

Whoosh! It is over. Boy that was close!

I can come out now. I floor it, if one can call it that, and continue passing, waving to the truck driver on my right and high above me.

I reach over and squeeze Magdalene's hand.

“You look a little pale, Honey. Why don't we have a break and rest for a while at the next coffee shop in Quartzsite in front of us before we cross the border to California?”

Quartzsite is not much more than a gas station and a coffee shop. We have lunch here and relax.

Magdalene is trying to relax; she looks at all the cars and trucks going west. "I wonder how I will find a job in Santa Monica. Maybe I can find one as an accountant again.”

“Don't worry, Honey. First, have your vacation. Enjoy the ocean across the street from our apartment.

“It is noon, we better start rolling again.” I fill up with gas and water for the radiator at the station across the street and we continue to go west.

Welcome to California!

“California, here we come!” Magdalene and I are singing.

“It is about half-way. Only another four hours or so, Honey.”

Hours have gone by. We pass through another lonely place in the desert, a gas station and a coffee shop only, and the long straight road is many miles in front of us again.

“It sure is a big country, isn’t it? I am glad we are not on a motor cycle now. It is getting pretty hot, and my coolant water temperature is getting up too.

“But we did have fun on the motorcycle. Remember, it took only a few hours to go from Venice to Florence in Italy, and we stopped and looked at Padua and Bologna and other places along the way.”

“Pomona 20 miles it says on the sign. Take a look at the map Honey, and see what freeway we should take to Santa Monica when we come to LA.”

“I can’t find a freeway, Helmut.”

“Let me pull over, that can’t be!”

“Either the map is wrong or there really is no freeway. In 1955 and no freeway or Autobahn through Los Angeles? Yes! I think you are right!

“Then let’s do that, I continue to go west until we cross Vermont or the next one, Western. Then we go north to Pico and west again to Ocean Avenue at the beach. Then we are within one block from our new home, Vicente Terrace. Follow the map as we go, Honey.”

There has to be a better way to cross Los Angeles. They have a traffic light on every block.

I am on my way through Los Angeles for over an hour now. It is a large city, but low density. Almost all houses are single story buildings.

“Honey, look straight ahead, I can see the ocean? Ten more minutes!”

We made it!

I even parked in backwards and uphill between two cars on Vicente Terrace in front of our hotel, and I made it on the first try. “We did well, Helmut, it is only four o’clock, we did it in nine hours. We promised to call when we arrive. I better call now.”

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Magdalene calls Onkel Klaus and Tante Lotte and before she gets a word in I can hear it, "Where are you, what happened?"

"Nothing happened, we are in our apartment, and I can see the ocean through the window," Magdalene calms Onkel Klaus down. "We had a good trip. We are as far to the West as it goes."

"Thank goodness," I hear Onkel Klaus. "We worried all day. We wish you luck. It was nice to have you here and we are going to miss you. We will come and see you as soon as you are settled. Good luck again."

"Thank you Onkel Klaus, maybe we come over to Phoenix at Easter, let's see," I hear Magdalene, "and thank you again for all you did for us."

Santa Monica

"We can take a walk along the beach in front of our hotel, Helmut. After driving all day and unpacking for hours it will do us some good."



“Are you ready for your job on Monday?”

“Oh yes! In our group are two Swiss engineers. I am sure I can ask them in German if I have too.”

“Doesn't it feel good to walk barefoot along the edge of the water? Maybe we can go for a swim tomorrow, what do you think Helmut?”

“I'd like to, let's see if anybody swims tomorrow, it is still cool in mid April.”

I slept like a log. We kept the window open, had fresh air and heard the ocean hum and whisper all night long. I have not slept that well for a long time. The air in Phoenix got hot in April and was very dry, too dry for me.

“Some people are on the beach, a few are also swimming. Let's go down there after breakfast,” I tell Magdalene looking down to the beach from our window. The surf is high today, but I love to swim again.

Where is Magdalene? Where is she? She was right behind me.

“Helmut, Helmut!”

I see her head for a moment above the water. She is struggling. What happened? With a wave pushing it takes me only two strokes and I can grab her and hold her above the water to give her a chance to catch her breath. I think the undertow scared her and then she panicked. I better stay close and keep an eye on my girl.

The drive to work is easy and it is only a few miles to get to my job south of Santa Monica Airport.

Mr. Carr introduces me to Emil and Max, the two Swiss engineers, to Jim the local engineer and to Charles from Canada. All are about my age and seem very nice. Jim and Charles will work with me on the motor-generator set. “Helmut, here is our hand-built unit. Make a set of drawings for us and then we have to find vendors for the parts,” my boss Bill Carr explains. “Doctor-up the parts to make them easy to manufacture and to keep the cost in line.”

Max is explaining to me the differences between the European and the American drawing systems. “All dimensions are in decimal inch and the views are differently arranged. It actually makes more sense. Other than that it isn't much different than what we have done in Europe.” I am glad to hear that. I never understood how anyone could make precision parts using fractions.

“How is your job?” Magdalene wants to know after the first week. “It’s fun in a way. I finished all the drawings in a week and Bill Carr was happy about that. Now we look for vendors to make the parts. Mr. Carr makes me talk to the suppliers. I was a little hesitant at first, but it is getting easier and easier.

The vendors like the idea that I encourage them to suggest ways to save money. I don’t mind changing the drawings to incorporate suggestions. It doesn’t take me long, and it makes Bill happy.

At quitting time Bill is always holding lectures for fifteen more minutes about life in America. I like most of what he says; some of it I take with a grain of salt. I also think he does not want us to run out at five o’clock sharp.

“Today I have I personal thing,” Bill announces at quitting time. “My wife Betty and I have decided to have a little party in a week. I have been telling her about all of you and she would like to get to know you. You and your wives are invited to come to our home on Fourth Street on Saturday afternoon and evening, keep that date open.”

“Thank you Bill,” I feel surprised and honored.

“What do I have to wear, Helmut?” Magdalene wants to know, as we get ready to go to Bill and Betty Carr.

“Don’t make it too fancy, Honey. Bill likes it casual. I don’t know about Betty, though.” We can walk over there; it is only a few blocks.

The neighborhood of Bill’s place is nice, lawns are manicured and I like the landscaping. All front yards are trimmed and green. Magdalene and I consider buying a house and we have learned to look for such things. Bill’s neighborhood has many Spanish styled houses; we don’t care for those, but the neighborhood is nice.

We are first and Betty invites us in.

“It smells so good,” Magdalene observes.

“That’s a roast,” Betty explains, “Are you familiar with that?”

“Yes, I am, I make roasts and porterhouse steaks frequently, Helmut likes it a lot.”

I see Magdalene and Betty disappear in the kitchen to discuss cooking. Betty seems a very nice lady, but I think Bill has his hands full the way she talks. She tells you what she is after, in a nice way.

Max, Emil and Jim have arrived too. Bill shows us all the projects in the house he is working on before we sit down for dinner.

Betty is the entertainer of the evening. She is good at telling stories of the past, especially how she met and caught Bill. It is hilarious, how

she asserted herself to let Bill know who is going to be the boss in the house.

Bill is a good sport and laughs about it. It is a wonderful evening.

Lear, Incorporated has a Monthly Report published about new crewmembers, job openings and work-in-progress. Pictures of our group are in there too with our power units.

In the 'Job openings' an ad *Looking for an Accountant* catches my eye. Magdalene is working as a bookkeeper at a bank in Santa Monica for now, I wonder if she could apply.

She updated her accounting knowledge with books from the Santa Monica City library to get familiar with accounting terms in English. I am sure she would love it. We could drive to work together then.

"Bill, what do you think, could Magdalene apply for this accounting job even when I already work at Lear?"

"It's a different division, Helmut. Bring her in at lunchtime. I'll talk to the accounting guys."

I call Magdalene right now. "Honey, Lear has a job opening for an accountant. Can I pick you up at the bank at lunch time to bring you here to apply for the job?"

"That would be wonderful, Helmut. I'll wait for you in front of the bank at twelve." Two hours later and Magdalene is still in the accounting department. She has not called me yet to take her back to the bank. I start to wonder. Then the phone rings and Bill answers it. "It's for you, Helmut, Magdalene got the job, I can tell!"

"Helmut, I got the job! Can you take me back to the bank?"

On the way back to the bank she tells me, "The new job at Lear will pay double what I make at the bank."

Things are great in the West! I am three months and Magdalene is four weeks at Lear today. The job is nice and I look forward to go to work in the morning. The fellows I work with are so friendly and helpful, much like my friends I worked with in Germany. They are the same type of people. In our group, Bill Carr is like our dad to us. He is the ideal man to work for when you are new in America. He is a self-made man but intimidated when we engineers do something analytical. Who is perfect?

"Helmut!" Bill Carr is looking at me with an envelope in his hand. It is probably another quote for a part. We get several quotes a day. Bill shows me how to deal with vendors.

”You have been with us for three months and I think you earned a raise; how about if I make it four hundred a month?”

“That would be wonderful, Bill. Magdalene will be jumping up and down when I tell her.”

“How does she like her job in our accounting, Helmut?”

“She loves it. Everybody is so nice and helpful. The job is not much different from what she did in Germany. She is the only girl in the office and she is the princess. No wonder she likes her job.”

Only Looking

Fog covers most of Santa Monica at least until noon, even now in early July. The car is dripping wet in the morning and the chrome plated bumpers start to rust. We are less than one hundred yards from the ocean, no wonder.

Just for the fun of it, Magdalene and I have been looking at houses along the beach in Malibu. We liked the area a lot, but the more we learned about living near the beach, the more we had second thoughts. When the sun shines it is nice at the beach, but many times it’s fogged-in. It also cools off early and can be very cool, too cool to sit in the open in the evening most of the time. In addition, mildew is everywhere.

“Take a look at houses in the valley,” my Swiss friend and co-worker Max tells me. He has lived here for several years now. “Don’t believe what they say about the valley, it’s a little warm in summer, but most of the year it is perfect.”

“Max, are houses cheaper in the San Fernando Valley? We look in the paper and it looks that way.”

“Yes, *viel billiger*, that’s one more reason to look at the valley. How about flying over the valley during lunch hour? Call Magdalene to come along. I will call the airplane rental place next door and we can go. We can take Jim along, he loves to fly, and then it is only five dollars for each of us for an hour.” Max had told me earlier that he was a member of a flying club in Switzerland a few years ago. He flew fighter planes for fun, including the Messerschmitt 109 and the Spitfire.

“In these planes you can go as fast as you have money to pay for the fuel,” Max added with a grin.

Twelve o’clock sharp and the four of us take off at the Santa Monica Airport above our hanger in a four-passenger Cessna. Max is an old hand flying these planes it looks like. What a view all around!

Max turns to me and points down. “Below us are the Santa Monica Mountains and in front of us is the San Fernando Valley. Look how many swimming pools are in the valley; that tells you the story. And notice all the building sites. Look!

“It feels good to see houses under construction. Helmut, compare how they build here versus what is done in Europe. You get much more for your money and construction is so much faster.”

I take Magdalene’s hand, and I can sense that we both agree to look at houses in the valley. We feel ready to buy a house, as soon as we have the money. However, it can’t hurt to look around now.

Max cruises around over the valley one more time and points to the various places like reservoirs, parks and the Van Nuys City Hall.

“Below is the Sepulveda Boulevard, take this road to see the valley. I will follow it now south to go back to the Santa Monica Airport--some people call it Clover Field--and we will be back at work in a few minutes.”

Magdalene and I were impressed with what we saw on our flight over the valley. We were looking forward to take a closer look and we are on our way. Sepulveda Boulevard in the pass is a winding road. One of these days, I have to get a sportier car should we buy a house in the valley, when I would have to go this road every day. The road is almost empty on Sunday and I can make my tires squeal in the turns. This is going to be fun!

“Langsam, langsam, Helmut, wir haben Zeit!”

“Are you ready to buy a house with all our savings, Honey? You are the accountant, how much did you stash away?”

“Eight hundred dollar, as of today.”

“How many houses can you get for eight hundred dollars? I bet the brokers will laugh when we tell him that. Do you remember the broker in Santa Monica? When he heard we only had five hundred dollar he drove us right back to his office and told us to come back when we have more money.”

We come out of a tunnel and are on top of the Santa Monica Mountains. The valley is below us.

“What a view, and it is sunny!” I call out. When we left our apartment, the sun did not shine and it was foggy in Santa Monica.

Flying over the valley a few days ago, I noticed many construction sites.

“Let’s follow the signs for model homes and take a look.”

I park next to several cars and Magdalene and I walk into one of the model homes. I am impressed.

“Look at the kitchen, Helmut. All built-in cabinets, water heater, big double sinks, a big refrigerator and a range. It would be fun to cook here.” All model homes are landscaped. It looks beautiful.

“Are you ready to buy a house?” A salesman comes over and asks us.

“We would like to, but we are not quite ready yet. We are new here.”

“Don’t let that bother you. Almost everybody was new here in this town. We also have many houses only a few years old. All are landscaped and very affordable. I would like to tell you more about all the possibilities and what you should know when you look for a home. Take my card and see me next Saturday when I am in the office. I’ll show you several of these houses, one of them I like very much.

“It is a real nice one and in a very good neighborhood in quiet Sherman Oaks. It is close to Sepulveda Boulevard, nice if you work in Santa Monica.”

I turn the card over to look at his address.

“My name is Dave, are you from Germany? I have several customers from Germany. I’ll take good care of you.”

“How much do those houses cost, just to get an idea Mr. Miller?”

“Figure around \$16,000 to 18,000 but that doesn’t matter too much.

What is important are the monthly payments. Are you professionals, if I may ask?"

"Yes. My wife is an accountant and I am an engineer, and we both work."

"You don't have a problem whatsoever. I can put you in any house you like."

I put the card in my pocket and tell him, "Thank you very much. Let me discuss it with my wife first and I will call you back."

I wonder as we drive back home again, is Miller just a slick salesman or is it worth it to come back to him. "What do you think, Honey? I am not so sure about this guy?"

"Neither am I, but what do we have to lose?"

"That's true. We do not have to sign anything until we are sure. If I talk to my boss Bill Carr, I can get good advice."

"And I can talk to my co-workers in the office, they are all accountants and can look the paper work over too before we sign. They all are so nice and would love to help us. All have gone through this before themselves. They know how things work around here, let's go next Saturday."

When we arrive, we find the real estate office in Sherman Oaks is open and Dave Miller is at his desk.

"Glad to see you, have a seat," he greets us. "I had several people look at the two houses I was mentioning. There is a lot of interest now."

"Let me take you to the two homes, so you get an idea. It's around the corner, right here in Sherman Oaks."

When we stop in front of the first house, Magdalene shakes her head. The neighborhood seems okay but something is not right, it is hard to tell what it is. The color of the home maybe. I do not care for it either.

"No problem, I bet you will like the other home, the one I have been raving about." Miller consoles us.

We enter a clean street; with tall colorful Liquidambar trees and well kept front yards. We stop in front of a nice clean house.

It is a pleasant neighborhood with children playing in the street. That is a good sign.

I have the feeling Miller is watching me.

"If you think the front is nice, you have got to see the backyard," Miller is teasing us.

“I like it” I am telling Magdalene. “The home has been empty for several weeks now—it’s a divorce case—and the former owner is eager to sell and just lowered the price, it is a real bargain now,” Miller continues. “It is a three bedroom home. It has two fire places and is professionally landscaped.”

I wonder what he will say when I tell him we have eight hundred dollars. After Magdalene peeks into all rooms and especially the bath and the kitchen, we see the backyard. Several dozen roses and azaleas are in full bloom and it all looks manicured.

“It looks pretty! What do you think, Honey?”

“I think I could go for it if we had the money.”

“Isn’t it a nice place? Mrs. Standke?”

“Yes, it is. How much does it cost? Too bad we can’t afford it?”

“I am sure you can! Let’s go back to the office and get a piece of paper and a sharp pencil.” We are back in the office in no time. “Make yourself comfortable, would you like some coffee?” Mr. Miller asks as we sit down at his desk.”

“How much does this home cost?” I like to know.

“You could take over the veteran loan maybe,” he mumbles looking at his folder. “Where you in the service Mr. Standke?”

“Yes, I was in the German Navy.”

“That certainly does make you a veteran. Problem is the loan has been paid down a lot and the home has appreciated that would make your second mortgage higher and the payments too high. Lets just refinance it; the difference is only one-half percent. The former owner is willing to give you a second mortgage of four thousand dollars and I can get you a \$10,000 loan for five percent.

“Let’s see. That only leaves you a down payment of two thousand dollars. Is that a problem?”

I have a feeling Mr. Miller is rushing us.

“I guess it is. All we have now is eight hundred dollars.” He finally asks the most important question. I guess it is all over now.

He wipes his hand over his shiny black hair, “Don’t worry, we can put this home in a three-month escrow. We have to finance the two thousand dollars down payment and about the two hundred dollars escrow fee. We are short \$1400. Has your car been paid for?”

“Yes,” I tell him.

“You can borrow against it at the bank. For your Chevy, you should be able to borrow about six hundred dollars. We are now short only

eight hundred dollars. Big deal! Can you save eight hundred dollars in three months?"

"Yes, that should be no problem," I answer and Magdalene nods her head.

"Now to the minor details. As I said, I can get you a \$10,000 five percent first mortgage, it will take a little doing, and you have to qualify. Let me handle it. Do you have assets?"

"We don't own anything, except personal things, we just got here three months ago."

His hand goes over his straight black hair again. "How about if I tell you," and he is scratching his chin and looks at me and Magdalene with a sly smile, "You forgot to mention the one thousand shares of General Motors stock you own. With your combined income of over seven hundred dollars a month, you should be able to make the payments easily. You do not have a problem. Let me talk to the owner of this business. I'll be right back."

"Honey, I wonder if that works out, it's a lot of money," I whisper, in German, Miller does not have to know what we are talking about.

After a few minutes, Miller comes back with a smile, "Congratulations, you will have a lovely home!"

"I have a bad feeling, Mr. Miller. We don't own a thousand shares of General Motors."

"Don't worry, as long as you make your payments—and I have no doubt you will—nobody is ever going to know. Trust me!"

"I like the house very much Mr. Miller," Magdalene adds, "Can you put this in writing so I can take it to the office where I work and let my friends take a look at it?"

"Of course, I'll have it typed in a few minutes. I want you to be comfortable with the formalities."

On the way home to Santa Monica Magdalene hangs on tight to the package of papers. "I think Mr. Miller tried very hard to make it possible for us to finance the house," she breaks the quiet, "Mr. Miller spent all day with us. I think he is okay. I will let my colleagues look at the papers on Monday. They can tell if Miller's Creative Financing Scheme is 'kosher', as they will call it."

"I think so too. As soon as we know, we have to call Miller, before somebody else buys the house."

All day on Monday, I wonder what the accountants in Magdalene's office think of our dealings with the broker. I like the house and I think

we have no problems making the payments. That would be something to write home about! I bought a house and I am only nine months in the country. Wow! **This is the land of opportunity!**

I have to call Magdalene. Maybe I should walk over to the accounting department and talk to her. I hope the financing of the house is okay, I do like the house. Once we move in, maybe then we can think of having a family.

We had the wrong impression of Mr. Miller. He is not a slick salesman. I now think he is doing all he can to help us get the house.

At quitting time, I see Magdalene come to the car for our way home. She is waving the papers high in the air and smiling. That is all I need to know.

I call up Miller as soon as we get home. I take everything back I thought about him. I will start to write letters to Mama, Papa and all my friends in Germany to tell them that I already bought a house in America. Many of my friends have to live with their parents or parents-in-law with no chance of ever getting an apartment, even now, in 1955.





First Wedding Anniversary in our new House

Can Success Become a Problem?

After leaving our lovely home in Sherman Oaks and *racing* through Sepulveda Pass, I drop Magdalene off at Lear, Inc. From there it is only a short trip back to my new job in Santa Monica, to Raymond Atchley, Inc. Ray's office is near the entrance and I hear, "Helmut, we got a *Request for Quote* from Boeing. It looks like my trip back to my Alma Mater is paying off. "We impressed some people from Boeing when they saw and heard about our jet pipe servo valve on display at MIT and learned what it can do. They would like it on the Minuteman intercontinental rocket."

"I'll do my best, Ray. Did you look it over yet?"

"Yes, I did, some. The envelope is very small, and it is quite different from our present valve. Take a look and see what you can do." Ray hired me a year ago after I worked for two years at Lear. Bill Carr, my boss at Lear, got an offer to go to Cape Canaveral, the launch site of most U.S. rockets. It was an offer he could not refuse. Our little department fell apart; Bill was the heart and soul of our group.

I was the seventh employee here, at Atchley, Inc; we are fifty now. The hydraulic servo valves I designed go mostly to test laboratories of aircraft manufacturers. We try to get into flight hardware; this Boeing Minuteman program may be the ticket. For days, I have gone through sheets of paper to try to match the envelope of the specification, trying to use our standard parts as much as possible. After a week of kicking things around, I have some good ideas. I am getting warm; I know that feeling.

To talk to Jack--our VP and my sounding board--is always productive. He is a graduate of Columbia University, served on a US destroyer, similar to one I was on. We are a very good team.

"What do you think, Jack? I got it almost together but I have to cut into the magnets a little. That should not affect performance too much. We can make a quick and dirty test to find out."

"It looks good, Helmut. I am sure it will not make a difference. Forget the test. I like it!

"By the way, I talked to the Link-Temco-Vought people in Fort Worth, Texas; they are the ones who actually do the controls for the Minuteman (intercontinental missile). Boeing is the prime contractor.

They will come out here next week to look us over. We were informed we all need security clearance for the Minuteman program.”

“O boy, I hope I will not be a problem. I am not a citizen yet; it will take another year before I am eligible. To make things worse I worked at a Russian company in Berlin. Actually it was the German General Electric, but who knows how the security people will look at it?”

“Helmut, let’s wait and see, you are the key guy on this program. The Link-Temco-Vought inspectors and engineers have come to look us over. They want to work with us and one of their inspectors is setting up the procedures for our QC (quality control) department. One of their engineers will stay with us for as long as it takes to develop and test our design to their specifications. Frank is about fifty, very casual and in aircraft hydraulic controls for years. He prefers California to Fort Worth. He will stay with us as long as he can.

Mowing the lawn on my front yard on a Saturday morning, my neighbor Roland stops his lawn mower. “Helmut, the FBI talked to me and wanted information about you. Which bank did you rob?”

“The wrong one, they didn’t have any money, Roland. That is good news. They must be working on my security clearance.” It is three weeks now and we have not heard about our security clearance yet. What would happen if I cannot get it? I know what I would do if I were the boss.

We shipped the first valves and the customer seems happy. Frank suggested better test equipment, and Ray jumped and got it. Frank and Jack spend days on it testing the new valves. I take care of the design and the manufacturing, teaching and mingling with the shop people. Softwood (poor performing workers) has to be removed once-in-a-while. I still worry about my security clearance. Nobody has it yet; maybe I worry too much?

“Helmut, look what I got.” It is Jack; he always comes early to read the mail. He hands me a letter from the Air force Department for Security. I have been cleared. I am the first one to receive the security clearance. “Helmut, they didn’t have to look very far, they probably have a dossier two feet high on you,” Jack is kidding.

That security thing was always on my mind. It feels good now. “And,” Jack continues, “The Navy’s submarine intercontinental Polaris missile people want to talk to us too. Our future looks bright!

My Son and I

It is three o'clock in the morning and I am in a hurry. The public phone is three blocks from here. I have to tell the doctor that we think the baby will come any minute.

"Call me again when labor pain comes five minutes apart," he tells me. It takes three tries to get the phone back on the hook. I wish we had a phone, but the Phone Company does not have a free line, maybe in 1958.

Magdalene is nervous too, "What did the doctor say, Helmut?"

"He said to call him when the labor pain comes every five minutes. Try to make it past eleven o'clock, so we would not be charged an extra day in the hospital. Does he understand how critical this is?"

I am wondering if Magdalene has the right doctor.

We worry until ten minutes to eleven and take off in a hurry for St. Joseph's Hospital in Burbank. I do not care if the labor pain comes in ten or five minutes.

But everything goes well. Actually little Randy arrives at eight p.m. when Dr. Schumann comes to the waiting room to tell me to take a look of my son. What a lovely little fellow. He sure has a strong voice.

"Congratulations," Dr. Schumann tells me with a smile. "Your wife had a rough day and is asleep now, but she is fine. You probably can take her home in three days."

On day two Magdalene has rested and feels better. Little Randy looks great. His skin is now pink. What a friendly smile.

"I'll pick you up tomorrow at ten, Honey. I sterilized thirteen baby bottles and I am ready for you."

We are signed out at the hospital and Magdalene, my son Randy and I are going home.

Early in the evening, I think Magdalene should have more rest. "Trust me Honey, go to sleep, I'll take care of Randy". Randy is sound asleep with the cutest smile on his face. Now Magdalene is sound asleep too. Randy and I are in the baby room and I am on watch.

I check little Randy's face; his breath is regular. Still, I do not dare to doze off.

Magdalene and I took Red Cross courses, about what to do when a baby comes into the family.

We learned that babies have a four-hour feeding schedule. I sterilized thirteen bottles, by the book, enough for two days plus a spare.

I must have been asleep. All of a sudden, I hear the baby cry. Why does he cry?

His diapers are okay and it is only three hours since Magdalene fed him last. His cute little face is red now; the little smile is gone. He sure has a strong voice. I hope he does not wake up Magdalene.

Who says babies have a four-hour feeding schedule? Not all people are alike. Maybe my son is a three-hour kid.

No problem, I have plenty of formula.

My son is hungry; boy, does he take care of that bottle. He must have been starving. I am glad I did not listen to the doctor.

All of a sudden, he falls asleep on me. He only took half the bottle. Actually that makes sense, for a three-hour schedule he would not need as much. To make sure he does not get sore on one cheek I turn him around in his bed and roll him over so he is facing me again. He is now with his other cheek on the pillow.

That little character! He just lifted his head up and turns back on his favorite cheek. He is now facing the wall and I cannot see his face. I did not know small babies could lift their heads and turn to the other side.

What is he crying now for? He is dry and it is only two hours after his feeding.

What is going on here, is he now on a two-hour schedule? I give up outguessing my little boy. I have enough bottles to make it through the night, I think. Whatever his schedule is, I do not have a clue.

Magdalene's sister Hildegard will be here shortly, she was a Certified Baby-Nurse in Germany, she would know how to handle babies on a one-hour schedule. I just fed him the last bottle. I hope Hildegard comes soon.

Hildegard laughs when I tell her what happened.

"Helmut, you better stay out of the baby business. It will take me all day to get him back on a four-hour schedule."



Randy's Baptism
Hildegard, Onkel Klaus, Helmut, Magdalene

Gary, Another healthy Boy!

We are lucky; we have another healthy boy, Gary. Our family is growing fast.



Gary 1 Month and Randy 14 Months old

Our parents write, when will be able to see the grand children?
When can we bring them over to Germany? These days it is less than a
day to make the trip!

A Long Vacation?

Magdalene is in the door with Gary on her arm, our second boy.

"Sepulveda Pass was terrible today; all two lanes were stop-and-go because of a wild-fire. Traffic is never good, but today it was bad. Let me hold Gary, that little cuddle. What's new, Honey?"

"We got a letter from your Mother and your Dad, they have a good question."

"What is it? Come on Randy, of course I take you too. Why don't you read it to me Honey, I got my arms full of boys."

"Your parents wonder when they will get a chance to see their grandchildren? Your dad writes, now that he is retired from the fire department, your mother and dad can get permission to travel from East Berlin to the West Germany. My parents invited them to stay with them while we are in West Germany. Wouldn't it be great to see them all? It is now five years that we are in America. I would like to see everybody and show them pictures and our movies of what we have accomplished and what California looks like. You said too that you would like to see your parents and show your friends and cousins our slides and movies from California."

But it is a lot of money to fly, over nine hundred dollars per person round trip, the children under two would be free.

I could buy a Volkswagen with delivery in Germany for eleven hundred sixty dollars, and ship it over here and sell it for eighteen hundred. We would have a car in Germany and sell it at a profit.

Magdalene and I have gone over this subject before. The real problem is that I cannot get away from work for four weeks or even more, maybe. Many of our recently hired workers need a fair amount of supervision. Most parts of our valves are high precision, way beyond what a normal machinist is accustomed to do. Immigrants are willing to learn, the natives think they know it all. I have to watch both.

It is a constant battle. Native machinists call the tiny jet orifice -- a very critical part--a non-producible part. They rattle my cage.

The problem was resolved when I hired Harry, a new immigrant from China. He catches on in no time. "*How many you want?*" is his

typical way of telling me that he has no trouble producing the jets. He is grinning from ear to ear.

I have to talk to Jack, our VP, about my vacation, he understands. In general, the Company is running well now and we make money. All servo valves are my design and that is all we are selling. We have about one hundred fifty employees—after three years that I am with the company -- and only Ray, the owner, and Jack and I are overhead. Jack could probably keep an eye on the shop too; we work together all the time. Jack is VP Engineering, I am Chief Engineer, but we have a terrific relationship. I have to talk to him.

“Honey, I will talk to Jack on Monday. You know him. He knows how to bamboozle Ray. I know Ray pretty well, but Jack knows him better. They have been together a long time.

“It sure would be fun to see our parents and friends in Germany!” Seven years ago I saw my parents the last time. I wonder how they are now. I know Mama will take little Gary and hold him for the time we will be in Germany.

“Honey, I just got a better idea! I will go to work tomorrow on a Saturday. I think Ray and Jack will be there too. On Saturdays, everything is casual. Ray always takes Jack and me out for lunch and a Miller High Life, his favorite beer. That will be a good time to ask for a leave-of-absence. Wish me luck!”

On Saturdays, our pizza restaurant is not a crowded place. As usual, we sit around for a pizza and our beer. Today we also have the shop supervisor with us who sometimes comes in on Saturday.

“Cheers Ray! Magdalene and I are now five years in the States, and we think of a trip to Germany to see our parents. Do you think you would not miss me too much if I went for an additional four weeks of unpaid vacation? We would appreciate it very much.”

“Helmut, I’ll miss you, but I will certainly approve. Why don’t you hire an engineer to help you? If he works out, fine, if not, let him go when you come back.” “I can keep an eye on things too,” Jack adds, “Have a good time. When are you planning to go?”

“I think we can get a flight in June and I will be back in mid July, something like that.” “Say hello to Magdalene and tell her to enjoy the trip, Helmut,” Ray adds.”

Vacation in Germany

Greenland disappears below us and in another eight hours, we should arrive in Copenhagen.

"Honey, maybe we should have taken the new Boeing Jet, it is so much faster, it flies at thirty thousand feet and the cabin is pressurized. Little Randy seems to have ear troubles too, like several passengers. He hasn't slept at all."

"Remember, Helmut, the airlines charge three times more for jet-flights."

"Yes, I know." I feel sorry for little Randy, our twenty months old. He cries, is feeling his ears all the time and seems to be in a lot of pain. At least Gary sleeps well in the baby crib at the bulkhead in front of us. He is the happiest child on board; he sleeps and smiles and sleeps some more.

We left Los Angeles ten hours ago, refueled first in Winnipeg, Canada and now again in Greenland. The last five hours we saw a never-ending world of ice, nine thousand feet below. If we have to go down here we do not have a chance, we will disappear forever.

"Watch the mosquitoes, Honey." A bunch of mosquitoes managed to come on board in Greenland and a stewardess is hunting them down with a Flit sprayer. That Danish Blond with a short skirt looks cute when she stands on the seat and sprays the bugs on the ceiling.

The crew is trying hard to make us comfortable. Little Gary gets a warm formula and likes it and they worry about Randy. We gave him half a sleeping pill, which was a big mistake. He got drowsy all right but could not sleep and now he is miserable.

It is dark again outside and only a couple blinking lights on the wings interrupt the darkness. The light on the wing is reflected by the propeller and a flickering reflection lights up our cabin. The left inboard engine propeller tip is within a few inches of my face.

These planes--a four-engine DC 7C-- are the last of their breed and will soon be replaced by jets, I am sure.

How old is this thing? Has that propeller been checked for cracks lately? I remember a picture of a propeller blade, which sliced through and penetrated the fuselage.

But SAS has a good maintenance record; I hope they did not forget the propeller. I will never sit next to a propeller again.

Mama and Papa are always on my mind. I wonder whether Papa got the permit to come to the west in time. I hope they did not get sick at the last moment and could not come. Mama and Papa wanted to see the children so much. We kept them up to date with photos, but pictures are no substitute.

I must have dozed off; I missed when the horizon in front of us started to get lighter. "Where are we, Honey?" I try to find out where we are.

"I think this is the coast of Ireland, the worst is over."

Eighteen hours in this noisy and rattling contraption is a long time. However, I should not complain. When I came to America five years ago, it took six days by ship to cross the ocean in November, a bad time on the Atlantic.

We are coming in for a landing in Copenhagen, a beautiful sight this early in the morning. Golden church domes, lots of lakes and green parks. I remember this clean beautiful city when I was here in 1945 in WW2.

It is now fourteen years ago when I was here last as a German sailor. I try to find the bronze statue of the Mermaid in the harbor. We were at the pier next to her. On our way to town, many of us sailors stopped and looked her over. We sailed home from here and back to Germany when the war was finally over.

After twenty hours of bouncing and rattles, there is an announcement. "We are an hour late and some of our passengers will have missed their connecting flights, sorry about that," the captain is telling us. "We reserved a room in a hotel for you. The flight to Düsseldorf will leave at two in the afternoon. Rest up and enjoy Copenhagen."

We appreciate the break, but we are dead tired and our relatives in Düsseldorf will have a six hour wait because of it.

It is a nice hotel but I could not sleep much. At one o'clock, the phone rings and we are told a taxi will pick us up in thirty minutes and take us to the airport. It is hard to wake up Randy. He was in pain and agony the entire flight and did not sleep a wink. He is so tired.

The taxi is at the airport in minutes. The plane near the gate is fairly small but elegant in comparison to the monstrous DC7C, only two little jet engines near the tail.

A picture on board tells us this is the Caravelle-- a new two-engine French jet--which will take us and about eighty other passengers to Düsseldorf in Germany.

The take-off is very smooth and over in seconds.

“Wow! *Viva la difference!* This is the way to fly!” I tell Magdalene. It takes a few minutes to be at altitude, high above the water I used to cruise on my destroyer. Boats of all kinds move along the busy Danish coast. It all looks prosperous in peacetime.

“Look down there Honey, that’s about the point where my destroyer turned north again when we were in Copenhagen.

After a snack, I wonder which paper I want to read to find out what is going on in Germany these days, when the plane is coming in for the landing. It all is so playful, so effortless.

It took forty-five minutes from Copenhagen to Düsseldorf. Twenty years ago, it took me two days, when I came for vacation from up north and had a stopover in Copenhagen. I had to go by ferries and by trains.

What a lousy time that was, to wait for a train on a Copenhagen train platform at minus five degrees F, from five in the morning to eight o’clock when the train finally came.

Today, in June, it is sunny and I get a good look at Düsseldorf during the descent. Many areas of destruction from allied bombing are still visible, but most of the city has been rebuilt, the parks are green again and the airport is new.

We arrived. I have Randy on my arm and Magdalene has Gary, and while we are just about to climb down to the tarmac we see Magdalene’s parents, and Aunt and Uncle stand at the edge of the airfield, waving wildly with both arms to greet us.

Magdalene hands Gary over to her mother. She has both hands full to hang on to this wiggling precious bundle. “We had to come with two cars, you probably have lots of luggage,” Magdalene’s father explains. “And there is more good news, Helmut. Your parents managed to get a Travel-to-West Permit and will be here in a week.”

“That is good news! I haven’t seen them for seven years and we have so much to talk about. And we want to show them their grandchildren.”

Good Times in Germany

The gravel crunches on the driveway and the two cars stop in front of the house Magdalene grew up.

"Look at all the flowers your mother planted again. Everything looks as we left it five years ago Honey."

"It feels like home!" Emmi and her daughter Brigitte come out of the house to greet us too.

"Emmi, Emmi," Magdalene runs to her sister, they hug each other and cry and laugh for minutes.

Magdalene's mother steps out of the other car and looks at Randy and Gary. "Magdalene, you better put the children to bed; it is all prepared for them." My mother-in-law has everything organized, as always. Everybody wants to see the children and everybody admires their healthy California tan. Right now, they are very tired.

Magdalene and I talk for hours about our life in America.

"Wait when I show you the movies," I promise. "I have hours of movies and slides to show you where and how we live."

"Let us know when, we love to see them," I hear from everybody.

With many visits to the doctor and Magdalene's and Emmi's effort and lots of love Gary and Randy are slowly getting over their infections.

"I think I will drive over to the EMG," I mention to Magdalene, "I want to say hello to my former colleagues in the Engineering Department."

The EMG is the company Magdalene and I worked for, and where we met seven years ago.

I also want to show off my new car and talk about the progress Magdalene and I have made in the meantime. Just in case somebody doubts we made the right decision to move to America.

It is only a ten-minute drive. With my motor cycle, I had to park in the rear, with my car today I park next to the front entrance.

The Engineering Department is upstairs, with wide windows all around. It is a clean and well-lit room and I enjoyed working there.

I see Alfred, the chief engineer and good friend in front of his drawing board and deep in thought. I tiptoe up to him and tap his shoulder.

"Hello Helmut! I heard you are in town. You look good! *We geht's?*"

"Alfred! You haven't changed, how is everybody?" Alfred alerts my old colleagues to come, greet me, and shake hands.

Alfred suggests, "It is almost lunchtime, why don't we all go out for lunch to Marcus down the road, then we can talk all we want."

About ten of us walk to the restaurant for lunch as most bachelors did at noontime when I still worked here. Little has changed, except Alfred and Hans are married now. It is a comfortable feeling to sit between my former colleagues and at the same table again with a beer in hand.

"Let's drink to Helmut's good fortunes!" Alfred lifts his stein. "Tell us Helmut, are you really better off?"

"Yes, I am! Much better! Two months after I quit here I landed a good job and bought a two-year old low-mileage car for less than three months salary. After eleven months, I bought a house. The price for the house is a little over twenty months my present salary.

I am now chief engineer of a company with over one hundred people, and we will probably grow by at least another fifty next year. That new Volkswagen at the door is mine."

"You did okay, Helmut, most of us can't even think of living in our own house." Alfred remarks. "Many of us have to live with our in-laws; which is not always easy.

"But I miss you all, guys," I add. "I don't think that I will ever find a bunch like you again. You are special and I will always remember you. Let me drink to that!"

"Listen guys," Alfred takes his fork and bangs on his beer, "Why don't we all get together like we always did six years ago, when we made little tours on our motor cycles. How about next weekend?"

"That's a terrific idea, Magdalene would love to see all of you too, and all the girls."

"Let's all meet on Saturday at ten at the company gate for a little tour. Let's drink to that!" Alfred concludes.

My parents have arrived from East Berlin; Magdalene's parents invited them to stay with us in their house. It is a big and happy get-together.

I am watching Mama. She has Baby Gary on her arm and is so happy. How could I even question whether I should take this vacation? Mama looks at Gary and adores the little fellow. He is smiling, full of

energy, jumping up and down in Mama's arm and Mama has a hard time holding onto him.

"Mama, let Brigitte hold him for a while if he is too much for you." Brigitte is Emmi's nine-year-old daughter who loves to carry and cuddle Gary. "No, no, Helmut, I will not give him up for anything, it brings back too many good memories.



Mama and Papa, now retired, had no problem to get a permit from the Communist authorities to travel from East Berlin to West Germany. They seem in good health, especially Papa. He is now seventy-one and Mama is sixty-nine.

Sister Inge in New Zealand and I worry a little about Mama. Papa would be so helpless should something ever happen to her. Inge and I try to figure out how to get them out of East Berlin, possibly letting them move to New Zealand. According to Inge, an immigration visa for New Zealand can be obtained for our parents. I know that an immigration visa for the USA for Mama and Papa would be impossible to get. When the time is right, I have to talk to Mama and Papa and find out what they think about it.



Magdalene's and my family in Gerlingen

Randy has a great time with his favorite toy, an old alarm clock with two bells, which still work, at least for now. With his mechanical mind way beyond his age of twenty months, he has figured out how to wind this thing up. When the alarm bells ring, he is chasing the chicken with it and has a ball. I wonder what Magdalene's mother thinks, her chicken harassed by her grandson. It looks she does not seem to mind, so I am not spoiling his fun.

When Randy is not chasing chickens, he is exercising all lamps he can reach. He finds all the switches no matter how well hidden they are. He calls out, "*an, aus, an, aus...!*" (on, out, on, out...) I wonder how many lamps will still work by the time we leave.

I think I can show Mama and Papa around a little. "Mama, you always wanted to see the Rhein River, we can be there in an hour from here. A road goes all along the Rhein and the scenery with the green vineyards and old romantic castles is something you will love to see. We can travel as far as we want to," I suggest.

"I wanted to see the Lorelei at the Rhein all my life, is that possible Helmut?" "That's no problem at all, Mama. Papa, do you want to come along? We can take one more."

"I have to stay with the children, but my Mother probably would like to come along too," Magdalene answers.

It is a fine day and the four of us take off. Papa is next to me--which has not happened for a long time--and the two grandmas are in the back. Both of them feel good that Magdalene and I are happy and are doing so well; and Gary and Randy couldn't be grander.

It does not take long and after a scenic trip along the Rhein, we drive up the hill to see the Lorelei.

I remember this place as tranquil and quiet when Magdalene and I were here on our motorcycle six years ago. We knew each other only three months, but by then I had a good feeling that our relationship would develop and last. It was my first time too that I had been at the Lorelei. It is a busy place today. Several tour busses are ahead of us and tour guides explain the legend of the Lorelei in all languages.

The view of the majestic Rhein below and of the grape vine covered hills and slopes are as beautiful as ever. Mama had heard the legend of the Lorelei since she was a child. "Where is that maiden which combs her golden hair to distract the sailors in their boats?" She is now a little disappointed; the real thing does not live up to the image in her fantasy, when sailors hit the rocks and perished?

"Mama! It is a legend! Who knows what really happened. Someone wrote a poem, put romantic music to it and for centuries, the schoolchildren are singing it. But it is a beautiful place and the legend makes you remember it.

"Papa, look at the acres of grapes all around us. Doesn't that remind you of your wine making operation in our kitchen years ago?" I remind him siphoning wine from the big fifty-liter fermenting container into bottles. "You were pretty happy after a while Papa, do you remember?"

"Yes, I do remember. You were about ten, which makes it almost thirty years ago. Where did the time go?"

"Papa, I meant to ask you for quite some time. Inge and I have an idea for you and Mama to think about. Inge and I think that when you live by yourselves in Berlin, eventually it could mean trouble for you or Mama. Mama, what do you think about leaving Berlin and moving to New Zealand, to Inge and her husband Des? Inge's little Michael is seven now and then they have Sonja, the little girl. You would come to us in

California first for a year, tourist visas are easy to get, and then you fly on to Inge. What do you think, Mama? We will take care of you when you are with us in California and Inge will when you are in New Zealand. Occasionally Magdalene and I will come and visit you. Inge and I think that would be best for both of you."

"No Helmut, that's not for me." Papa answers without considering the merits of what I said. "I don't speak English, I got my friends in Berlin, and I have my garden, and who is going to ring the church bells?"

Papa tries to think of more reasons to stay put. I expected that. I did not think he would come around on the first try. He has never done anything on a moment's notice. "Oskar, don't say that," Mama speaks up, "You said yourself the sprinkling can gets heavier every year and the stairs in the house must be getting higher. Many other people would love to ring the church bells, just for the honor of it. Let us think about it Helmut!

"I remember Inge too has written something about coming to New Zealand in several of her letters.

"When I was twenty my brothers and sisters moved from the farm to Berlin, my mother came along too. The best thing we ever did!

"Give us time to get used to the idea and let me talk to Papa, Helmut! It will take a lot of planning to decide what we can and have to take along."

"Yes Mama, It's just something to think about for a while and the idea will grow on you. Many things will fall into place after a while. Do you remember the beautiful pictures Inge sent from New Zealand? She has a wonderful family and she fell in love with New Zealand. Papa, you like horses, everybody in the family has their own horse; you will love it.

"You can stay with us here for a few months until you are West German citizens, then you take off from here," Magdalene's mother offers a very helpful idea. She sees what needs to be done. We talk while I drive home and before we know it, we are in front of the house. Brigitte is waiting with Gary on her arm at the gate, taking his right hand to wave at us. Mama wants to have Gary back on her arm. I think the Lorelei is history.

My old Hometown Berlin

My relatives and friends in Berlin want to see my California and Arizona films, and how we live and what America looks like. My U.S. citizenship papers are not due for a few more months and I have to travel with my German passport. I will fly to West Berlin and avoid East Germany, where they could arrest me for *illegally leaving the East German Democratic Republic*. Can you believe that?

Mama and Papa go home to Berlin in a few days and Magdalene and I will follow in a couple of weeks. We will stay with Fritz and Friedel in Berlin-Spandau. Friedel and Fritz have applied for a visa to immigrate to the US. I sponsored for them and I want to bring them the papers. Fritz was a senior electronic development engineer and I am sure he will do well in the U.S. I have known him for many years.

We both studied at the State Engineering College Gauss, Berlin, and we worked in the same company in East Berlin. As bachelors, we went on vacations together, to the Baltic Sea swimming in summer and skiing in the mountains in winter.

"Papa, can you organize a meeting for our relatives and my friends to meet me in West Berlin, in a restaurant room maybe? I don't want to go over the border to the East. I will pay for food and drinks and when there is interest I will show my eight millimeter movies and slides."

"That should not be a problem, Helmut. How about two weeks from now, on a Saturday. We are home by then and I have time to get in touch with everybody."

"That's perfect Papa. Say hello to everybody and I would love to see them." The time has come. Emmi takes care of Randy and Gary in Gerlingen; they are not quite over their ear infections and have to see the doctor a few more times.

Magdalene and I drive to Hannover, near the east-west German border and fly from there to Berlin-Tempelhof in the West, where Fritz can pick us up with his car. He is now a refugee from East Germany. Fritz, Friedel and their two girls live in primitive temporary quarters. Somehow, they fit us in.

"I hope it will not be long until you get out of here, Fritz. The immigration papers are all complete and with a little luck, you are on your

way soon and will be with us. Engineers seem to get preferential consideration right now."

Papa did a good job in organizing the meeting with relatives and friends. He says he invited about fifty people and rented a large room in a restaurant to handle the crowd. The restaurant is near a train station and easy to get to. What will they all look like, I wonder.

Seven years ago, I left them all when I skied alone for twelve hours through the Harz mountain forests and over the border to West Germany. Most of my relatives come in groups and I am busy greeting everybody and sit with them on their table. I wish I had more time with many but I do the best I can. The food is good and beer is plenty. Everybody is happy. There is a lot of interest to see how we live and travel in America. All my guests want to see the movies. Nobody has ever heard of the Grand Canyon, seen the big Sequoia trees or driven through a desert with ten-meter-tall cacti. It is very quiet, and only the projector is humming; sometimes I have a comment. I am surprised that there is so much interest. Even after two hours, the only other noise one can hear is when the waiter brings beer. At six o'clock we have seen all pictures and everybody talked to everybody else, they have not seen for ages.

It was a terrific party.

I say *auf wiedersehen* to everybody and remind all, "Don't forget to answer my mail, you got my address."

Today is Sunday and I meet with Mama and Papa, Fritz and family, and several of my friends with whom I worked and traveled. We meet near the Brandenburg Gate in the Tiergarten in West Berlin and Fritz and I talk about life in America.

"I think I have a good chance of a job in Los Angeles with the Stoddard Electronics Company. I used their measuring equipment and made several improvements on it, which were patented even," Fritz explained. Let's get in touch with them when you come, Fritz. Let's hope it won't be long."

It is getting dark and it is time to say good-bye.

"Papa, you love children and enjoyed Fritz's girls. You can play with your own grandchildren in California. Don't forget, Papa!"

Magdalene and I bring Mama and Papa to the train station.

"*Auf wiedersehen Mama und Papa*, will I see you again in California?"

After I let Mama out of the bear hug, she tells me, "I have to see the children again, Helmut. I will talk this over with Papa.



Achim, I, Magdalene, Mama, Weinert's girls, Traudel, Friedel

The Family is growing



*W*e are a family of four now and our house has only one bathroom. I am sure that in time it will become a problem. Now is the time to think about it before our family is growing again. Magdalene and I would love to have a girl sometime in the future. We have many friends and we like our neighborhood. The backyard is a rose garden and something is in bloom all year. Going to work is not too bad; we live close to Sepulveda, the road to West L.A. where I work.

"Can't we add a bathroom on to the house?" Magdalene wonders.

"We could, but it doesn't make much sense. The backyard is too small and will be tiny when you add on to the house. It would add nothing to the value of the property."

"Helmut, you liked the *Royal Homes* on Devonshire, let's take another look at them."

"It can't hurt, looking is cheap. If only we had not spent all our money going to Germany. But that was money well spent. Your and my parents and everybody loved to see us and cuddle the kids.

"Now they know what we mean when we write. I will get the children ready, Helmut. Let's take another look at the *Royal Homes* again."

It is a sunny weekend in August 1959. Magdalene and I walk from model home to model home along Devonshire Street.

"Honey, I like these homes better and better, but I wouldn't like to live on this busy street across a vacant weed patch. The long row of somewhat similar houses bothers me too. It will never be a nice community." "Why don't we ask in the sales office if they build these houses at other places, Helmut?" "I doubt it, but it can't hurt to ask."

The sales office is a friendly place, well decorated, and showing all available options of color and finish, tiles and roof types, but nothing indicates another building site.

"I'll ask the guy." Magdalene walks over to a salesman.

"We like your homes, but don't you build something in the hills and not on a busy street?" The salesman is an elderly man, well dressed and polished. He looks at Magdalene, and me and the boys and smiles.

"In fact we do, but the development is in the early stages. If you are interested, you can look at the lots in Woodland Hills. I will give you the address. You can pay a thousand dollars down on a particular lot and we will hold it for you. Come back and let me know. Have a good day! I hope you like what you see!"

It is a long way to Woodland Hills on Ventura Boulevard and along many vacant and overgrown places. We are in the boondocks. I am looking for the church St. Mel to turn south, as the salesman had told us. Majestic old walnut trees line the street and hide big houses in the back. Nice!

One more turn and I should be at the lots we want to see. We know what they look like, but how much money do they want for this?

The neighborhood does not look cheap. Can I go home and pretend I have never seen this beautiful area?

The lot for the type of home Magdalene and I liked has a large hill in the back, that's not good!

"Honey, let's go over to the other side of the street where all lots have a view; that is what we like!"

After three more lots up hill, we come to the end of the street. The last lot has the best view but has a SOLD sign on it. The foundations are finished and tell us the layout of the houses. It looks that the next two houses have five smaller bedrooms or a maids-room, which we do not like. The fourth one down is very nice.

Magdalene and I walk to the edge of the property and look down forty feet below to a green field with children on horseback.

"This is heaven! What do I have to do to get to heaven?"

"I hope this lot is still for sale, Honey. There is no SOLD sign, but we better check at the sales office on Devonshire."

After dusting off our children, we drive back up to the Royal Homes sales office on Devonshire and Balboa to find out.

Our salesman spots us as we enter the office, greeting us with outstretched arms. "Yes, this lot is still available but I have several inquiries. You better put a thousand dollars on it so I can hold it for you," he explains.

"How much would the house cost and what financing is available?" I ask.

"The total price will be \$ 33,000.00 with thirty percent down at the close of escrow. Any changes you like to make, like a circular drive way or sliding doors instead of windows, things like that; have to be paid in advance."

"When will the house be ready to move in?" Magdalene is a little ahead of the game I think.

Our savings account is on empty and my Volkswagen will not arrive for another week or two. I plan to sell it when it comes in, that would be about \$1900. I am sure we can manage the ten thousand dollars when we sell our house. We have paid off the second mortgage and we made extra payments on the first mortgage. But for now, I have to get the thousand dollars from somewhere.

Magdalene and I agree we want this house. The remaining twenty five thousand Dollars would be about a two years salary. Financing will be okay, I think.

"Figure the end of December, give or take a few weeks, that's when escrow will close," the salesman tells us.

"Can you hold the lot until Monday, the banks are closed over the weekend," I ask.

"I can't promise. If someone puts up the money I have to sell it to him."

I figured he would say that. Nice try! "What do you think Honey, why don't we buy it then?"

I look at the salesman, "If we sign to buy it now can you hold the lot till Monday?"

"Yes, let me prepare the sales paper right away," he answers and disappears in his office.

"Von wem willst du denn die tausend Dollar her kriegen," (from whom will you get the thousand Dollars) Magdalene asks in German so the salesman would not understand.

"Ich weiss noch nicht," (I don't know yet) I answer. We both sign the contract without hesitation; we know we will manage somehow. On the way home, I tell Magdalene that I will try to get my salary a couple weeks early on Monday. I am sure my boss and owner Ray Atchley will do me a favor. I am with his company for four years now and his chief engineer for almost as long.

"Maybe my sister Hildegard can loan us the money for a couple weeks, until the VW arrives and we sell it." I know she does not make much money but she never spends any. She sews all her clothing in the latest fashion and looks terrific. She never goes out. She wears out a penny by turning it over and over before she spends one.

"I will call her when we get home."

When Hildegard came to America, she lived with us for a year. As a registered Baby Nurse in Germany, she was a great help with our small boys.

However, her German nurse's registration was not recognized in the U.S. The education is different we were told. She loves the boys and takes care of them when Magdalene and I take off for a few days. When Lear Inc. asked Magdalene if she would consider coming back to work, Magdalene suggested Hildegard would be a good replacement. Hildegard had taken several accounting courses and Magdalene tutored her, and she did get Magdalene's job. She now lives in West Los Angeles, closer to her work.

I hear Magdalene on the phone, "You do have a thousand dollars in the account? You are an angel! You want to meet Helmut at the bank tomorrow at noontime? Great! Then he can take the check to the Royal Homes sales office after work, that's what we promised we will do."

On weekends, we take the boys and drive to Woodland Hills to watch our new house grow, two-by-four by two-by-four. We order changes on the stonework, we want a circular drive way and we want one additional sliding door instead of a window. We select the wall colors and the tiles. It does not take us long to decide. We never disagree on things. Selling our present house is no problem.

The kitchen is the major attraction. I refaced all cabinets and drawers and replaced all the cheap cabinet doors with mahogany doors. Everybody loves our rose garden. The house is sold before the sign is

up. In case we cannot move into our new house by December, we will stay in the house until we can move in. The buyer agreed to that.

Mid January 1960 is when we move in. It is eighteen degrees outside and the electricity is not hooked up yet. That means the gas heater is not working either. Therefore, the fireplace gets a workout; any leftover lumber on the lot comes in handy. That's okay! We tuck in the boys, and then Magdalene and I move closer. We are celebrating,

“CHEERS!”



Our new house in Woodland Hills



In the hills of Woodland Hills

Magdalene's Parents come to see us

1960

Three and a half-year-old Randy and two-year-old Gary love to walk and run with Grandpa up and down the hills. He huffs, puffs, and has a ball, laughing all the way.

Magdalene's mother Adolfine and father Eduard are visiting us. Emmi, their oldest daughter, is running their insurance business in Germany in the meantime.

Hildegard, Magdalene's sister, comes to us every weekend to be with her parents and the family. I am glad we have her around when we have a new baby.

Magdalene is expecting our third child in three months and we would love to have Hildegard again. Things are easier when a professional nurse is around.

Magdalene's mother wipes away a tear and tells us, "I wish I could be here with Magdalene when the baby arrives.

However, father Eduard thinks it is time to go home. "We have been here three months now and there is trouble at home in Germany. Emmi is calling for help!"

Magdalene's sister Emmi had written a letter from Germany, *"The weather turned very bad after Christmas in Westphalia this year. Farmers have many problems. Our insurance business has a hard time to keep up with it!"*

"Mach dir keine Sorgen (don't worry)," I try to put my mother-in-law at ease. "When the baby arrives in three months we will hire a nurse to take care of Magdalene and the baby. It will be okay. Hildegard has promised to come too when the baby arrives. We will write and tell you all about Magdalene and the baby."

My mother too would love to be here. Mama would leave Berlin any day, if it were not for Dad who does not want to leave his hometown Berlin.

I hope that one of these days Mama can talk him into moving. They would come to us first for a year, and then continue the flight to New Zealand to my sister Inge.

Inge and I worry about Papa. Should something happen to Mama, Papa would not know what to do. Her health is okay for now but not as robust as Papa's is.

I have to inform my parents about the birth of our daughter Ingrid. I will tell them again to come to us for a year, and then fly on to Inge and her husband Desmond in New Zealand.

"Dear Mama and Papa. We have a healthy little girl Ingrid, eight pounds and a few ounces. She was born on March 12. Everything was normal. I hope you will come soon to see her. Ingrid is such a sweet little baby, Papa, blue eyes like yours and she has at least two blond hairs and lots of blond promises.

Now I can hear her crying, "I want my Grandma, I want my Grandpa!"



We had a nice summer. Ingrid and the children are well. We are friends with all neighbors. I could do without the long way to work, but I do not mind. Moving is out of the question!

Driving home on a Friday is always bad, but to be home over the weekend with my family makes up for it.

"You got mail from Inge," Magdalene greets me and hands me the letter as I get out of the car.

"We may get your parents out of Berlin yet, Helmut."

The kids are all over me and want to play when I come home. Somehow, I get a chance to read the letter.

"Dear Magdalene and Helmut, I have a terrific idea. Let me know what you think of it.

My parents-in-law Hilda and James Cooper-- Des's parents-- will travel to London in the spring of 1962 to a church convention. I talked them into visiting Mama and Papa in Berlin while they are in Europe and invite them to come to New Zealand. I wrote Mama and Papa that Des's parents would come to see them.

My friend Helga in Berlin has offered to translate when they come. Hilda and James are very friendly people. I hope that James can convince Papa to think of moving. Mom and Dad would be so much

better off here on the farm, and I can take care of them. I know Dad is crazy about horses since his days in the cavalry way back when. We have four horses, one for everyone in the family. I told James to bring that up with Dad when they meet in Berlin. I do not think Dad can resist.

What do you think, Helmut? Your loving sister, Inge."

"That's a terrific idea, Inge," I tell myself, "why didn't I think of that!"

I too try to figure out what makes Papa tick.

Dad has no longer any relatives or friends in Berlin that he really cares about. What keeps him there?

The Communists do not care about retired people; they almost encourage them to go. It frees up an apartment. If you no longer live in their state, they do not pay you social security and will not take care of you when you are sick. They figure you no longer work for them and they are better off without you in the Worker's Paradise.

All Mom and Dad have to do is pack what they wish to take along to New Zealand. The flight to Auckland, New Zealand, can be interrupted in Los Angeles, and after a year, they can continue the flight to Auckland.

I had better write Mama and Papa a pep-up letter. They should have Inge's invitation by now.

"Dear Mama and Papa! Inge just wrote me that Des' parents Hilda and James are planning to visit you soon. I hope they can convince you to do what everybody thinks is best for you. Our little Ingrid is now nine months old and will be walking soon. Papa, the boys look forward to walk and run over the green hills with you.

Let us know as soon as you can how the meeting with the Coopers went. I hope we see you soon, Magdalene and Helmut."

I expect to hear from Mama any day now. Mama's and Papa's meeting with the Coopers must have happened in Berlin by now.

Magdalene must have heard the rattle of my two hundred thousand miles old Chevy when I came up the driveway. She comes out of the door to greet me, waving a letter high above her head.

"It's a letter from your mother. Your Mom and Dad decided to come, Helmut!"

I hug and kiss Magdalene first and then I read Mama's long letter. It must be full of good news.

"Dear Magdalene and Helmut. Yes, we met Inge's parents-in-law. They are a very nice couple, about ten years younger than we are and still

full of energy. With Helga translating, we could communicate quite well. I did not know Helga could speak English so well. Some of the words I could understand, they are similar to Platt Deutsch (Low German) I spoke as a child. James Cooper talked to us for many hours and slowly managed to convince Papa that we would be better off in New Zealand. Here is what James Cooper pointed out to us.

Why in the world would you want to live in this little apartment when you can live out in the country, Oskar? On a big piece of land. With lots of horses around you, four alone in Inge and Des's family, not to mention the one hundred sixty cows and the dog, with a view of high mountains in the background. In addition, we have the beautiful climate. You will love it, Oskar!"

"Helmut, now I think I know what Papa is afraid of. Papa told James that he cannot speak English and will be lost in New Zealand. James had a good answer.

'Oskar; don't worry. Time will take care of that. Inge is always there. In California, the entire family can speak German. You will have a year to adjust. It is easier than you think. When you say Bier and Schnapps, everybody will tell you that your English couldn't be better.'

"Helmut, here is what I think really changed Papa's mind.

When James told us that Inge is restoring an antique two-people chariot, so Inge can take Papa out for a spin with his favorite horse to the village inn and let the horse find it's way back home if he had a couple drinks, Papa had to wipe his eyes. Papa had not talked about his wish for many years and probably given up on it. When Papa heard that Inge never forgot and wants to make it happen for him, Papa had tears in his eyes.

Papa used to walk over to the fire department to say hello to his old firefighter buddies and they would have a beer together. However, the firemen are all younger now and fewer and fewer can remember him. You and Inge have given up on East Berlin a long time ago and invited us many times to come. When James Cooper and his wife Hilda were leaving, they made Papa and me say in English, "See you in New Zealand!"

We will be busy for the next few weeks but we will be together soon. Papa will go to the District Office on Monday to apply for the Emigration Permit.

I get used to the thought that we will move away from where we have lived for the last fifty years. I pray that we all remain healthy and will be together again. Kisses to all the little ones, Mama and Papa.

Did Mama and Papa Decide?

1962

Was I doing the right thing to encourage Mama and Papa to leave their home? We have not received any mail for weeks. Did they change their mind? Has the emigration process started?

I am in my office and try to concentrate on my job.

If I could call we could stay in touch, but the telephone cables in East Berlin were pulled out of the ground by the Russians after the war and were never replaced.

All Mama and Papa can take along are two suitcases each, everything else in the apartment has to be sold or given away. How will they manage in an empty apartment until they leave?

The phone stops my thoughts.

"Helmut," I hear Magdalene's voice. "Your mother wrote a long letter. Don't worry, all is well. I know you are concerned, that's why I call."

"Thank you Honey, I was worried. I read it when I come home, Honey. I can't wait. Thanks again. Love you!"

That is good news; I can't wait to read it. Why does it take so long to get home today? Coming through the door, I can tell by Magdalene's face that good news is in the letter she hands me.

"Liebe Magdalene und lieber Helmut. Sorry it took so long, but we are very busy. I wish we had our telephone back. Here is what happened.

We have the Emigration Permit from the district, but now we have to leave East Berlin in four weeks. We are very busy selling and giving away our furniture and all things we cannot take along. I can't recognize Papa anymore; now he cannot get out of here fast enough, all of a sudden.

The fire department in Oberschöneweide gave him a farewell party. Papa could not help it; tears were running down his face. He was over fifty-five years with the fire department.

Do you remember your cousin Ehrhard and his son Bernhard? Bernhard is now twenty years old and is a big help to us. We sold and gave away our furniture, but we keep it in the apartment until we leave. Bernhard will then arrange to empty the apartment.

It is a lot of work; Papa is now seventy-three and I am seventy-one years old.

We will write Magdalene's parents. We have enough money to get there, Helmut. But you offered to pay for the flight tickets to New Zealand; we have to take you up on that when we are in Gerlingen with Magdalene's parents. They are such a nice family.

To immigrate to New Zealand we have to be West German citizens first, which means we have to live in West Germany for at least three months.

The mail to America from here takes ten days--I think our East German government opens some mail. When you get this letter, we will be at Magdalene's Parents. From now on write to them.

Kiss my little Ingrid, Randy and Gary. I can't wait to be with you, Mama and Papa."

"Honey! I feel so much better now! Every thing seems to be going well

Mama and Papa are on the Way

Our worries are over. Magdalene's mother wrote that my parents arrived and are happy in Gerlingen. Magdalene's father will help them to register and apply for West German citizenship, he knows everybody in the district office. He helped me too to get my East German social security papers transferred and registered in West Germany. I am sure Magdalene's parents will take care of Mama and Papa.

Magdalene has been busy preparing a room for them when they arrive here. They will arrive next week at the Los Angeles airport. I hope Mama is okay, it is a long flight. At least the flight is only twelve hours by jet from Frankfurt to LA. It was eighteen hours in a propeller plane three years ago when we flew to Germany on vacation.

I worried too much; my parents had no trouble to leave Berlin, and I am certain they are in good hands in Gerlingen.

Today Magdalene and I am at the Los Angeles airport, and we stare at every group of passengers, which come through customs. At least my parents will not have to lug the very heavy stuff; my father-in-law had it shipped direct to Inge in New Zealand.

I saw Mama and Papa the last time three years ago when we were on vacation in Germany. They were in good shape then. In the meantime, it must have been tough. However, I think it will be worth it for them to have left East Germany.

"Helmut! Here they come!" Magdalene points to Mama and Papa pushing their luggage and trying to find us between the hundred people surrounding us. Then they notice us waving.

"Welcome to America!" We yell until they can make it through the gate.

I do not think I ever was so relieved to see my parents again, and they are healthy it seems. Mama and Papa have tears running down their faces and hang on to Magdalene and me. We will take good care of them.

Mama and Papa in California
1962



"I picked some oranges for you," I tell Mama and Papa at the breakfast table on their first day in California, "right off the tree you see over there. The trees are still young and get much bigger." "I walked around the house and saw them," Papa explains. "It is the first time I saw an orange tree. You do not see oranges at all in East Germany;

they never import oranges or bananas. And I noticed a field of orange trees below in the valley and giant walnut trees down the street.”

Mama and Papa have been gardening most of their lives, and they wonder about the plants we have here. Some of them they have never seen before.

"I will give you the tour after breakfast," Papa, "if you see a plant that needs water feel free to take the garden hose. It does not rain here in summer and it can get very hot. Think of it as your garden, feel right at home!"

"Helmut, is it okay to walk along the street? You don't have a sidewalk. Nobody walks the street here."

"Very few people do, Papa, but you certainly can. However, do not get lost. I prepare a note with our address for you. Should you get lost you can show it to people and they will point you in the right direction. People are very friendly here. They will help you whenever they can."

"How about the hills at the end of the next street, Helmut, can I walk there too?"

"Magdalene and I took Randy and Gary up the hills; you have a nice view over the valley from the top. But stay on the road and watch out for rattle snakes."

"Klapper-Schlangen, they are poisons, Helmut!"

"Yes, but if you leave them alone they really don't bother you. I know at first it is scary to hear about them, but they hunt for gophers, which makes them 'Good Guys' to a gardener. We don't tolerate rattlesnakes in the backyard though, because of the children, that's all."

"What are you two talking about that's so important?" Magdalene joins us.

"I want to do something," Papa answers, "I can't sit here all day."

"I notice that Ingrid loves it when you hug and cuddle her, Papa. You can take her along in the stroller. She is now seventeen months old and we took her along when we all went up the hill. She loved it." Magdalene tells Papa. "Yes, she pays attention when I talk to her in German. I think she will talk in German before she speaks English."

"That's okay; Papa, Randy and Gary can speak to you in German too."

Mama comes into the room and is all excited. "Helmut, I just heard you will have another baby in December?"

"Yes, Mama, beginning December. You will have a baby to hold and carry again."

"I am so happy for you. Then you have four, you don't need more than that.

"I shouldn't have said that, I am so sorry."

"Don't worry Mama, but you are right. Four children is a perfect family. Let us hope the baby is healthy and that Magdalene is not having any problems. That is all that matters.

"Now something else, how about going up the coast to Santa Barbara next weekend. Are you up to it, Mama? It is about a one and a half hour drive. We can see the old Spanish mission, most monks up there speak German and you can talk to them, Mama. We can have lunch in town and then we go up the mountains to a little Danish village for *Kaffee und Kuchen*. How about it?"

"Helmut, do what you think is best. I am sure we like it, don't we Oskar? But don't make long trips, Helmut. Sitting in a car very long doesn't agree with me. I like to be at home and in your garden, then I can watch and hold the children."

"I call my sister Hildegard, maybe she can baby-sit for us," Magdalene adds, "Hildegard loves the children."

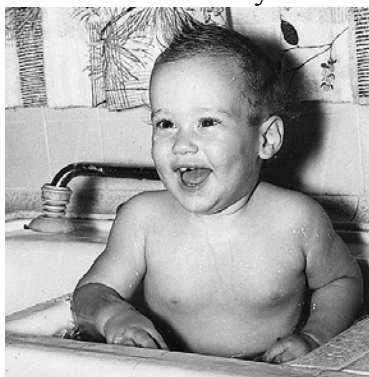
Mama and Papa are at home here now. Papa and Ingrid go for long walks and talk in German.

The neighbors are amused that our little Ingrid, not even two years old, can have a conversation with her Grandpa in German as they walk down the street. Papa and Ingrid are inseparable.

"Mama, you will have a baby to hold pretty soon, it can only be a few more days," I tell Mama.

All our children were born over a weekend so I could drive Magdalene to the hospital. We lucked out again. Baby Richard was born on Saturday, 14 December 1962, two days ago, and I am taking Magdalene and the baby home. All went well.

Richard is a happy little baby. Mama thinks he looks like me when I was a baby.



Richard



*From left Gary, Randy and Ingrid
Magdalene with baby Richard, Mama, Papa*

"Papa, we always had a Christmas tree in Berlin; rain or shine peace or war. Let's go and get one, it's only a week till Christmas."

"But I never had to take a car to get one. It was easier in Berlin; we only had to walk a block. Christmas trees were at every corner."

"I know, Papa, but we never bought on that reaches from the floor to the ceiling. We had our tree on the table, and then it went to the ceiling."

"Papa, when you were dressed up as Santa Claus I could tell it was you when I was four, you had your fireman's uniform underneath."

"You do remember that, Helmut? Yes, it never failed! Somebody would knock the Christmas tree over--with the live candles we had in those days--and will set the tree or the curtains on fire. And we firemen had to go out on Christmas. Or we had a chimney on fire, which is hard to control and serious."

"Papa, I remember that you put on electric light bulbs on the tree as soon as we were hooked up to electricity. I was about six or seven then."

"Let's stop at this lot, they still have many trees. You are an old hand at *Weihnachtsbäume*, Papa. We need a tree as tall as we can reach."

"These are very nice *Tannen Bäume*, even all around, no branches missing, and pliable twigs. *Sehr schöne Bäume*."

"Yes, Papa, you picked a good one. We have boxes full with ornaments, lights, and tinsel, just like we had at home. The two of us can decorate our *Weihnachtsbaum*. Randy and Gary can help. It will be Christmas like in the old days."

"Mama adds, "Only Inge in New Zealand is missing."

Our kitchen table is at maximum length to seat our large family at dinnertime. Magdalene made a twenty-pound turkey with all the trimmings and the house smells like Christmas. Mama and Papa have many helpings and I refilled Papa's glass a few times.

"*Frohe Weihnachten!* (Merry Christmas)" I wish everybody.

"Honey, everything is delicious!"

"It is, Magdalene. *Es ist schon so lange her dass ich eine Pute hatte* (It is long ago that I had a turkey)," Mama calls out.

“If you like it Mama, we can have another one on New Year. We plan to have Richard’s baptism then,” Magdalene announces. “Tante Lotte and Onkel Klaus, Friedel and Fritz, and Ursula and Heiner Grimm are coming. Except for Onkel Klaus and I, all you Berliners are getting together again. We all will speak German then, Mama and Papa you can really feel at home.”

Time flies. Ingrid is two years old and walking more than ever with Papa, her German is perfect. I wonder what will happen when Mama and Papa will move on to New Zealand. Ingrid will be lost then. It is only five more months.

Our backyard is a mess for the moment. We get a swimming pool. Papa is fascinated how well the tractor operator maneuvers the scoop.

“They put a lot of steel in the wall, is that necessary?”

“Yes Papa! This is earthquake country. Also, our soil expands when it gets wet that compresses the pool structure. So far we were lucky; no earthquake has hit us yet.”

Mama and Papa are moving on to New Zealand! 1963

Where did the year go? Mama and Papa are packing to go to Sister Inge in New Zealand. They fly tomorrow afternoon with Air New Zealand to Auckland, NZ.

It is very hard for Mama and Papa. "I don't know how I can live without little Richard," Mama repeats over and over again, tears are running down her face. Papa is hanging on to Ingrid, "I wish I could take her along. What will I do without her?"

I really don't know how to tell Ingrid that her Oma and Opa are leaving. "We send you pictures of the children and keep you up-to-date Mama. Tell Inge to send us pictures, I know you will do the writing. Who knows, maybe you come back for a visit or we come to New Zealand on vacation one day, who knows."

"I doubt that I can come, Helmut. It's a lot of money."

"Don't say that, Mama. Did you believe you would be in America one day? Or in New Zealand? Never give up hope!"

"Let's have another Cognac Papa. Let's drink to your happy life in New Zealand!"



It is a sad day!

It is hard to say good-bye. I am sure Inge will take good care of Mama and Papa. But will we ever see them again?

Mama is pressing little Richard on her chest for comfort, but time moves on.

At the airport, we have two hours until departure time. Papa is busy entertaining the children, Magdalene and I talk to Mama.

Time flies. Now it is time to go.

"We wish you both the best in New Zealand Mama and Papa. Let us know if you need something. We send you whatever you need. Say hello to Inge and her husband Desmond."

One more hug, Mama, and Papa have to leave.
We wave one more time when Mama and Papa waved at us one
more time on their way to the plane.

Will we ever see them again?

It is a long flight and Magdalene and I worry...

It took a few weeks, but today we received a letter from Mama and
we can stop worrying about my parents.

*Dear Magdalene and Helmut. The flight was long but Papa and I
arrived in Auckland without any problems. Inge and Des greeted us at the
airport. We love the life on the farm. It is as Jim Cooper had said it
would be. Papa loves the horses here. Now more good news! Papa
received a substantial social security back payment from West Germany
because he was a public employee of the city of Berlin when he was a
Fire-Chief in Berlin. Because Berlin was controlled by all four powers,
East or West sectors did not matter. Inge and Des purchased a small
house and moved it within twenty yards of their house as a temporary
guesthouse. A carpenter made a workshop out of one room and Papa had
something he always wanted. I like that there are no more stairs to climb
and no more icy winters. Inge prepares the dinner and Papa and I eat
dinner in the main house with the rest of the family.*

*Inge, Des or Jim take Papa on tours with the chariot on weekends.
Papa's long-time wish has come true. Do you have more pictures of the
children? Hug little Richard for me. Papa misses little Ingrid a lot, the
two could talk all day in German. Inge's children, Michel and Sonja have
started to say a few words in German now. We hope you and the children
are well.*

We
miss you, Mama and Papa

The picture shows Papa and Jim, Papa likes it here.



Mama and I in New Zealand 1967



Mama is seventy-nine years old but in very good shape. It is wonderful to meet Inge's family, Des and the children Sonja and Michael. All are having their own horse and participate in dressage and cross-country events. Even Mama comes along and has fun watching what is going on. There is a lot to see in New Zealand, it is a beautiful country. Geological activity is everywhere. Geysers, steam power plants, and bubbling mud lakes, it is an interesting world.

Mama and Inge came to California on vacation for a few weeks the year later. For Mama's eightieth birthday in 1969, she made the long flight to California back by herself again and stayed for a year with us here in California. She felt at home here and enjoyed her grandchildren. When her tourist visa expired, it was hard for her to leave, knowing that she would probably not see us again. Mama passed away in New Zealand on July 4 in 1973 at the age of 83.

What is happening to My Job?

1962/63

Raymond Atchley, Inc. has moved to a much larger place at the end of 1960 to make room for more business. I have a larger office now and three engineers to handle the additional work. For years, I have tried unsuccessfully to talk Ray, my boss and the owner of Raymond Atchley, Inc. to purchase modern universal drafting machines. He finally saw them at his Alma Mater MIT where he used to teach hydraulics for some years. "Helmut, get them for us, they look good." He still does not see the light; he buys them for the wrong reason. Typists have fancy electric typewriters and engineers work on egg crates to make expensive drawings in this country.

Our company has now two hundred forty employees. We are very profitable!

It seems to be a normal day, I just finished another proposal when I hear Ray's voice, "Helmut, can you come to my office for a moment, please?"

My ears perk up. What is that formality all of a sudden? We discuss Engineering matters anywhere, where ever we happen to be, hardly ever in Ray's office. I wonder.

Engineering ideas come from Jack, our vice president, or from me, seldom from Ray. When I tell him what I have in mind, he comes back the next day and tells me about the great idea he has. Usually Jack and I discuss the merit of an idea and the strategy of how to convince Ray before we give him a chance to say no. Important cases, where we can't afford for Ray to say no, Jack and I let Ray know after the fact when we have good test results that even he will understand and will not interfere with it.

So I wonder what he has this time.

"Helmut, have a seat. You are four years with us now, congratulations!" Ray greets me, shakes my hand across the desk, and hands me an envelope.

"I thought you deserve a raise. The details are in that envelope. But here is the real good news. It is time for Raymond Atchley, Inc. to grow and broaden its horizon. We have joined a large company, ABEX (American Brake Shoe), which is about to play a big role in aircraft hydraulics. They make reliable aircraft hydraulic pumps and we make the best and most reliable servo valves; what a combination.

A small group of ABEX engineers will come from Boston, mostly MIT engineers, and will start to broaden our product line. It will be a big chance for us. In the meantime everything will go on as usual. Good luck to you, Helmut!"

"Thank you, Ray," is all I can think of for the moment.

I am back in my office. I am not sure what to make of it. I am opening my mail but I do not really see what I am looking at.

My mind swings between Ray's broader horizons stuff and abyss. I have to hold on to my job right now. I now have a wife and kids and a new house to pay for. What is in that envelope? My hands shake as I tear it open. *Congratulations, bla bla bla...!* I am looking for numbers and dollar signs. Here it is, a monthly salary of \$1250.00, including a raise of fifty dollars per month.

According to the magazine Machine Design, I am in the upper ten percent in my seniority class. I should be happy. What is wrong? I think the future is not as secure as I thought it was. That's what it is!

I am not getting much done today. I cannot concentrate. That never happened before.

"Hello, Helmut! Has Ray talked to you yet?" It is Jack. He is vice president but much more than just my boss. He studied at Columbia University and besides his broad knowledge; he is a very practical guy too. He is also my sounding board. Whenever I have a new idea, I discuss it with him. Between the two of us, we can do anything. What is going to happen to both of us?

"Yes, Jack. Ray told me he joined ABEX, a company interested in us and can make us grow faster."

"Ray sold out to ABEX, Helmut. What that means to us remains to be seen. I guess for now we go on as usual, we will find out soon enough. Hang in there, Helmut!"

Six months later Jack is no longer with us and has taken a job at one of our competitors. Jim, one of the new engineers, is VP engineering and my boss.

Although I am still chief engineer, the other new engineers work directly for him. That suits me fine; they are not the engineers I need. They sit in front of their computers all day and try to figure out why things work what we have been designing and selling for years.

Good luck! I do not expect any new products from them.

"Helmut, we have to change our drawing numbering system, some drawings have too many dash numbers. Our computers can handle only nine digits. ABEX tells us we have to conform."

"That will screw up our entire manufacturing and procurement system, Jim, and it will be a lot of work to implement. I have to hire temporary help for a few weeks to do that."

"Go ahead, we have no choice!"

I knew it! Money is no object. That's why the company is now in the red. That is not going to change as far as I can see. It is a bad omen.

In early 1962 Raymond Atchley, Inc. is now called ABEX-valve division. Our new Marketing Manager calls all office employees to come to the conference room to listen to a marketing forecast. To pacify us, I guess.

I sit next to Carl, one of our Project engineers. He doesn't work directly for me, but he is a nice guy and I can help him a lot. He was the meteorologist for the Marines at Iwo Jima and I have learned a lot from him. Our views of the new management are the same. They are a bunch of dumb kids in a China shop!

"We have our second best year," the Marketing manager declares, pointing at a schematic on the wall showing a steep year-to-year increase in business over the last five years and now a sudden downturn.

"Helmut, we better start looking," Carl whispers in my ear.

"I know what you mean, Carl. Get off this ship! We got too many holes!"

The management of ABEX must have noticed something, they want to consolidate and move us to Oxnard, CA where the pump division is and plenty of space to expand.

Carl and at least two-thirds of the shop personnel have quit as of now and will not move to Oxnard.

On paper, the move actually does not look bad. I would be paid for the move and would be paid for a number of items should I sell my house and move to Oxnard.

"Honey, let's take a look what is new in housing. I heard that in Camarillo at Las Posas Road, next to the golf course, the houses look terrific."

Magdalene and I drive to Camarillo, we like the houses on Las Posas Road a lot. However, why should I pay an arm and a leg for a house on the golf course when I don't play golf? I like where I am in Woodland Hills.

Then, is the ABEX management in Oxnard any better than what we had in Santa Monica?

To come to work in Oxnard we get paid mileage for three months. We share the ride and we come out ahead. Except an endless line of cars goes eighty miles per hour on a two-lane highway when impatient and desperate people try to cross it. There are bad accidents and close-ones every day.

I start to look around.

Rocketdyne is hiring engineers I read in the paper, I could look into it.

One day the General Manager of the ABEX Oxnard division takes several of his managers and engineers from Atchley out for lunch to the Wagenwheel Restaurant in Oxnard to get acquainted. The food and the drinks are good. When I ask the General Manager about prevailing wages, vacation and health insurance, he is talking for half an hour without saying much.

He doesn't know that I have learned to read between the lines. It is funny when he talks himself into a dead-end sentence and cannot find a good lie to come out of it. I met Nazis and Communists in Germany doing the same thing. *Nothing new in the West!*

My new title is chief engineer for the valve group. The pump group has another chief engineer, Derek, a chap from England. Our boss is the ABEX chief engineer.

The three months to make a decision on moving or not moving to Oxnard are almost over. All inducements to move will end soon. What should I do?

I do not care for the new company but I am still not certain. I make good money and have almost six-years of seniority.

We are back from lunch when Derek comes to my office. "Helmut, I just found out you make over twelve hundred dollar a month!"

"What about it, Derek? How much do you make?"

"Only seven hundred dollar. That's not fair!"

"Derek, if I were you I most certainly would know what to do! My God, what leverage. If you don't know what to do Derek and you only

complain to me about it--which will do you not a bit of good--you probably are already over-paid.

"You just did me a great favor, Derek. I now know what I have to do. Good luck to you!"

I remember Bryan, the young Norwegian engineer, who worked for me sometimes at Atchley. We became good friends. He started to work for Rocketdyne a couple of years ago after he quit Atchley. I wonder what he knows about Rocketdyne hiring engineers.

I look for Bryan's phone number at Rocketdyne to call him. Bryan was testing torque motors at Atchley; sometimes he worked for me in the engineering department to help out. I went skiing together with his Norwegian friends and at his wedding Magdalene and I joined a happy family. I felt right at home between the happy Norwegians.

While the phone rings I close the door to my office, this is private for now. "Hello, Bryan, remember me, Helmut Standke at Atchley?"

"Of course I do, Helmut. I saw you last at my wedding. How is it going?"

"Ray Atchley sold out a few months ago and the company is moving to Oxnard. You would not recognize the place any more. I am looking for a job."

"Helmut, give me a few minutes and I'll call you back, give me your number." Should I be so lucky and get the job at Rocketdyne I will be at work in five minutes, almost. It is too good to be true.

The phone rings. "Helmut, can you come in on Saturday at eleven and talk to my boss? His name is Paul Evans, a nice guy.

Bring your resume up to date and mention you designed *torque motors*. We are studying how to replace solenoids with torque motors on our propellant valves. That knowledge is important.

When you arrive, call me from the lobby at Canoga Avenue. I'll pick you up. You need an escort."

"Thanks Bryan, I'll be there Saturday morning. Thanks again!"

"Don't mention it. I told Paul that we worked on torque motors at Atchley. Paul wants to talk to you about it. I am sure you'll get the job. Right now good people are hard to come by. See you Saturday, Helmut."

On Saturday Bryan drops me off at Mr. Evans' office. "Bryan told me that you designed and manufactured torque motors at Atchley, Helmut?" He looks at my resume while talking. "We need an expert to study the application for propellant valves and come up with a preliminary design, Helmut.

The target of the study is to reduce some weight, operate the valve with less power, and cut the operating time in half, hopefully even lower, down to a few milliseconds.

Do you have a feel that this can be accomplished?"

"In general terms, for the same force and stroke and for the same power input the response time of a torque motor is about one third of a solenoid.

"At one third the power input--same stroke and force--the response time is still better by a factor of two.

"It definitely looks very promising to work out the details Mr. Evans."

I took the job for the money I am making now. I am happy. Good-bye ABEX in Oxnard.

P.S. How can a good little company be ruined in such a short time by a large company who buys them out? ABEX made no effort to do it right. None of the old managers were ever consulted, and all left.

ABEX in Oxnard struggled for several years and eventually closed.

The Apollo Moon-Landing Program 1963

"It sure is embarrassing," I hear from Dave. "And we thought we had it all under control."

I am working for Dave now, my supervisor for valves in the Rocketdyne Space Engine Division. We refine and improve the design of the propellant valves for the Apollo moon-landing program.

Then this happened. We just had a test failure. A valve did not close right. We need an analysis of the valve's Teflon seat that is supposed to seal after each short firing.

"Helmut, take a look at this Teflon seat under the microscope at thirty powers and take a picture of it. Here is a work order and have the model shop cut the seat out of the steel seat assembly. Tell them to be careful and be gentle with it; don't let them get the part too hot, it will ruin the evidence. I suggest you stand next to the guy when he does it. Time is critical!"

"Okay, Dave, I understand."

"Tell Mac, the red-haired foreman down there, the Teflon seat has to be in the lab by eleven to be analyzed. Make sure he understands that this is critical. He can be a stubborn guy sometimes. I have a meeting with the Rocketdyne Vice President Paul this afternoon. I have to have the lab info for Paul or all of us are in trouble!"

I heard of VP Paul-the-Terrible. I understand he rules with an iron fist and is very impatient. He has fired people on the spot.

I know what to do. Inspecting the seat under the microscope and taking pictures is the easy part. In the engineering lab everybody cooperates. Setting up the microscope takes me only a few minutes. I get a nice eight and a half by eleven big 'glossy' that shows a section of this half inch diameter seat and a blister in the Teflon.

It looks like a material problem. The plastics specialist in the material lab will settle that.

Down in the model shop I see a big red-haired guy at the desk; that must be the supervisor.

"I have a critical rush job that has to get to the material lab by eleven and..."

"All of it here is rush, don't give me that! I'll be back in a minute!" And he walks away.

I stand there with my hardware and my work order in hand while this guy walks out on me. That is a No-No!

But what can I do now? Is my job on the line, or Dave's maybe?

Karl, one of the lathe operators a few feet away cranes his neck and waves for me to come over to him.

I met Karl before. He is from Hamburg, Germany and some time ago, we had a long talk about our German Navy years back during the war. He is a sporty guy of forty-two, much like me.

"Are you waiting for Mac to come back soon, Helmut? Forget it! This guy is acting up again. He gives everybody a hard time who comes with a hot job. He is a jerk! What do you have that's so important?"

"We had a failure. I'll have to get the Teflon seat out of the steel assembly for analysis. It has to be in the material lab by eleven or VP Paul will be all over us. I can promise you, Mac included."

"I wish I could do it for you, Helmut, but I have to ship what I am doing today, and it is late as it is. The lathe behind me is open. Can you do it yourself? I can give you the tools."

"That will be great, Karl. I owe you a coffee!"

Karl hands me the cutting tools. I chuck up the Teflon seat assembly, start the lathe and begin to slowly cut the steel away from the Teflon seat. This is my baby now! It does not take long and I am almost done when I see a reflection on the glossy paint on the lathe. I can guess who it is but continue with my job and do not look up. What would he dare to do?

"Who allowed you to work on this lathe?" The supervisor asks.

"I did, Mac," Karl answers before I finished wondering what to tell him.

"You can't work at a lathe with your tie!"

"Is it that what's bothering you?" I take off my tie, stuff it in my pocket and continue my job.

"You can't do that!" he yells.

"Of course I can, in fact I did! I just finished it!" I answer and stop the lathe. I remove my Teflon part with utmost care and place it in the padded box.

Mac turns red in his face. I keep a close eye on this older guy, just in case. I notice Karl does too.

For a few seconds it is tense. Then big Mac turns around and moves back to his desk without a word. He slams his fist on his desk and stares at the wall.

"Thanks Karl, here are your tools. Let's have our coffee. I hope I didn't mess up your relationship with Mac?"

"He doesn't have any relations with anybody here, Helmut. Don't worry. It was fun to see this big guy squirm." Karl snickers and both of us go to the coffee maker and talk a little more about our navy time.

We are on the way back and Mac is still red-faced at his desk. I stop and hand him the shop order I had in my shirt pocket.

"Thank you sir for letting me use the lathe. Vice President Paul Vogt would have been all over us if I had come back without that Teflon valve seat cut out. Thanks again!" Mac nods his head, but his face turns pale.

When I place the neatly carved out Teflon seat and the large photo showing the blister in the Teflon on Dave's desk I can tell he is tickled pink.

"Did you do it yourself, Helmut?" He asks with a grin.

"How did you know?"

"The shop down there doesn't work so fast, you did it the only way to get it done in a hurry. I appreciate it! I feel a lot better now going to the meeting with Paul. Thanks Helmut!"

Progress in the Model Shop?

Most design improvements on propellant valves are under control, except we think the valve poppet needs more work. Dave is familiar with the Gemini Program, the precursor to the Apollo Moon Landing program we are working on now.

He brings me up-to-date. "We tried ceramic and sapphire balls, they are brittle and I am scared to use them. Look at this design, using a Stellite ball. Stellite is tough and will not corrode when exposed to our rocket propellants. And precision Stellite balls are available off-the-shelf."

"Why don't we use it then? What's the problem?" I know this will be my next assignment.

"Our model shop can't put it together, I can't make my point! They claim it cannot be done! It is frustrating with these characters. This design is the best in my opinion. Can you straighten the model shop out, Helmut?"

"I like the design too, it's neat and simple. There is no problem, Dave. You spin the armature lips over the ball; that is all. Hydraulic pumps use a similar design and they do it all the time."

"Helmut, can you show the model shop how to do it? But the ball should be free to rotate with a maximum play of five tenth (.0005 inch in engineering English) at the most."

"Sure, we don't want to lose poppet stroke, I know."

"I got a few experimental armatures and balls here for you. If we can demonstrate it can be done, it will go a long way towards finishing this valve design. Don't let Mac in the model shop bother you."

"I got him trained now, Dave, he will be fine. The magic word is VP Paul." Dave grins; he has been down this alley. I guess Berlin, New York and LA are very much alike.

I go down to the model shop to make the arrangements. "When is a good time to develop an assembly method for this assembly, Sir? I need a lathe operator for a day at the most. I would like to finish the job this week so I can mention it in my weekly report."

"Call me Mac, like everybody else here. How about tomorrow morning, Steve is almost done with his present job?"

"Call me Helmut, Mac. This will be great. I will be here at eight tomorrow. Thank you very much."

Steve and I start out with a cup of coffee. I explain to him what needs to be done. "To roll the lip over we need the knurling tool, except we will grind the rolls over to remove the teeth. Should the tool crip squawk, I will tell them it is a sacrifice to Apollo. Let's do that first."

Steve got the idea and we are ready in no time.

"Chuck up the armature in a collet, install the ball with a little grease and move the rollers to press against the armature lip at a 45 degree angle. Put lots of oil on the ball to give us the clearance we want. Let it turn slowly and press. See how the lip rolls over?"

"This is easy. Neat!"

"Let's place an indicator in front of the ball and a long thin rod on the other side through the lathe spindle. We can now measure the play and roll it a little more if we have too. Move the ball back and forth to measure the play. What do you read, Steve?"

"A little more than five tenths? I will roll it little more, that will do it!"

"You got it, Steve!"

"Let me do the other armatures by myself, Helmut. I want to prove something to Mac."

"More power to you, Steve!"

I am back in the office; I knew it was easy. "Is that what you had in mind, Dave?" I place the armatures assemblies on his desk. "Try how the balls roll, the play is less then three tenths. I think we've got it!"

"We sure do! Thanks! That will wrap it up!"

This lousy Workmanship has to stop!

1965/1966

I am surprised when Bob Steele comes over to my desk. "Dave told me to see you, Helmut. We got a problem and I need your help." Bob is the Propellant Valve Assembly supervisor.

"I have to show you something on the microscope. Can you come over to us in the cleanroom? I would like to know what you think."

"I'll be there in a minute, Bob."

Bob and I have been working together on a number of problems before. He knows that I am a journeyman tool and die maker/machine fitter by trade--and I am proud of it-- before I studied engineering. That helps a lot to understand many odd problems, including manufacturing problems.

It was a year ago, when Bob pointed out to me that the Rocketdyne deburring specification calls for a ten-power magnifying lens as the inspection tool, when at least a thirty power stereo microscope is necessary. I wrote a specification for the Rocketdyne small engine division and let Bob review the draft before we went to the coordination meeting with the quality control department. The quality control, the engineering and the manufacturing departments attend the coordination meetings of specifications. They review and approve the documents for release.

"This thirty power inspection is unenforceable; don't you think so Mr. Steel?" The QC man objects and is trying to get manufacturing on his side.

Here is a guy supposed to look out for the quality of the product. I have no idea what's motivating him. He has played engineering against manufacturing many times before. What QC does not know is that this time Bob, manufacturing, and I, engineering, have worked it out beforehand.

"I think that a thirty power stereo microscope inspection is a must," Bob emphasizes. "I see it every day. Why do you say no?"

"It will turn into splitting hair. My God, thirty power? That's unnecessary!" The Quality Controls inspector insists.

"Don't you think we have to do a better job? I feel very strongly about that. I wrote to use a thirty power stereo microscope in the specification, because one cannot see the fine burrs at a lesser magnification. I insist that this requirement remains in the specification, I will not back off." I let him know.

"Why don't we vote on this issue?" Bob suggests.

It is two to one; the specification is approved. So much for Quality Control! Fortunately, that was settled a year ago.

On my way to the cleanroom I wonder what Bob has that is so important.

I have 'Secret Clearance' and with my green tag, I am allowed into the cleanroom where the valve assembly takes place.

To keep contamination out of delicate assemblies the *cleanroom* is sealed to the environment and is slightly pressurized with clean filtered air.

To get in I have to put on the special gown, a cap and plastic booties to cover my shoes.

I find Bob inspecting a valve armature-poppet assembly for burrs with a microscope at the now typical thirty times magnification. He is looking from all angles at the half-inch diameter and one inch long solenoid armature.

At thirty times magnification, a human hair looks like a one sixteenth inch thick nail.

"Look at this crap they want us to assemble, Helmut? No wonder we have problems. And then I am being blamed for not supervising my people. This is what Quality Control passed as meeting the drawing requirements."

I am familiar with microscopes--I wrote the book--and adjust the light and focus to suit my eyes.

"You are right Bob," without taking my eyes off the armature. "The shop did a lousy job. I see fine burrs hanging on a number of places. They will certainly jam the valve.

You know Bob, before WW2 I worked on aircraft parts for the *Luftwaffe* in Berlin. As a craftsman I would have been too proud to ship stuff like this."

The operating clearances in the valve are a fraction of a hair, and small loose steel burrs will be pulled into the gap by the magnetic field when the valve is energized. It will be catastrophic for the moon mission.

"You are definitely right Bob. Do you know who makes these parts?"

"They are made by our sister division on Crenshaw Boulevard in LA. I don't know why we don't make them ourselves right here at Rocketdyne. They would look better, I'm sure."

"Bob, this we have to stop! Our astronauts may never make it back to earth.

"Let me talk to Dave to bring him up-to-date. He may have an idea how to handle this."

When I tell Dave what Bob and I have found, he groans, "I wanted to make the valves here at Rocketdyne, I was overruled. We have to do something! There are a number of these valves on the Reaction Control System and their function is vital. The Apollo capsule may lose control in space. God forbid!"

"Maybe if I go there and teach them, Dave?"

"Let me think about it. I'll let you know."

A couple of days later Dave and I sit together and we discuss what to do.

"Why don't you go to our Crenshaw division once a week and inspect about a dozen or so of the critical parts each time you go. I will give you the contact engineer's name and he will get you the parts, which are ready to be shipped. They are cleaned to our spec and double wrapped. It'll cost them to go through these procedures a second time. That's too bad!

Don't just tell them what they do wrong, record everything. *Capish*, Helmut? Record everything you do and the results, and note comments from the people around you about our effort."

"I'll start tomorrow, Dave." The Crenshaw division (on Crenshaw Blvd) contact engineer greets me and points out a place for me in the inspection department. I set the microscope to thirty times and go over the valve parts with a fine-tooth comb. Dimensionally all parts are fine.

But many parts have burrs, very thin hair-like burrs at certain places. Like the ones I saw in our cleanroom. I take many notes and make sketches as Dave had insisted.

For four weeks now, I have inspected many valve parts and pointed out to the Crenshaw people why these parts are rejects and need to be reworked.

"They have to be repaired before you can ship them." I tell them repeatedly. According to my data, I made hardly any progress during the last weeks. About twenty percent of the parts are rejects. That is terrible!

In my Weekly Progress Report to Dave, I point out that all bad parts were passed by one inspector.

The solution is obvious! Get this inspector off our program!

I just started another day of checking parts when the burly union steward from the Crenshaw division comes into the inspection room and growls at me.

"When are going to finish your witch hunt? You cost us a fortune re-cleaning and repackaging all these perfect parts."

I try to answer as calmly as I can. "The rejection rate is over twenty percent, that's how bad it is. I found out that only one of the inspectors cannot see the burrs and is causing all the problems. He obviously doesn't know or doesn't care how to do this job. He shouldn't be working on this program."

"He is entitled to have as many hours of overtime as anybody else," is the steward's reply.

"But he can't do the job! This is a critical program. Look at the big note on each drawing, MAN—RATED. We'll never make it to the moon this way." I try to reason with him.

"This is your opinion, and I give a dam about your opinion. This man is a certified inspector; I have his certification on file. He knows what he is doing. By the way, who are you, anyway?"

"Sir, I am your customer, I am from Rocketdyne."

"What a joke, Rocketdyne is a division of North American Aviation, like us, we are one-and-the-same. Let me tell you something. Don't you dare to come back!" He shouts.

I get up from my chair and maneuver the chair between us. He looks me over a couple of times and with clenched fists walks out of the room.

That doesn't leave me much of a choice. All I can do is pack up my notebook and drive back to Rocketdyne in the San Fernando Valley. But his words are ringing in my ears and will go into my report, verbatim. I will also mention that our work is done at overtime rates.

When I step into Dave's office, he looks at me. I don't have to say anything.

"I knew it, I knew it!" Dave pounds his desk.

He must have anticipated what happened. "Write a formal detailed report, Helmut. You know, Summary, Introduction, Description and Corrective action--the works. Make sketches of the parts, location of the burrs, and the number of discrepancies during each time you were there so it shows we did a thorough job. Write down what you just told me and use all your data. I will submit the report to our Rocketdyne Small Engine chief engineer."

It is only a few weeks later and Rocketdyne has started to manufacture these valves "*In House*."

Now Dave, Bob and I have a chance to see to it that they also will be spacecraft quality. But shop foreman Bob Steele and I--representing engineering--have an understanding, we will do whatever it takes to make sure these valves will be craftsman-like.

"I'll keep an eye on it, Dave. I work very close with Bob Steele; he watches it too," I tell Dave to put him at ease.

The first valves--manufactured in our own shop at Rocketdyne--come to the cleanroom for assembly when I get a phone call from Bob. "Helmut, take a look at the new parts here in the cleanroom. They are better but not by much. They are a long way from what they should be. Now what are we going to do?"

I see Bob in the cleanroom inspecting the valve parts. I am very disappointed. I had hoped all our problems would be over--wishful thinking! We hardly made any progress.

"Bob, I know engineering is officially out of the picture, and I know it is against the rules. But, if I had always obeyed the rules, I would be in jail in East Berlin, or worse!

But we don't have to break any rules; we amend a rule. Even the American Constitution has been amended a few times. "Here is my plan. I'll prepare a dozen or so large glossy pictures of parts under the

microscope at thirty times enlargement, to illustrate what the parts should not look like, like these here..."

Bob adds, "I am not going to assemble these parts, right Helmut? The pictures would show they are bad, right?"

"You got it! It will probably bring QC on stage to complain. Then we can turn on the lime light and show what a lousy job they are doing. I would like to see anybody who will dare to tell us we have to use defective parts!"

"This has never been done before, Helmut, but I like it! I think it'll work!" Bob is enthused.

"I think I will make a formal looking but unofficial little booklet with a formal sounding title--*Assembly Aid*--with a lot of glossy photos of good and of bad parts. "

"We have to teach QC that they are supposed to stand **for quality**. So far they stood only in the way."

I do not have to convince Cliff, my new supervisor in the Apollo engine Group, he is all for it. He has been following the effort to get better quality parts. "How about also a display of some actual good and bad parts, Helmut?"

"In a fancy mahogany box to make it look impressive, right?" I add.

In a few days, I have three *Assembly Aid* copies--each with ten large glossy photos we made in the engineering test lab. The mahogany sample box is ready too. It looks very official. A varnished glossy mahogany jewelry box contains three good armature assemblies without burrs and three bad armature assemblies showing burrs at the usual places.

I show the booklet and the box to Cliff, "What do you think? Cliff? I think it will make all the difference!"

"Yes, I think so too. However, brace yourself Helmut. Brace yourself for battle. We are stepping on their turf."

"I think this *Assembly Aid* and the box will do it! I think Bob Steele and I can handle it."

"Hello Bob, I have a present for you, I'll meet you in the cleanroom."

The *Visual Aid* booklet is in an official-looking plastic bag and the box is hidden in my pocket--I am not supposed to bring anything into the cleanroom, which has not been officially processed.

I go over to the cleanroom to get things rolling.

Bob is impressed by the cover, **VISUAL AID**.

A short introduction on page two and ten large glossy photographs.

"The pictures are great, Helmut. Now everybody can see what we are talking about. Do you have an heirloom in that box? Let's see!

"I love it!

"Let me start with my lead man. This Visual Aid booklet will be our bible. I will refuse to let my guys assemble parts that are defective as specified by this bible. Don't stand close to the fan, Helmut!"

I am close to the phone all day, ready to do whatever I have to. At the end of the day, I call Bob, "Are you still alive, Bob?"

"Very much so, Helmut. You wouldn't believe it. QC is not as stupid as we thought. With the tail between their legs, they collected all defective parts and smuggled them out of the cleanroom for rework. They plan to re-work and re-clean the parts and smuggle them back in here. There will be no trace of these rework operations.

"But in the end, we will have good parts for assembly; and my guys will be riding QC. This time *we* got *them*. Thanks to your Visual Aid. Why don't we always do that?"

"I am happy to hear that, I feel better now. I couldn't sit in my office and let a bad thing happen. Thanks for telling me, Bob. I'll tell Cliff and Dave too. Thanks again!"

In March 1966, I received this award from our chief engineer and the VP Paul (Vogt), the man that everybody feared.

This quality improvement program was recognized by the Rocketdyne PRIDE AWARD committee in Recognition of Outstanding Performance, made possible through the individual acceptance of

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY IN DAILY EFFORT.

S.J. Domokos
Chief Engineer

Paul R. Vogt
Vice President and General
Manager



Apollo was a success. Our astronauts walked on the moon and came back alive

*Work is slowing down at Rocketdyne
1968*

Almost all-engineering work on rocket engines for the Apollo moon-landing program is completed. There is talk about layoffs at Rocketdyne. By chance, I was able to see a man-hour forecast for the next five years for engineers.

The number of engineers will be reduced from several thousand to a few hundred. Wow!

My present assignment is a U.S. Air Force study on design features of valves that work in particle contaminated fluids. It is a worthwhile program but I know it is only temporary.

Job opportunities in the city will deteriorate when Rocketdyne will lay off engineers by the hundreds. Until now, I have never paid any attention to head hunters. I should do so now.

While visualizing how the hardware should be designed to minimize the affects of contamination-- the phone interrupts.

"Mr. Standke, I am calling for a company that looks for a senior designer of hydraulic, pneumatic and electro magnetic aircraft components, do you happen to know someone?"

"Yes, I do. What is the name of the company?"

"They are near the airport, about two hundred people strong with a twenty five million gross; a solid company. They are starting an engineering department. Would you be interested Mr. Standke?"

"Yes, let's talk!"

"I will make an appointment for you and call you back. Nice talking to you, Mr. Standke."

It takes an hour to drive to Consolidated Controls Corporation in El Segundo for my job interview. I try to get paid for my time on the freeway and I am timing my drive to the company. When I get paid for travel to work I wouldn't mind driving, I figure.

Consolidated Controls, Corp. 1968

I am in the conference room with the general manager Joe Fontana, the chief engineer and a bunch of other people. Several design and manufacturing problems the company is trying to solve are presented to me to see how I would handle it. After I explained how I solved similar problems in the past they were very interested. Joe Fontana knows my background as chief engineer at Atchley--I sold torque motors to Consolidated Controls while I was at Atchley.

I sense that they want me as soon as possible.

"We are in the process to enlarge our engineering department and we are looking for hands-on aerospace engineers. Several proposals to Boeing for the 747 jumbo jets look interesting and we want to submit proposals. Some of our products need updating and support," the general manager Joe Fontana explains.

"We also make servo valves for industrial robots; we have our share of problems there. I hope you can get this thing resolved.

"How soon can you join us?"

Consolidated Controls Corp. and the people I meet make a good impression. What I really like is to work as a project and development engineer again, to design and develop new devices, improve existing products, guide manufacturing, estimate cost and deal with customers and suppliers.

We agree on the money, including a nice raise, and I will start in two weeks, April 1968.

My work at Consolidated Controls Corp. from 1968 to 1989 included:

**Proposal and marketing work with customers,
Design, development,
Fabrication and testing of:**

Door Speed Control Snubbers for the 747, 757 and 767 Boeing passenger planes,

Engine Start Bleed and Anti-Icing Valves for US Army helicopters Blackhawk and Apache T700 engines,

Engine Start Bleed valves for the US Marines Surface Affect Landing Crafts,

Oxygen Compartment Door Latches to release the emergency oxygen masks for all American Passenger Aircraft,

Brake Valves for the 747, 737 Boeing planes and the B2 super sonic bomber,

Burst Disks for aircraft, missiles and nuclear submarines,

Rollers and Wheels for Boeing freight planes,

Hydraulic Wing Tank Controls for NATO and US Marines Tornado attack planes,

Hydraulic Servo Valves for industrial robots.

In addition, many other projects for aircraft and defense Systems.

*It was 21 years of challenges, progress and success. It was an inspiration to work with many outstanding engineers. All programs were/are very successful, technically and financially. **I loved my job!***

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY, HELMUT STANDKE

1968 - 1977 **Consolidated Controls Corporation**

1980 - 1989

“ “ “

El Segundo, Calif.

Program Manager/Project Engineer. Mr. Standke joined Consolidated Controls Corporation in 1968 and has been responsible for the design and development of cryogenic valves for Saturn V, pneumatic and hydraulic control valves, shut-off valves, servo valves, engine start bleed and anti-icing valves, burst disks, etc., for aerospace and general applications. Proposal work for CCC during 1977-1980.

1977 - 1980 **Dura Products Corporation**

Los Angeles, California

Mr. Standke was Part owner and Chief Engineer, designed, manufactured Torque Motor operated Dual Air - Oxygen mixture, pulse and flow control valves for medical applications.

1963 - 1968 **Rocketdyne, Div. of North American Aviation**

Los Angeles, California

Mr. Standke was Senior Design and Development Engineer of Transtage, Gemini, Apollo, Lance, and J-2 propellant valves and filters; space engine propellant systems, component selection, specification and testing. He participated as principle investigator in the US Air Force study program AFRPL-67-290 to determine design criteria for contamination environment present in rocket propulsion systems.

1957 - 1963 **Raymond Atchley, Inc. (Abex)**

1977 - 1980 **Atchley Controls, Inc.**

Los Angeles, California

Mr. Standke was Chief Engineer, Vice President Engineering and the key engineer in the design and development of the entire line of the Atchley Jet Pipe High Reliability Servo Valve and torque motors, used on Minuteman, Polaris, and missile, aircraft and industrial control systems and robots.

1955 - 1957 Lear incorporated

Los Angeles, California

Mr. Standke worked as Design Engineer, designed, and developed high RPM alternators, APU's and electro magnetic power steering systems

1952 - 1954 Electromechanic GMBH

Olpe, Germany

Mr. Standke was a Design and Development Engineer. Designed and developed automatic hydraulic transmissions, self-contained hydraulic actuators, electro-magnetic iron particle clutches and controls.

1949 - 1952 High Frequency Laboratories

Berlin, Germany

Development Engineer. Designed and developed precision miniature microphones, telephones and sound analyzers.

1940 - 1945 German Navy

Fire control and fire control computer calibration and maintenance.

1935 - 1940 Knorr-Bremse AG

Berlin, Germany,

Graduated as Tool and Die Maker/Machine Fitter Journeyman.

EDUCATION

- 1935 - 1939 Technical High-School Knorr-Bremse, Berlin, Germ.
- 1940, 1943 Navy (Kriegsmarine) Ship Artillery College, Germany
- 1945 - 1949 BSME, Gauss Engineering State College, Berlin, Ger.
- 1951 Industrial Economics, University of Dresden, Germany
- 1962 Advanced Mathematics, University of California, LA
- 1964 Business Administration, University of California LA
- 1965 Spacecraft Engine Theory, Rocketdyne, Division of North American Aviation

PATENTS

Mr. Standke holds the following patents,

- 1) EXPLOSION PROOF ELECTRO-MAGNETIC PARTICLE
CLUTCH, GERMAN PATENT 1,046,420 1959
- 2) LATCH ASSEMBLY
UNITED STATES PATENT 3,764,172 1973
- 3) BI-DIRECTIONAL FLOW CONTROL DEVICE
UNITED STATES PATENT 4,596,321 1986
- 4) TURBO ENGINE TEMPERATURE MODULATING
HOT AIR FLOW CONTROL VALVE
UNITED STATES PATENT 4,802,621 1988
- 5) THERMO MODULATING HOT AIR CONTROL VALVE
UNITED STATES PATENT 4,775,117 1988

Inventions

Designs

Patents

Magnetic Iron Particle Clutch, 1953
German Patent 1046420

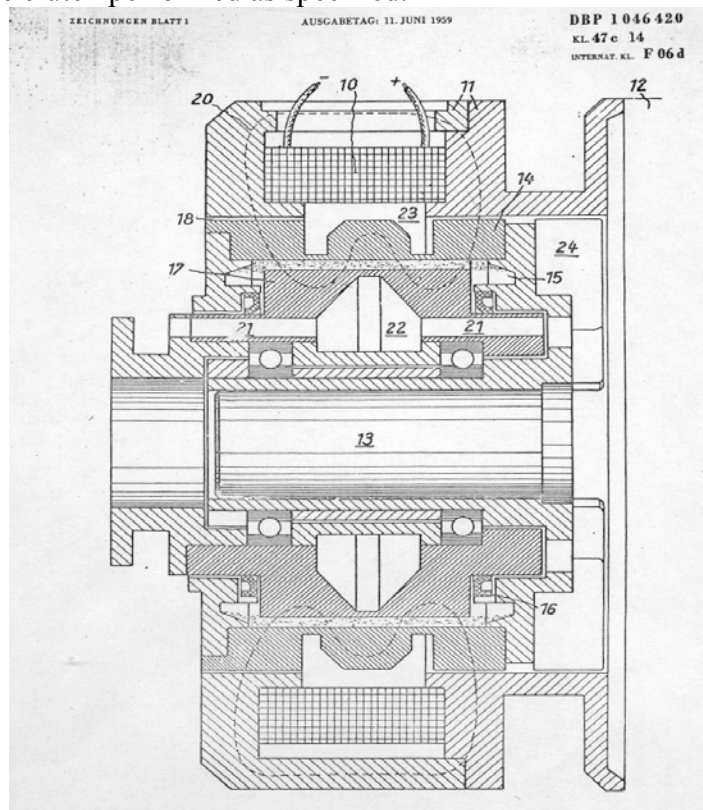
This clutch design is for a 100 KW motor (approx. 30" diameter by 60" long). A magnetic field is required to magnetize the rotating inner poles and the iron powder between these poles to engage the clutch. Slip rings are ruled out for reliability reasons and the potential use of this clutch in an explosive environment.

A large cast iron stationary pole on the motor face surrounds the outer rotating pole of the clutch, separated by narrow air gaps.

When the coil is energized, the magnetic flux will go through the air gaps to the outer rotating pole--which is connected to the motor shaft--and then through the iron powder to the inner rotating pole of the clutch, which is part of the output flange.

The magnetized iron powder will clutch both rotating poles. The clutch torque is proportional to the coil input current.

Restricting the cross section area of the rotating poles will magnetically saturate the narrow sections and redirect the magnetic flux again through the powder, minimizing the number of air gaps required, reducing power loss. Cast iron material is normally not used for magnetic circuits. However, the size of this device and the ease of casting large pieces made it attractive. I have designed large cast iron transformers to energize clutches. The use of cast iron as a magnetic material was new and many predicted failure. The first large cast iron transformer performed as predicted. The magnetic flux density in the cast iron section is held to less than half one would normally use for steel and the clutch performed as specified.



Magnetic Iron Particle Clutch, German Patent 1046420



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DBP 1 046 420

KL. 47c 14

INTERNAT. KL. F 06d

ANMELDETAG: 7. AUGUST 1954

BEKANNTMACHUNG
DER ANMELDUNG
UND AUSGABE DER
AUSLEGESCHRIFT: 11. DEZEMBER 1958

AUSGABE DER
PATENTSCHRIFT: 11. JUNI 1959

STIMMT ÜBEREIN MIT AUSLEGESCHRIFT
1 046 420* (E 9390 XII/47c)

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Es sind Magnetpulverkupplungen bekannt, bei denen der Magnetfluß mehr als zweimal durch den Arbeitsspalt tritt, was durch mehrere Erregerwicklungen erreicht wird, die je einen Magnetfluß bewirken. Bei zwei Erregerwicklungen kann so der Arbeitsspalt dreimal vom Magnetfluß durchsetzt werden, jedoch erfordert dies einen hohen Aufwand, da die Erregerwicklungen verhältnismäßig kostspielig hergestellt und eingebaut werden können.

Nach der Erfindung wird nun der Querschnitt des vom magnetischen Fluß durchsetzten Eisenweges durch Eisenquerschnittsverengungen an dem einen Kupplungsteil bei entsprechender Eisenquerschnittserweiterung an dem anderen Kupplungsteil so aufgeteilt, daß bei nur einem Magnetkreis der magnetische Fluß mehr als zweimal den Arbeitsspalt durchsetzt. Dadurch wird bei nur einer Erregerwicklung eine gleichmäßigere, über den Arbeitsspalt verteilte Kraftübertragung und damit eine bessere Ausnutzung des Magnetpulvers erreicht, was insbesondere bei Kupplungen größerer axialer Ausdehnung von besonderer Bedeutung ist.

Durch die Eisenquerschnittsverengungen in den Kupplungsteilen gebildeten Hohlräume wird vorzugsweise ein natürlicher und/oder ein zwangsläufiger Kühlmittelstrom geführt, um der durch die Hohlräume verminderten Wärmeleitfähigkeit und Wärmekapazität der Kupplungsteile entgegenzuwirken. Es kann hierdurch eine sehr wirksame Kühlung der Kupplungsteile erreicht werden, wodurch die Leistungsfähigkeit der Kupplung bzw. die Lebensdauer der Pulverfüllung erhöht wird. Der zwangsläufige Kühlmittelstrom kann z. B. durch ein mit dem Primärteil der Kupplung umlaufendes Kreiselrad erzeugt werden, wobei dieses Kreiselrad auf der Motorseite in einem von dem Motorlagerschild begrenzten Gehäuse angeordnet ist. Bei Verwendung einer Magnetpulverkupplung oder -bremse mit feststehender, unter Bildung eines Luftspaltes die Kupplungsteile umschließender Erregerspule ist der Luftspalt zwischen der Erregerspule und den Kupplungsteilen vorzugsweise in den Kühlmittelstrom eingeschaltet.

Die Zeichnung zeigt ein Ausführungsbeispiel des Gegenstandes der Erfindung in einem Querschnitt.

Die Erregerwicklung 10 wird umgeben und gehalten vom Spulenhalter 11, der am Lagerschild 12 des Antriebsmotors verschraubt ist. Die Motorwelle 13 treibt den Primärkupplungsteil 14. Der Magnetpulverraum 15 wird durch die Lippendichtungen 16 abgedichtet. Bei eingeschalteter Erregung überträgt das Magnetpulver die Drehbewegung auf den Sekundärkupplungsteil 17. Der Verlauf des Magnetflusses 20 ist dann wie folgt: Spulenhalter 11, Luftspalt 18, Primärkupplungsteil 14, Magnetpulver-

Magnetpulverkupplung oder -bremse

Patentiert für

Elektro-Mechanik G. m. b. H.,
Wendenerhütte über Olpe (Westf.)

Helmut Standke, Gerlingen (Kr. Olpe, Westf.),
ist als Erfinder genannt worden

2

Sekundärkupplungsteil 17, Magnetpulver, Primärkupplungsteil 14, Magnetpulver, Sekundärkupplungsteil 17, Magnetpulver, Primärkupplungsteil 14, Luftspalt 18, Spulenhalter 11.

Der Luftspalt 18 trennt den fest am Motor verschraubten Spulenhalter 11 von den sich drehenden Kupplungsteilen, wodurch auch ein Wärmeübergang zwischen diesen Teilen weitgehend verhindert wird. Bei nur zweimaligem Durchgang des Magnetflusses 20 durch diesen Luftspalt 18, dessen Überwindung erhöhte Erregerleistung beansprucht, findet ein viermaliger Durchgang durch das Magnetpulver statt. Durch diese besondere Querschnittsgestaltung des Magnetweges findet der eigentliche Kupplungsvorgang zwischen den beiden Kupplungsteilen 14 und 17 über das Magnetpulver statt.

Durch die Querschnittsverengungen der beiden Kupplungsteile 14, 17 ergeben sich Hohlräume 22 und 23, von denen der Raum 22 durch die Bohrungen 21 einerseits mit der Außenluft und andererseits mit der Saugseite des Lüfters 24 verbunden ist. Der Lüfter wird in seinem auf der Motorseite durch das Motorlagerschild begrenzten Gehäuse unabhängig vom Kupplungszustand mit der Primärdrehzahl angetrieben und bewirkt den Luftumlauf durch 21, 22, 21, 24, 18, 23, 18 nach außen. Die Kupplung wird somit während des Kupplungsvorganges und anschließend ständig gekühlt.

Durch die Kühlung in den Bohrungen 21 sowie in dem Hohlraum 22 wird die Wärme weitgehend von der Lagerung ferngehalten.

Die nicht zur Erfindung, aber zur Erläuterung des Ausführungsbeispiels gehörenden beiden Lippendichtungen 16, die den Magnetpulverraum 15 bei Stillstand des Motors abdichten, sind so gestaltet, daß sie, sich bei einer bestimmten Umdrehungszahl des Motors von ihren Dichtflächen abheben. In diesem

The Jet Pipe Servo Valve
First... in Reliability

Raymond Hitchley, Inc.
AUTOMATION COMPONENTS



**MODEL 415
SERVOVALVE***

FEATURES

CAN PASS 200 MICRON PARTICLES

Because of the unique jet construction, the Model 415 can receive and pass on particles as large as 200 microns in the first and second stage without malfunctioning.

NO UNBALANCE DUE TO OIL CONTAMINATION

Because there is but a single source of oil into the first stage, it is not possible for the valve to become unbalanced or to produce false "hard over" signals due to oil contamination of the first stage.

LOW HYSTERESIS

The servovalve hysteresis is 2% maximum for all input signals.

HIGH RESOLUTION

The Model 415 has a resolution of 0.1%. This is due to the white noise generated by the hydraulic preamplifier, which subtly dithers the second stage to reduce static friction, yet does not appreciably increase leakage.

NO FILTERS

The first-stage oil passes through a single 200 micron screen. The screen may be easily removed for inspection without disassembling the valve.

LOW TEMPERATURE DRIFT

Because of the symmetrical torque motor design and all-welded construction, null shift resulting from oil or environmental temperature changes is approximately 1% for each 100°F.

SERVO-CONTROLLED SECOND STAGE

The second-stage piston is precisely controlled by a high gain, null balance force feedback servo. Because the hydraulic preamplifier is pressure balanced, the position of the second-stage piston does not change with variations in supply or return oil pressure.

WIDE DYNAMIC RANGE

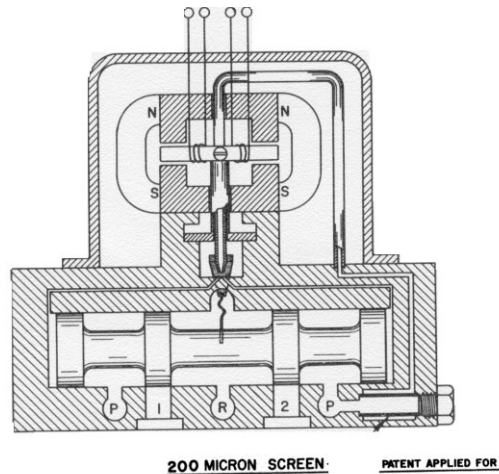
The phase-and-amplitude-versus-frequency characteristics are virtually the same for inputs between a few per cent and fifty per cent of full flow.

DRY TORQUE MOTOR

The hermetically sealed torque motor is completely isolated from the hydraulic fluid.

LOW "G" SENSITIVITY

The first stage is balanced in all three axes against the effects of lateral accelerations and vibration. Acceleration tests on the valve show no effect on the load output from 0 to 2000 cps.



OPERATING DESCRIPTION

Servovalves are commonly used in closed-loop servosystems. They control the flow of fluid to or from a load actuator in proportion to the input differential current signal to the torque motor. Referring to the servovalve diagram, oil is introduced under pressure into cavities marked P. This oil is supplied through a manifold provided by the customer. Ports marked 1 and 2 are connected through the same manifold to the load actuator. Cavity R is connected to the oil return line to the reservoir. The three (or four) torque motor leads are normally driven in push-pull from a vacuum tube, magnetic, or transistor amplifier. In actual operation, the second-stage piston displacement (and hence oil flow) is proportional in magnitude and direction to differential current in the torque motor. The piston is precisely controlled by a push-pull frictionless force feedback servosystem. Here is how it works:

A very small amount of oil flows continuously out of the pressure cavity P into the 200 micron screen, then through the flexible pipe connected to the torque motor armature, and out of the projector jet. The oil flowing from the jet impinges on the two receiver pipes that are connected to each end of the piston. At the null, approximately

$\frac{1}{2}$ line pressure is developed in each receiver pipe and therefore no differential pressure, and hence no net force, exists on the piston. When a differential current is supplied to the torque motor, it develops a force and the armature rotates through a small angle. Assuming the armature rotates counter-clockwise, the jet pipe would be displaced to the right and more oil would impinge on the right-hand receiver pipe and the pressure would increase. Conversely, less pressure would be developed in the left-hand pipe. Thus, a differential pressure (and a net force) exists on the piston which causes it to move to the left. As the piston moves, a counteracting force is transmitted to the jet pipe by a force feedback spring which is connected between the jet pipe and the piston. The piston continues to move to the left until the force created by the feedback spring is equal to the force developed by the torque motor. When this occurs, the jet pipe is again symmetrically positioned over the two receiver pipes, and no differential pressure, and hence no net force, is acting on the piston and it remains at its new position. Thus, the second-stage piston has assumed a position proportional in direction and magnitude to the input differential current in the torque motor. If the differential current polarity is reversed, the piston will move to the other side.

The hydraulic servo valve models 410, 415, 425, and the big 450 were analyzed, designed and drawn in all manufacturing details by me in the first eighteen months I was with Raymond Atchley, Inc. These valves and the similar pneumatic versions of these valves performed well and outperformed all competing designs. They became the sole products of our company.

Atchley, my boss, took my drawings to the patent attorney and claimed all patents.

However, he paid me a good salary, something I could take home.

May 5, 1959

R. D. ATCHLEY
SERVO-MECHANISM

2,884,907

Filed Aug. 30, 1957

4 Sheets-Sheet 2

FIG. 2.

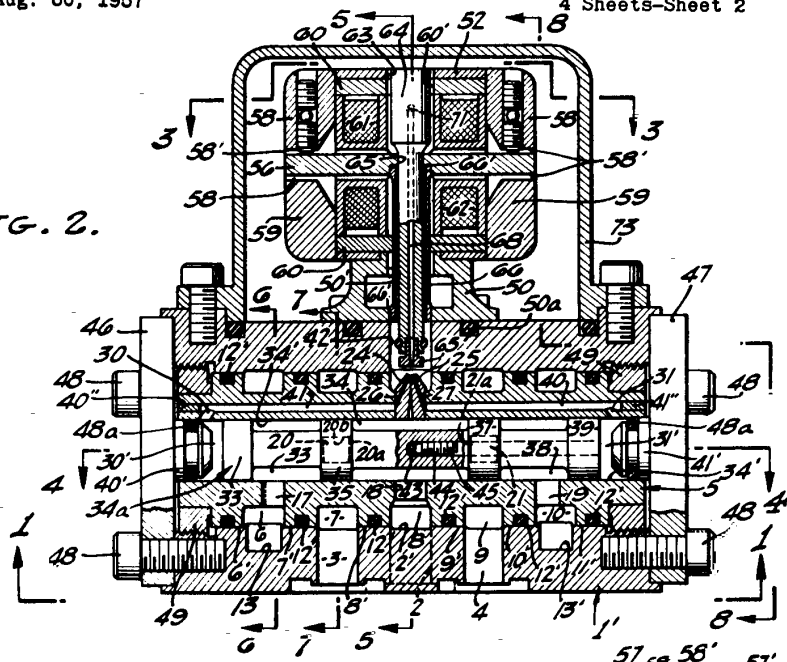
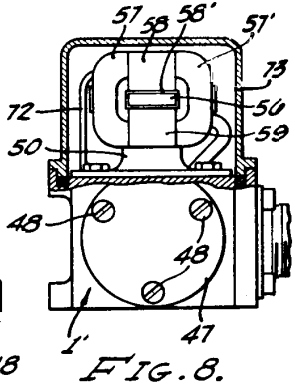
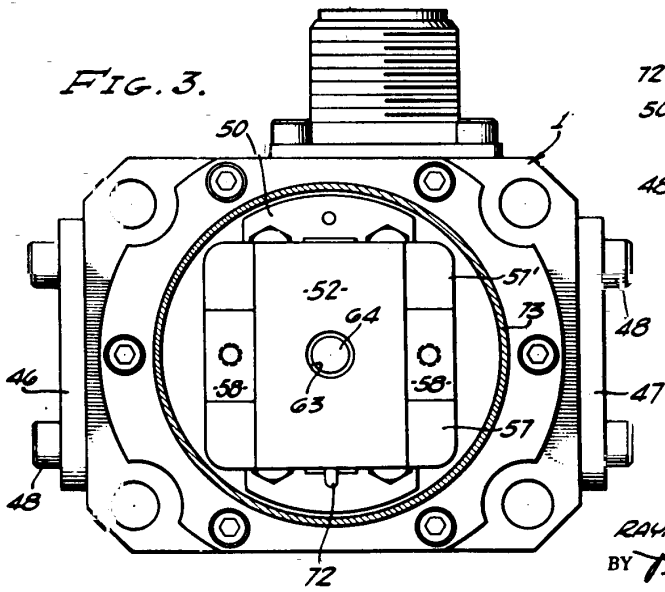


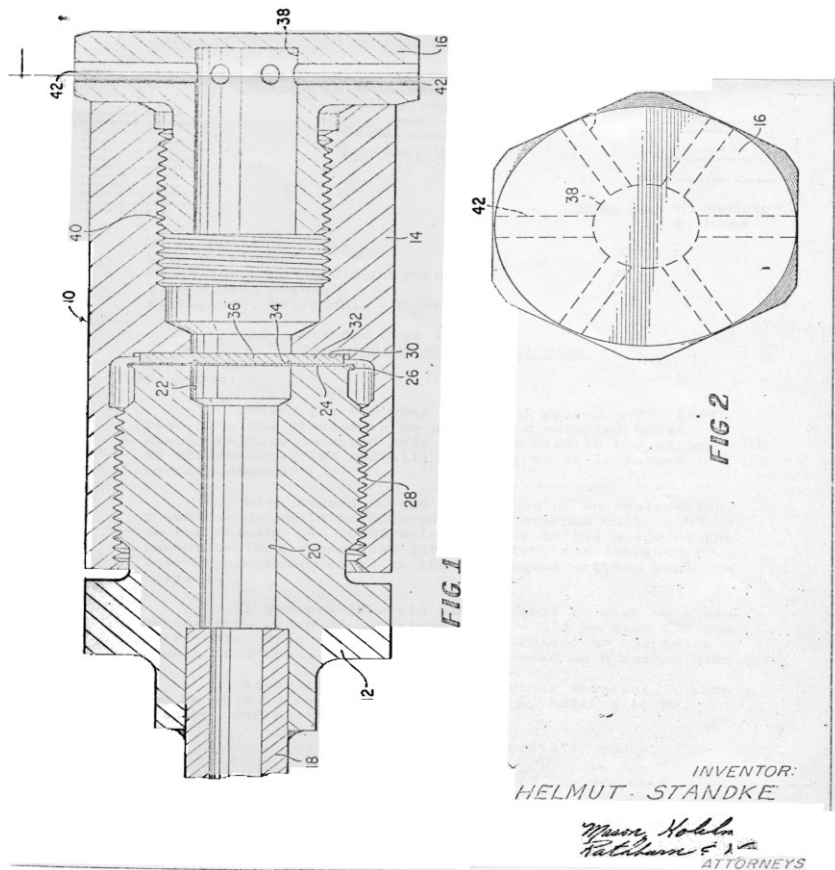
FIG. 3.



INVENTOR.
 RAYMOND D. ATCHLEY
 BY *Philip Sutton*
Max Meinen
 ATTORNEYS

HIGH PRESSURE BURST DISK COMPATIBLE WITH ROCKET PROPELLANTS, 1968

Using a disk of thin Titanium laminated to a conventional pure Aluminum disk.



Latch Assembly, 1973

This latch is used to latch and unlatch the oxygen mask compartment door on passenger aircraft. Normally, the compartment door is held closed by the latch. In case oxygen is required and the masks are to be deployed, an electrical signal triggers the latch to open the compartment door, which allows the oxygen masks to unroll out of the compartment for use by the passenger. The latch striker--mounted to the door--is held in place by the latch mechanism when the door is closed. The mechanism--and the striker-- is held in this latched position by a permanent magnet against the force of a spring. To release the striker and to allow the door to open, an electrical coil is energized. The resulting magnetic polarity opposes the holding force of the permanent magnet until the spring can release a moveable pole plate. The latching mechanism can now spring back, releasing the striker. When the pole plate is pushed back and touches the magnet poles, the door can then be closed and the striker will again hold the door closed.

SMALL LATCHES BRING BIG BUSINESS

BY BILL WANG

In the old days, airplane oxygen compartment doors were triggered by reduced gaseous oxygen pressure when cabin decompression was encountered in flight.

When Lockheed and McDonnell Douglas were designing their L-1011 and DC-10 jumbo jets in 1970, they were planning to use the "Candle" system, which consists of a solid hemical pellet that can be ignited by a spark-generating device. The burning of the pellet releases oxygen through the masks for passengers to breathe during that crucial decompression period. With this system, however, as pressure is not available for triggering the compartment latches. Thus, a new method utilizing a solenoid would have to be used to activate the doors.

CCC developed a design using a latching magnetic latch and a D.C. coil which, upon actuation, develops an opposing field. This nullifies the magnetic latching force, and releases the compartment door, and the oxygen masks.

Each latch is able to develop a holding force of five pounds, weighs 15 pounds, and uses .10 amperes. Using two latches per door, the L-1011 can save about 50 pounds of weight, and uses 80% less electrical current than regular solenoids. This unique design resulted in an initial Lockheed aircraft order for 24,000 latches in 1970.

A few months later, McDonnell Douglas issued a "request for quote" for an oxygen compartment door latch for use on the back of each pas-

senger's seat. That meant more latch business for CCC. However, the new requirements had a catch. They called for a latch that could meet the following conditions:

1. The latch must withstand 50 pounds of pull force without permanent set.
2. The unit must latch with an allowance of $\pm 1/8$ inch mismatch between the mating assemblies.
3. The latch must disengage under a pulling force of .10 pound.
4. To relatch the door, the latch must be reset first by a trained individual before the door can be closed.
5. The latch must be able to be operated manually in case of power failure.
6. The latch must operate with .10 ampere, maximum.
7. The latch must withstand 50g shock without disengaging.
8. The latch must not weigh over .10 pound.

CCC responded to this challenge with a latch design that exceeded all the above requirements. Hundreds of thousands of these latches have been sold since 1972, and CCC is still supplying latches for McDonnell Douglas MD-80 and MD-87 aircraft, and Airbus A300, A310, and A320 airplanes.

CCC's domination of the magnetic latch business is due to strong patent-rights (Wang and Standke) protection of a unique design that has no equal.

CCC

[54] **LATCH ASSEMBLY**
 [75] Inventor: **Helmut Standke**, Woodland Hills, Calif.
 [73] Assignee: **Consolidated Controls Corporation**, Bethel, Conn.
 [22] Filed: **Oct. 29, 1971**
 [21] Appl. No.: **193,782**

Primary Examiner—Richard E. Moore
Attorney—Richard D. Mason et al.

[52] U.S. Cl. **292/15, 292/252**
 [51] Int. Cl. **E05c 5/00**
 [58] Field of Search **292/251.5, 252, 261, 292/299, 305, 144, 201, 15, 16, 75; 335/290; 24/211; 339/91 B**

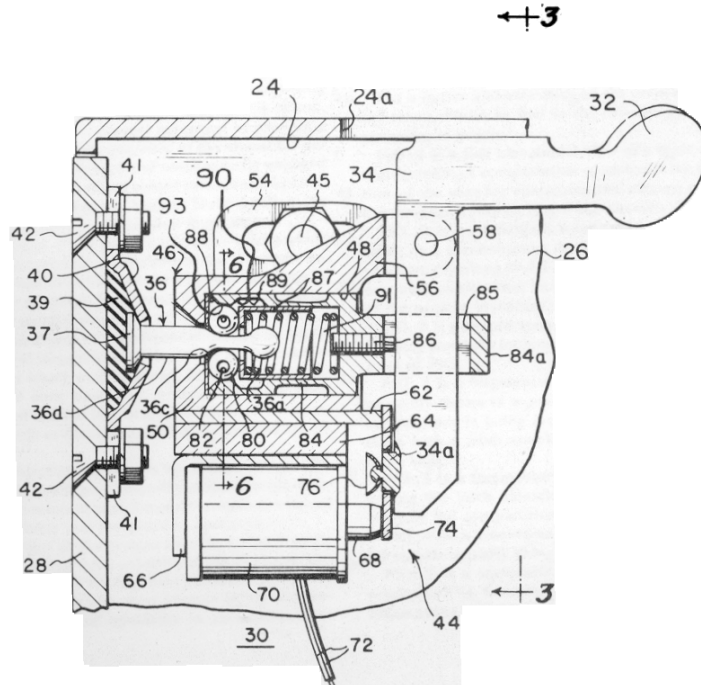
[57] **ABSTRACT**

A latch assembly for a door swingable towards and away from a doorjamb comprising a pair of mechanically engageable latch means mounted on the doorjamb and movable relatively between an engaged, mechanically latched position and an unlatched position. Permanent magnet means is provided for holding mechanically latched engagement between said latch means, and electromagnet means is provided having a polarity while energized opposing said permanent magnet for overcoming the holding force thereof to cause unlatching. One of said pair of latch means includes a pair of relatively movable members with one member being fixed to the jamb and the other member movable relative thereto. Said permanent magnet means is positioned in fixed magnetic relation to the fixed member and normally attracts said movable member to a latch holding position in contact therewith. Said electromagnet means is positioned to act through a lever and repel the movable latch member away from said latched position to said unlatched position when said electromagnet means is momentarily energized.

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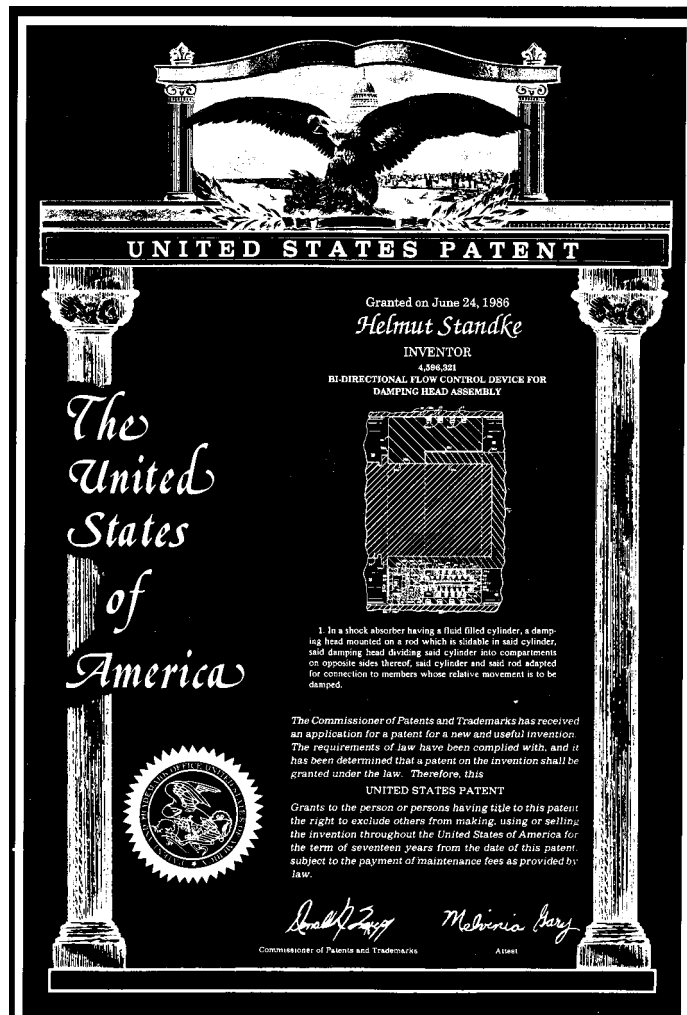
13 Claims, 7 Drawing Figures



**BI-DIRECTIONAL FLOW CONTROL DEVICE
FOR DAMPING HEAD ASSEMBLY, 1988**

United States Patent 4,596,321

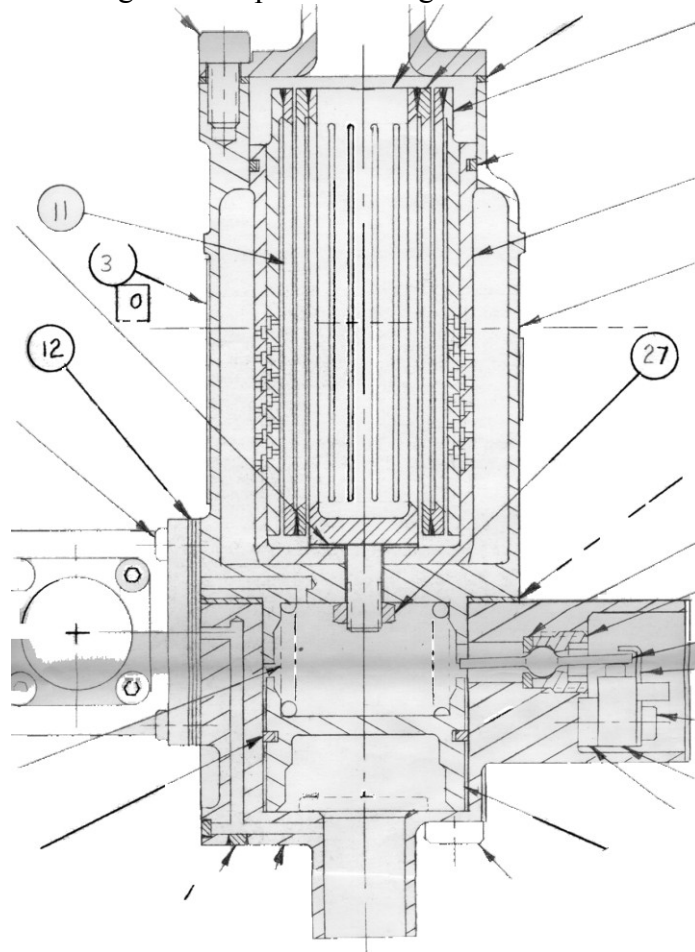
This device--part of an elaborate suspension assembly-- is intended to increase the survival rate of US intercontinental missals in silos during a nuclear attack.



Turbo Engine Temperature Modulated Hot Air Flow Control Valve, 1988

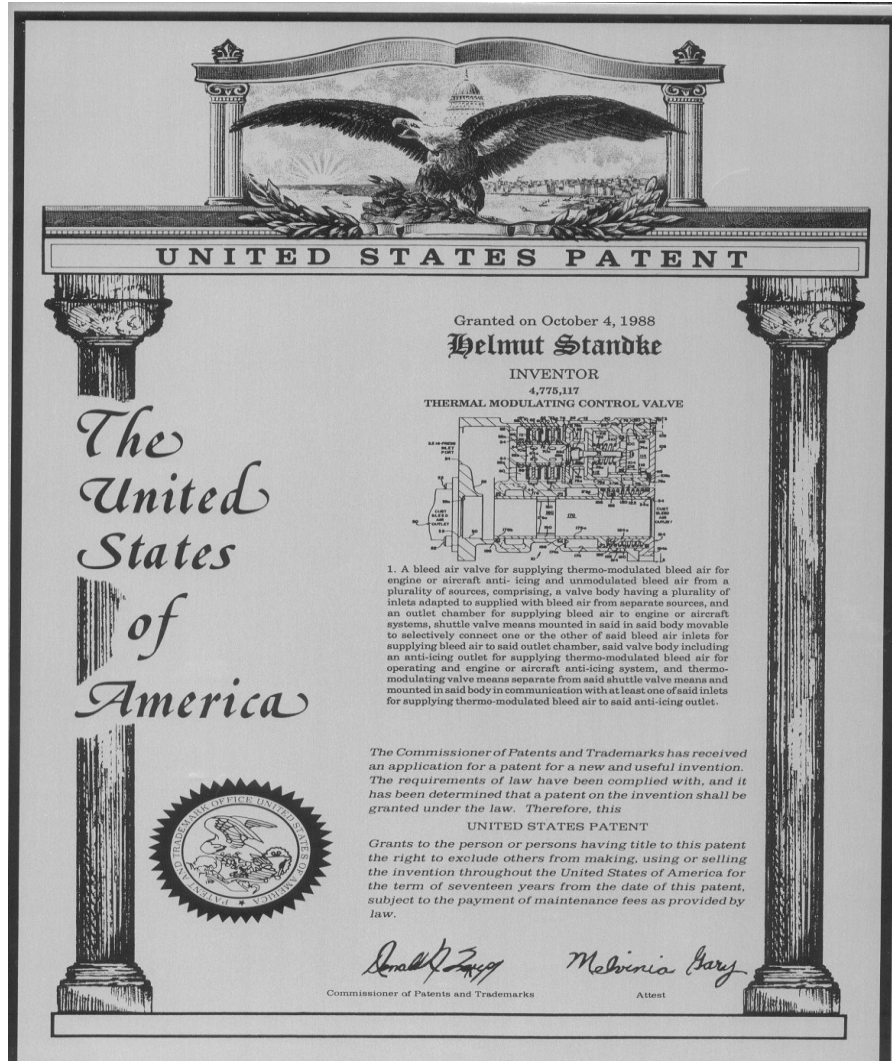
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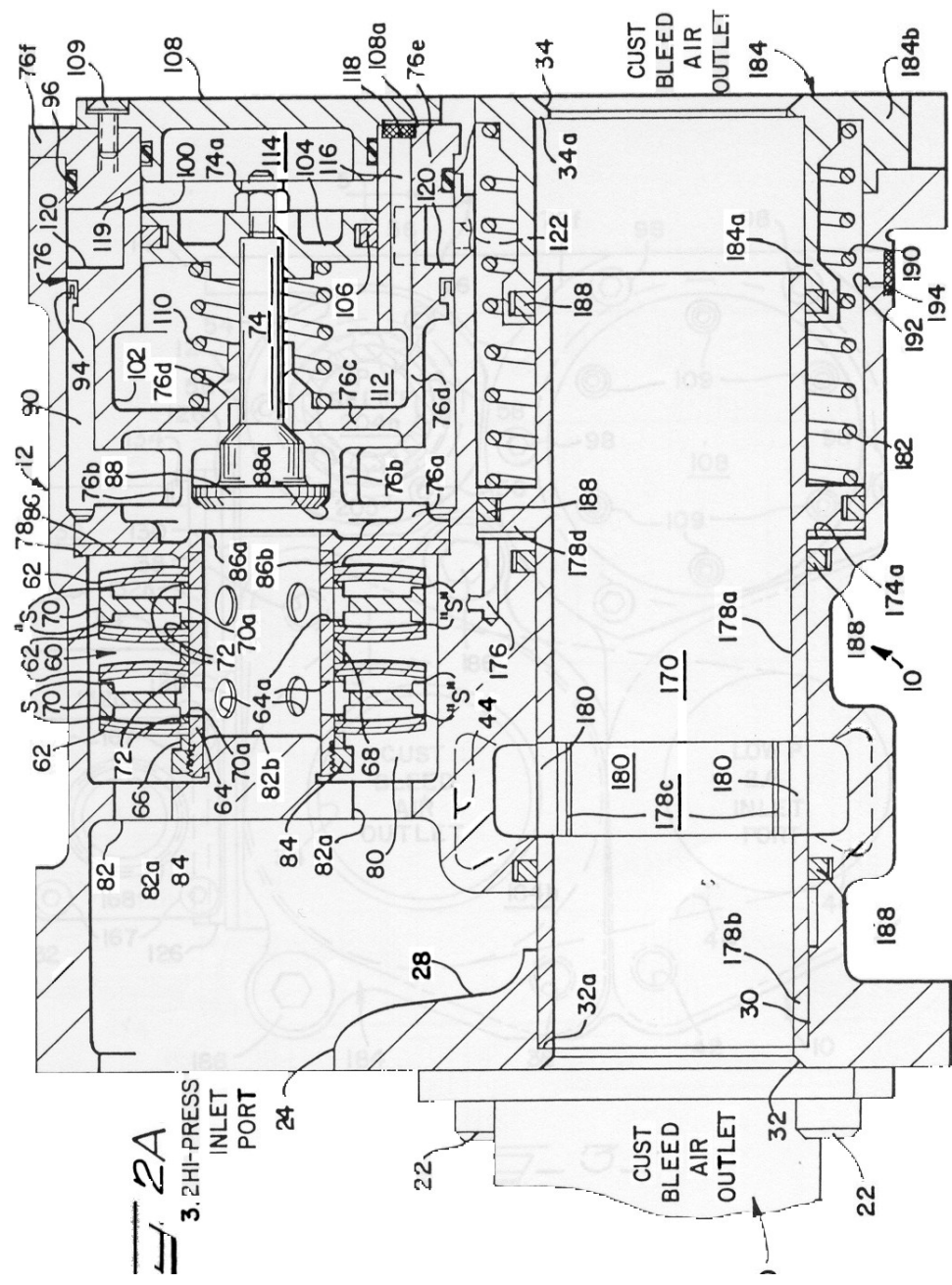
This device controls airflow according to temperature for anti-icing of helicopter turbo engines.



THERMAL MODULATING CONTROL VALVE, 1988

This valve controls airflow according to air inlet temperature. At higher air temperature, less flow is required for anti-icing.





2A
3.2 HI-PRESS
INLET
PORT



HELMUT STANDKE admires the bookend/rotary snubber which he received at his retirement party.



STANDKE RETIRES AND SMILES ON LONG CAREER

BY DOUG EISENBERG

Hearty laughter and a sense of humor to match indelibly mark the character of CCC's effervescent engineer Helmut Standke, who retired August 1.

The good humor, however, can be misleading, because beneath this is a very serious professional with a long and distinctive career.

Since Helmut joined Consolidated Controls as a project engineer in 1968, his accomplishments have included designing and developing Saturn V cryogenic valves, pneumatic and hydraulic control valves, shut-off valves, servo valves, air-bleed valves, and burst discs for aerospace and general applications.

At the time that he came to CCC, the company had about 100 employees, and he was among the original core of engineers. He feels that the company was less formal and structured at the time, and had much less paperwork.

The overriding need for a satisfied customer, however, has remained constant. Also unchanged is that "the company has been well managed, and has made a profit."

"I've enjoyed working with a lot of good people at CCC," Standke said. "The job and the people here have been interesting and refreshing. Looking for new customers and applications in commercial and military sectors has been challenging."

From 1977 to 1980, Helmut took a sabbatical to work at Atchley Controls as vice-president of engineering producing servo-valves used for industrial robots and animation.

After World War II, Helmut earned a B.S. from Gauss Engineering State College in Berlin, not too far from his hometown of Oberschoneweide. To finance his education, he built radios from surplus military equipment. He sold these radios in West Germany in exchange for cigarettes, which he then sold in East Berlin for cash.

After graduating from college, he worked for two years in the electro-acoustical lab at NEF company designing microphones and telephones.

Foreseeing no future in the system which Russia was imposing on East Germany, Helmut skied to West Germany through the Harz Mountains in January, 1952.

Unable to find a job in Munich, Helmut ran out of money and went to a refugee camp. Six months later he received papers identifying him as a West German citizen. He then found work at German General Electric designing and developing hydraulic equipment. At a company picnic, he met his wife Magdalene, who worked in the accounting department.

Continued on Page 7

Seeing that opportunities were scant where they were living, in 1954 Helmut and Magdalene moved to Phoenix, Arizona where she had relatives. He had intended to move to Australia to join his sister, but changed his mind after meeting his wife. Following Helmut's six-month stint working in Phoenix as a shop foreman and tool designer, the Standkes decided to leave the limited industry of Phoenix for California.

In April, 1955, Mr. Standke moved to Santa Monica and began working for Lear, Inc. as a design engineer for high RPM alternators and electrical power steering units used on aircraft.

Following this, he worked for six years as chief engineer at Raymond-Atchley Inc. in West Los Angeles, where he was the key engineer in the design and development of servo valves, and torque motors used on the Minuteman, Polaris, and all present aircraft control systems. Here he had some initial business contacts with CCC.

Prior to coming to CCC, Helmut worked at Rocketdyne in Canoga Park for five years, beginning in 1962. As a senior engineer, he helped to design and develop propellant valves and filters for Transtage, Gemini, Apollo and LANCE.

Along with his other accomplishments, Helmut has helped raise four children, with careers that include electrical engineering, and medicine.

Besides exploring parts of the United States with some of his extra recreation time, Helmut and his wife plan to travel to China, Hong Kong, New Zealand, and Australia ("to see what I may have missed").

I incorporated and continued advanced design and proposal work as Standke Engineering, Inc. until 1989.

Stories of my life by Helmut Standke
Pages 495 to 499

Our Daughter and Sons

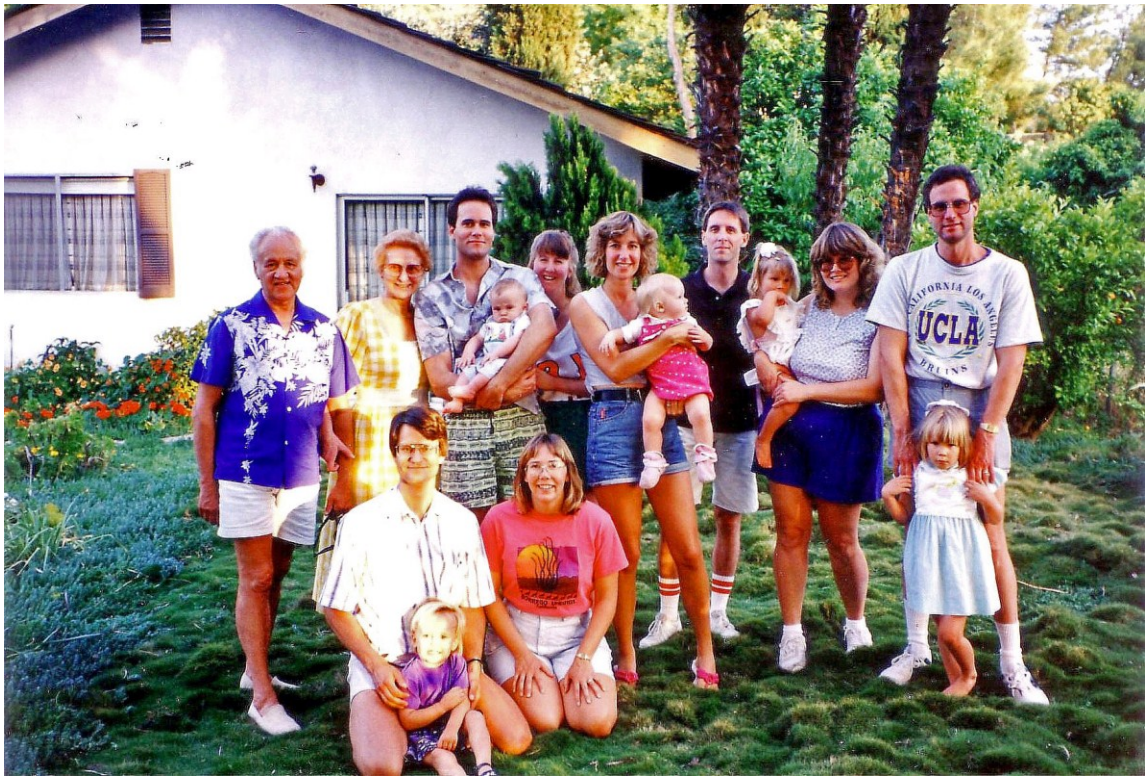


Gary Ingrid Randy Richard



*Our Swimming Pool and two of the boys in the Backyard
Some time ago*

*The Family
In front of the Guesthouse in the Backyard*



The Family In Front of Richard's house, 2005



My 90th Birthday 2010

Our fifties Wedding Anniversary
2004



