

Walter Grunwald

EXPERIENCES

Youth . - . Persecution . - . Liberation

An Autobiography

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The drawings from Wulkow were drawn by my camp mate **Herbert Kolb**, Paramus (USA) and made available to me with many thanks.

In memoriam



**Steffi,
born 14 March 1921,
deported to Auschwitz
on 4 March 1943,
missing**

In memoriam



Steffi in our flat, January 1943

Prologue

In the following biography, I will try to describe my very eventful life as a young person in my country of birth in order to pass on my memories of important events from different periods to later generations.

My fate is not an isolated case; thousands upon thousands experienced the same thing during the persecution, but only very few survived.

In more than 50 years, a lot of grass has grown over what I experienced. Today, details are only very faintly remembered. It is therefore possible that certain incidents do not quite correspond to reality. However, I have endeavoured to describe this period of my life as truthfully as possible. I have therefore refrained from "over-dramatising" and "reconstructing". Further insights have also led me to complete many sections of this biography at a later date. All the names of people, places, towns and squares mentioned are authentic.

The time of persecution was very difficult, the possibility of survival in the concentration camp almost hopeless, but there were nevertheless bright spots that I remember. They were often a great comfort when things were particularly hard.

To summarise, I would like to say that this biography has some positive aspects, but many negative ones. The losses were too great.

The Events will never be forgotten.

The Family

Both my father's and mother's ancestors come from Upper Silesia, places that now belong to Poland. I myself was born on 4 September 1919 in Berlin-Pankow.

My grandparents **Grunwald**, grandfather Isidor and grandmother Nanny, née Braun, who died in 1903, had four children, the boys Max and Georg (my father, born on 20 January 1881) and the girls Else and Anna.

The family moved to Berlin in 1888, as my grandfather was to take over the management of a Jewish orphanage, which later became the 2nd orphanage of the Jewish community in Berlin-Pankow. Due to the premature death of his first wife Nanny, who was only 43 years old, my grandfather had to marry a second time in order to continue the management and economic tasks in the home. He chose Rosa, née Israel, as his second wife. For me, my grandmother Rosa was the "Great Grandma" until her death. Shortly before her deportation to Theresienstadt, she and her sister Clara voluntarily gave up their lives on 22 October 1942.

My grandparents **Kosak**, grandfather Theodor, who died around the turn of the century, and grandmother Emma, née Nippert, came from two Catholic / Protestant families of craftsmen. They had five children, the girls Gertrud, Paula (my mother, born on 23 October 1891) and Margarethe, and the boys Alfred and Hans. To keep the two grandmothers apart, Grandma Emma remained the "Little Grandma" for me.

My parents met before the First World War. My father worked as a pharmacist in the Minerva pharmacy in the north of Berlin and my mother was a customer in this pharmacy. The war came and my father went "into the field" (went to war) as a senior pharmacist with the rank of major, as it was called back then. As far as I remember from my parents' stories, they were engaged shortly after the war began. They married on 14 August 1918, but there were difficulties. My father formally belonged to the Jewish religion, my mother was Protestant, much to the displeasure of my grandfather, who would have preferred to have a Jewish daughter-in-law in the house. In the end, he had to put up with it, as my father didn't give in in any way. From what I learnt later, there was a lot of controversy because my grandfather demanded that his son be more considerate of him as an official of the Jewish community. My father had a different view in this respect. He had hardly any direct ties to the Jewish faith, which was also reflected in his later attitude to religion. It was never really explained to me why he took this view.

you grow up and flourish into a good person, so that the name Grunwald will one day be mentioned in praise of our family and species.
Fulfil this hope, my beloved grandson!"

Grandfather only lived for about 2 ½ years afterwards. He died of a serious illness on 17 February 1925. I was 5 1/2 years old at the time.



The parents: Paula Kosak (Grunwald) and Georg Grunwald

I was unable to find out anything about my grandfather's ancestors. When my grandfather was still a small child, he lost his father. His mother married a second time to a man called Pulvermacher. This gave my grandfather, who also had a sister called Rey, three half-brothers, Leo, Siegmund and David. Even though grandfather was a hard man, the letter he sent me on 30 August 1922 for my 3rd birthday speaks for him and his good core. Here is an extract from this letter:

"My dear grandson Walter!

*On September 4th of this year, you will be three years old. That's not old yet, but I remember events of my life that took place during the time when I was only three years old, and so you will remember your grandfather and the look on his face, how he beamed with inner happiness when he saw you and heard you talk so cleverly and promisingly. Perhaps God will give me the grace and let me live for some time longer, so that I can see you grow up and flourish into a good person, so that the name **Grunwald** will one day be called in glory to our family and kind. Fulfill this hope, my beloved grandson!"*

Grandfather lived only about 2 1/2 years after that. He passed away on 17 February 1925 from a long illness and I was 5 ½ years old.

When my grandfather took over the orphanage, it consisted of two separate houses, which were later replaced by a larger new building in 1912 - 1913 after a fire. In 1941, the orphanage was dissolved and seized by the Gestapo (Secret State Police). Later, the "Zentrale Sichtvermerkstelle" (Central Visa Point) of the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) was housed there. The bars on all the windows, which still exist today, were ordered by the SS as part of the confiscation. The building was spared of war damage and was the temporary headquarters of the Pankow district office (Council) immediately after the end of the war. Under the former GDR regime (East German regime), the building housed the Polish and later the Cuban embassy. Since the end of 1990, the former orphanage has been completely empty and unfortunately at the mercy of total decay.



The 2nd orphanage of the Jewish community in Berlin-Pankow

As far as I have learnt in later years, the house was given to the Israeli state. The question of its use has not yet been resolved.

The first pupils were Russian boys of Jewish faith who came to Berlin as refugees from Pogromen in Russia. My grandfather imposed very harsh but necessary discipline on the pupils, as there were occasional assaults on him by the boys. My father told me that my grandfather would walk through the dormitories at night, armed with a large bunch of keys, to see what was going on. All the boys wore uniform. On Sunday mornings, grandfather would practise the "left-around-right-around-march-march" (left foot – right foot – forward march) etc. in the yard with drummers and flautists. He couldn't forget his own military service as an officer. However, this kind of education stopped after a few years. Grandfather endeavoured to ensure that all the boys entrusted to him received a primary school education, later learned a trade and stayed in the house or an apprenticeship home in Pankow until they were independent. At the beginning of the turn of the century, more and more of the pupils were German orphans, but later they were also half-orphans.

I have one very special memory: every evening, all the boys had to line up in the long corridor in front of their grandparents' private home, in rows of four, from the tallest to the smallest. Grandfather would say "Good night" to each boy and shake his hand. As a small boy, I was present at this ceremony several times, possibly as the smallest in the row or walking down the line holding my grandfather's hand. It was the greatest happiness I could have had at that time. It was characteristic of grandfather that he was a very respected man in Pankow. Every Thursday, the Protestant and Catholic pastors and the mayor of Pankow would meet with him for a twilight drink at Café Preusse in Breite Straße. According to my father, he did this for years

There is one more event that my mother often told me that was typical of the different views. My parents always put up a small Christmas tree for me at Christmas. When my grandfather arrived for a visit, the tree quickly disappeared into the pantry. In other words, outwardly grandfather was very strict about rituals such as kosher food, separate crockery and cutlery for pupils and teachers. In his private home, things were very different. There was even ham on the table, which is normally completely out of the question in a strictly run household. It wasn't so important to him in his own neighbourhood. My parents had no understanding for these ambiguities. They chose their own way of life. My adult education in matters of religion was accordingly, they had no particular significance for me.

After my grandfather's death, my uncle, Max Blumenfeld, who was married to my father's sister Anna, took over the management of the house. After that, contact with my father's former family home was no longer as strong. The families visited each other, of course, but everyone did their own thing.

Max and Anna had two children, their daughter Edith and their son Fritz. Both were older than me. Edith married an Italian doctor, Dr Bermann, in Merano. Shortly before the war, Edith's husband went to America to renew his medical qualification. Edith stayed in Merano with two children and was surprised by the war. During the war, she fought with the partisans with a gun in her hand. After the end of the war, Edith's family was able to reunite in America. Fritz went to a kibbutz in what was then Palestine very early on. Max Blumenfeld died in 1935, after which his wife Anna went to live with her daughter in Italy and was taken to Palestine by her son before the start of the war, where she died in the early 1950s.

A former pupil of the orphanage, Kurt Crohn, who had originally trained as a tailor took over the management of the orphanage. Grandfather encouraged him to train as a teacher. Under Max Blumenfeld, he was already a teacher at the orphanage. He became the successor and last director of the orphanage.

Father's second sister Else was married to Albert Silberberg. They both taught at a horticultural school in Ahlem near Hanover until 1929. They also had a daughter, Hilde. She lived with her husband in Königsberg / East Prussia, but emigrated to America in time. I later had no significant contact with my cousin Fritz and my cousins Edith and Hilde.

Of my mother's siblings, only Alfred and later Hans were married. As I was the only grandchild of my "Little Grandma", I was of course spoilt rotten, which was very gratefully accepted on my part.

The years 1926 – 1932

Life began in earnest for me at Easter 1926 when I started at the 6th primary school at Schulstrasse 29 in Pankow. The school was Catholic, with boys and girls in the same class. During my time at primary school, my parents were very worried about me because of my extensive illnesses. It began with a purulent tonsillitis, which triggered a series of secondary illnesses, the worst of which was rheumatoid arthritis. Constant bed rest for about half a year really upset my school routine. My uncle Max Blumenfeld often sent boys from the orphanage to play with me or keep me company in other ways. But later illnesses also meant that the compulsory four years of primary school shrank considerably. My primary school teacher Steinmetz was sometimes called in to give extra lessons at home.

Walter's First Day at School, Easter 1926

It was probably the winter of 1929/30 and my parents attended the Press Ball in Berlin. At a certain "Örtchen" (Toilet), my father met a former fellow student, Georg Freund, who was editor-in-chief of the Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung. From then on, the families met once a month. The son of the house, Hellmut, was only eight days younger than me. He already had the urge to write at a young age. When the families visited our flat, our poor parents couldn't resist a "cinema show". Still images were shown again and again with a simple projector, Hellmut commented on the same images each time, but then with different texts. As I had already been involved with technical things earlier, "radio programmes" with Hellmut's reportages were also "transmitted". When we visited the Freund's in Tempelhof, "theatre performances" were also on the programme from time to time. We boys were always busy in our own way. The family emigrated to Uruguay in 1938, but returned to Germany after the end of the war. My old friend Hellmut (Freund) now lives in Frankfurt / Main as an editor for the S. Fischer Verlag.

Stays in sanatoriums (Hospital for specialist diseases) brought me back to the point where I was able to transfer to a humanistic grammar school, the Heinrich-Schliemann-Schule, at Easter 1930.

One of my classmates was Günther Hartmann, also from Pankow. We travelled every day on the tram to Schönhauser Allee, on the corner of Gleimstraße. We often ran all the way home from school because we had already spent the fare in an ice cream parlour.

It turned out that Günther's father was a slightly younger classmate of my father. They didn't go to the same class, but they did go to the same Sophien-Gymnasium. As if that wasn't enough, I had two teachers at the Heinrich-Schliemann-Schule, Mr Kluge and Mr Sicker, both former classmates of my father. I didn't gain any advantages from this constellation. I had the absolute opposite impression.

We started Latin in the sexta, Ancient Greek in the quarta and French from the lower terta. I wasn't that interested in ancient languages, I was more interested in science and maths. Because my father was a humanist, my son had to become one too. There was nothing to be done about that at the time. I completed my workload as an average pupil, neither better nor worse, my grades were in line with my performance.

Of course, when you reach the age of 10 - 12, there are certain bad habits, I'll call them that. My father was a strict but always fair man who did not always show his love for his son in a way that I could understand, as the following story will explain. I'm thinking of the bucket of oil-soaked sawdust that was needed to sweep out the school corridor. Günther and I came up with the unique idea of tipping the contents of the bucket into the toilet, which we did. Of course, it was not so good that a teacher turned up. As a result, each of us was given an hour's detention. Before the punishment was served, a

"blue letter" (blue envelope with penalty) was sent home to the parents. When my father asked me if anything of importance had happened at school, I denied it at first. When he then showed me the letter, I had to admit what I had done. As Günther's father received the same letter, both fathers were of the opinion that our actions had not been punished enough with an hour's detention. The fathers' council decided to tell the school that three hours of detention was appropriate. We had to struggle with a Caesar translation (Latin) for three hours one afternoon. Our parents had to foot the bill for the plumber who had to repair the toilet, which meant a deduction from our pocket money.

We had a teacher called Mr Naujoks, who taught biology and French. In those days, teachers were sometimes allowed to get "violent". Naujoks had a very special manner. Whatever reasons there were for being punished were of secondary importance here. He pulled our temple hair with the words: "Look at me cheerfully" and then you got a "gewischt" (slap in the face). There was no force behind the slap, it was more symbolic. Another teacher used a cane. You had to hold out the palm of your hand and then received a short slap. It wasn't always pleasant because it really hurt. This cane was kept in the locked classroom cupboard. As we pupils came from different social backgrounds, we also had the son of a locksmith among us. He had no difficulty opening the cupboard with a duplicate key. The cane was "prepared" with a raw onion, placed on the radiator to dry and put back in the cupboard. We waited for the next "outbreak", which was not long in coming. At the first stroke, the cane shattered into tiny little pieces. As no one in the class declared themselves guilty, a class punishment of one hour's detention with a corresponding 'Blue Letter' was imposed. After this 'Blue Letter', my father just smiled mischievously.

During my time at grammar school, my father thought of something very special. I have to go back a bit here to make the following easier to understand. As my father did not need a high school diploma for his profession as a licensed pharmacist at the time, he found it necessary to catch up on his high school diploma after his state examination. He felt that there were still gaps in his knowledge. He was already 27 years old at the time. As a result, he still had a lot of Latin and Ancient Greek stuck in his head. So he invited Günther and two other school mates of mine for Sunday morning. The four of us, with my father as our teacher, spent at least two hours cramming Latin and Greek, much to our annoyance, because we would have liked to have spent Sunday morning doing other things. But rightly so, we benefited a lot from these exercises.

The relationship with my parents was, as I perceived it, very good and warm. As already mentioned, my father was a bit strict with me. It's understandable when you consider the environment in which he grew up in his parental home. I realised many years later that he wanted the best for me. At a young age, you have little understanding for that. But it turned out that he was right about everything. I can't remember ever having been slapped or otherwise beaten by my father. My mum, on the other hand, had a somewhat "looser hand", but no offence, she also only wanted the best. Both parents had the same goal for their son, each in their own way. I thank them for that today, because without them and their upbringing, I would not have been able to cope with many situations later in life.

Ok Back to my early youth. From 1930, we lived opposite Pankow Castle Park in a very nice 4 ½-room flat in a large, modern and newly built corner house, where there were other boys my age. I'm thinking in particular of a boy whose name has slipped my mind, let's call him Kurt. It was autumn and the chestnuts in the castle park were almost ripe. We were collecting chestnuts, you could make so many things with them. Suddenly we had the idea of pulling the iron clamps, which were used to fasten the barrier wire for the lawn, out of the wooden posts. With these clamps, we were able to shoot the chestnuts down with a catapult. Everything went well until the park ranger turned up with an old sheepdog. Somehow he managed to get Kurt's address. Another fathers' council met and it was decided that Kurt and I would have to buy new conkers with our pocket money. The next Sunday morning, my father had cancelled the "cramming", we had to hammer in the new cramps again under the supervision of both fathers and in the presence of the Sunday walkers. We didn't come up with such ideas a second time.

The castle park also had its charms in winter. When there was snow, we would take our sledges to the "Katzenbuckel", a small hill in the park. We would have toboggan races there and whoever got the furthest won. If you weren't careful, you ended up in the Panke, a small tributary of the river Spree. At the end of the park was the SCHÜSSLER, a garden pub, a popular destination in summer, and in winter there was an ice rink for skating on the large playground. We spent most of our time there, provided that our schoolwork was done satisfactorily. My mum was relentless in this respect.

A boy's greatest dream is a bicycle. As I had not yet learnt to ride, I could hardly ask my parents for one. So I first had to learn to ride on two wheels without falling over. Good advice was expensive. At just the right moment, a boy turned up with a junior bike. The bike was a bit too small for me, but it was enough to teach me to ride this way, albeit out of sight of our flat. However, it wasn't long before my mum discovered me. It was no longer a secret to my parents that I had mastered riding. Now it was time to convince my father that Mr Son could no longer manage without his own bike. However, my father did not come to this conclusion and so I had to wait some time before my parents took me to the bike shop Fahrrad-Machnow in Weinmeisterstraße. I was allowed to choose a bike. After my father had also test ridden the bike, I could consider it my own. Now the question was: How would I get the bike home? I didn't have any concerns, as I could ride it home myself. After a long discussion, I was told to stay next to the tram where my parents were travelling so that my father could supervise. In the end it got too much for me, so I rode at my own pace and was home long before my parents. This bike gave me a lot of pleasure. But for some inexplicable reason, I never rode it to school.

In 1927, my parents bought a car, a 6-cylinder open-top Chrysler. By the standards of the time, this car could be described as the "ultimate". First of all first we had to get a driving licence, which both my parents managed without any particular difficulties. We made many wonderful tours with this car. Austria and Switzerland were often our destinations. I can still remember how my father and my mother used to push the car up to 95 km/h on the Berlin AVUS (Public Motor Racing Road until 1998) a racetrack open at certain times. The car didn't go any faster. At that time, one drove between 50 - 60 and sometimes 70 km/h, which was perfectly adequate for the road conditions at the time.

Even as a boy, I was always very interested in technical things. I set up a small workshop in the cellar. Kurt and I built model gliders. We bought a drawing with building descriptions and instructions for 50 pfennigs from the newspaper "Grüne Post". We begged the cigar dealers for wooden cigar boxes and bought mouldings and other materials from other shops. We sawed and glued as much as we could, but only after we had finished our schoolwork - my mum was tough in this respect. These models were fully airworthy. When we had 2 - 3 models ready, we went to Schönholzer Heide (a park) to let the gliders fly. They often broke, but that didn't bother us, we built new models. I think I remember that we must have built 15 - 20 aeroplanes. I often think back to that time, how carefree it was. I am glad that I was able to experience it.

The year 1933

30 January 1933 came Hitler's "seizure of power". From that day onwards, much was to change in my life. At that time, and even before, there was hardly any talk about religion in our family. In my father's opinion, the "Hitler movement" could not last very long. He was an officer and a front-line fighter in the First World War, received his Iron Cross and was German - that was enough for him. Unfortunately, as it turned out that his opinion didn't last, but more about that in later segments. I myself didn't have any difficulties as a result of the upheaval, for me everything went on as before. I was only surprised that some of the teachers and the headmaster Hildebrand were replaced and that our class teacher Weinhold turned up for lessons in SA uniform. In the first few months after the seizure of power, nothing special happened at the school until one day the Heinrich-Schliemann-Schule became the "**Horst Wessel-Gymnasium**". Why this renaming with a large parade of flags, unveiling of a memorial plaque and other so-called "festivities"? Was the archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann no longer fit to

give his name to a humanist grammar school? I soon received the answer. Horst Wessel, the SA man and evil thug who was shot at the time, once went to this school for a few months. But his intelligence was not sufficient to follow the lessons, he was simply expelled from the school. However, this happened long before 1933.

On 1 April 1933, all Jewish businesses were boycotted, ordered and organised by the highest party offices and carried out by SA troops. My father's pharmacy in Prinzen-Allee in the suburb of Wedding district was also affected in the early hours of that day. An SA man with a sign saying "**DO NOT BUY FROM JEWS**" positioned himself in front of the pharmacy entrance door. The customers didn't pay much attention, and it wasn't long before an agitated crowd protested threateningly against this SA man. He preferred to disappear as quickly as possible. My father and his pharmacy were very popular with the working-class population and such a disgrace against my father was not tolerated. I don't know what happened next, only that my father was not harassed any further.

When I came home from school on 1 April 1933, the phone rang. Günther Hartmann had been told by his father to take me for a walk in Pankow in the afternoon. Neither he nor I understood anything about this gesture. We did what we were told to do. In the evening, Günther's father insisted on driving through Pankow with my father in an open-top car, which is what happened. It should be noted that both our families were very well known in Pankow. This open demonstration was a protest by a non-Jewish

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From 1933 to 1945, my schoolmate and friend Günther showed himself to be a sincere and honest person towards our family, who never shied away from openly expressing his opposition to the Nazis, even if the circumstances meant considerable risks for him. This friendship lasted throughout the years. We often visited each other to share old memories. After many years, he told me the following episode:

He was probably 14 - 15 years old when he once greeted his father with a "Heil Hitler". In response, his father said: "It's still the same in my house: **Morjn, Mahlzeit and Juten Abend**", (Berliner dialect: Good Morning, Bon Apetit and Good Evening) to which Günther replied again with "Heil Hitler". He then found himself lying in a corner after a resounding slap in the face. He later said that Hitler must have been a very bad person because he had received so many beatings because of him. Günther died in January 1992 after a serious illness. I lost a good and true friend.

The years 1934 – 1936

At the beginning of 1934, I fell ill again, which weakened my general health. It got to the point where I developed mild pneumonia, which required quick and effective treatment and healing. The doctor treating me was of the opinion that only a radical change of climate could lead to success. Antibiotics were not yet available at that time.

My parents received information about a country school in Italy, the Istituto Fiorentino, a kind of college in Florence. The conditions for admission were very favourable, as the college was still being established. It was run by a professor and doctor of linguistics, Werner Peiser and his wife Esther. After some correspondence, my parents decided to have a look at this school first. However, the doctor said: "Take the boy with you straight away, the warm climate will work wonders for him". The doctor was right.

At grammar school, I still reached the Ober tertia. So in mid-June 1934, my parents and I travelled to Florence. Naturally, we were all very curious and had great expectations. We were already expected at the railway station in Florence, then we travelled to Villa Elena in Fiesole, a suburb of Florence. The town lies between the east and west sides in a valley with foothills of the Apennine Mountains. Fiesole lies on the east side, with Villa Elena halfway up the mountain. The transport connection to the town was maintained at the time by a tram. The tram made a deafening screeching noise as it rounded the bends, but it was sufficient for us as a means of transport. We were given a very friendly welcome, we were shown the house and the garden, then I got to know my new classmates, boys and at the beginning, two girls my age. That was really exciting, of course. There were no more than 8- 10 pupils, some German, but also Italian. As Germans, we had to learn Italian, while the others had to learn German. There were very few language difficulties. I felt very comfortable as soon as I arrived.

Once all the formalities had been completed and my parents were satisfied that I was well accommodated in this college, I stayed in Florence. My parents travelled back to Berlin after another week's stay. My things were sent on later. I can't remember today how I felt as a 14-year-old boy, suddenly being left to my own devices with people I didn't know. The college management did their utmost to make the transition as easy as possible. I never felt homesick during my entire stay in Italy. I would also like to say that this gave me a certain independence at a very young age, which helped me a lot in later life.

The aim of the home was to teach the pupils the Italian language as quickly as possible and to prepare them for the Italian school in the city, among other things. There was a choice between going to an Italian state school or continuing their education at college. My parents chose the state school, which meant that the classes I had already completed at grammar school were recognised. Arriving in Florence in June was convenient because the school summer holidays lasted from 1 July to 30 September. During these three months, the home was moved to the Mediterranean, to Forte dei Marmi, near Viareggio. The time was used to learn Italian intensively. Today I would say that I found it very easy, but not much of it has remained to this day, even if I can still understand quite a lot. In addition to learning, there was of course plenty of free time, swimming in the sea, lazing on the white beach, playing tennis etc. etc. Joint excursions and hikes led by the teachers to the surrounding area or the marble quarries of Carrara were often on the agenda. We also hired bicycles for longer trips, which sometimes lasted several days. For reasons of economy, we usually stayed overnight with farmers in their barns. We often enjoyed the great hospitality of the Italians. We had to eat with them, no matter how simple it was. Of course, the farmers realised that we were foreigners, so perhaps it was interesting for them to hear something different for once.

The house in Forte dei Marmi was small in the first year, but it was enough for everyone. The following year, we were over 50 students, accommodated in a multi-storey villa with several adjoining houses.

Spending time in the fresh sea air and the warm climate had such a positive effect on my health that I was able to completely cure myself and lay the foundations for a healthy life. I didn't realise at the time that I was in dire need of this physical turnaround.

On 1 October 1934, I returned to Florence, but no longer to Villa Elena but to Villa Pazzi, also in a suburb, Pian dei Giullari (Place of the Jugglers), on the opposite hill. In the summer months, the number of students grew considerably, Fiesole was no longer enough. Villa Pazzi was an old manor house with large estates that were leased and farmed by wine and olive growers. A long uphill avenue of olive trees led from the village street to Villa Pazzi (the main house). It housed the college management, the teachers, the farm staff and the girls. Classrooms, offices and a large hall on the ground floor, our dining room, were also part of the main house. Villa Barbera, in the centre of Pian dei Giullari, housed the boys, about 200 metres from the main house. Opposite Villa Barbera there was a trattoria where we boys sometimes went when the school meals didn't taste good. If the pocket money I got from my parents was used up, we didn't go to the trattoria. We also needed some money for other things, like the occasional visit to the opera with standing room in the fourth tier, where it was cheap, the cinema or even a visit to a patisserie.



Now things got serious for me. I went to an Italian secondary school in the city. The Italian school system differed from the German one in many ways; it was shorter and easier until the school-leaving examination (Abitur). Apart from Latin, I only needed one optional foreign language, which for me was German. The other subjects were not as intensive as in Germany, but they had to be taken in Italian. When you're between the ages of 14 and 16, you don't have much time for the beauty of a city. It was the same for me. We hardly noticed the great art treasures in the Uffizi Gallery, the Ponte Vecchio (old bridge over the River Arno), the buildings such as Palazzo Vecchio, Palazzo Pitti, the cathedral with its campanile (bell tower), the Baptistery, etc., etc. We were hardly aware of them. It was only much later that we learnt to appreciate this city.

During our entire time in Italy, we hadn't learnt much about developments in Germany. There was certainly an authoritarian regime under Mussolini, but it was in no way comparable to the Nazi regime. Some of my Italian schoolmates belonged to the youth organisation that existed at the time, which could be compared to the HJ (Hitler Youth) in certain respects. In Italy, however, they didn't ask which circles the members came from; anyone could join the uniformed and colourfully decorated group.

So what could be more obvious, I also wanted to join, but I needed the permission of my father, which of course I didn't get for reasons that later became clear.

In March 1936, I was ready to take my school-leaving examination under the Italian system. I had a bit of a trepidation, but it went better than I thought, I managed it, as an only 16 ½ years old. I will never forget my time in Italy, I really enjoyed it, not only did I learn a lot, but I also saw so much. School trips to Venice and Rome, winter holidays in the snow-covered Apennines and summers on the Mediterranean are and will remain great memories for me.

OOOOOO

In 1959, I travelled to Italy and also visited Florence. What could be more natural than to visit the old school? The college as such no longer existed, but the Villa Pazzi did, which now belonged to an American oil millionaire from Texas. I couldn't resist visiting the house. It also turned out that the "padrone" was of Norwegian origin. He was delighted to have a Scandinavian with him and we spoke a mixture of Norwegian and Swedish. Not much had changed in the house. However, the walls in the large hall had valuable frescoes, which in my day were covered with a protective colour, although we had no idea about this. On the occasion of a theatre performance, I mounted hooks in the ceiling to attach the curtain. These hooks were still in the same place. There was now a swimming pool on the former tennis court. There was a tree in the garden where I built a castle in the branches with planks, which was also still there. On a second visit to Florence in 1987, Villa Pazzi had been converted into a residential building with several flats, and I hardly recognised the garden. The former owner had died and the widow had returned to America. The village of Pian dei Giullari still had the old and familiar houses. Every time I visited later, the memories came flooding back. Italy was a wonderful time for me.

OOOOOO

I returned to Berlin in March 1936. A lot had changed in Germany in two years under the Hitler regime. In 1935, the landlord gave my parents notice to leave their flat in Schlosspark for reasons I don't know. They moved into a very nice four-room flat in Kulmbacherstraße near what was then Nürnberger Platz in Wilmersdorf (suburb of Berlin).

At the time of my stay in Italy, the so-called "Nuremberg Race Law" or "Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour" was passed on 15 September 1935 at the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party) party conference in Nuremberg. In Italy, little or very little was known about the extent of this law. The confrontation after my return was all the worse. This law divided up and ostracised Germany's Jewish fellow citizens according to alleged criteria.

A person was labelled a "**Full Jew**" if they had four Jewish grandparents. If you had two Jewish and two "Aryan" grandparents, you were a "**Mischling**" (mixed race) according to the law. The Mischlinge, also sometimes called "**Half-Jews**", were categorised again. A Mischling who had been baptised by the church was considered a "Mischling of the 1st degree" He could be drafted into the labour service and the military, in any case into the OT-Arbeitseinsatz (Organisation Todt) (OT labour deployment Organisation Death). The work tasks of this organisation were of various kinds. The heaviest construction projects with the use of all physical strength, clearing work, fortifications etc. etc.

If you were not baptised, you remained a Mischling, but were stamped as a "**Geltungs-Jude**" (Valid Jew). As I now had two Jewish and two Aryan grandparents and had not been baptised by the church, I was categorised as a "Geltungsjude", which was decisive for the rest of my life.

At that time, I didn't realise the extent of this law. I had not yet come into contact with the "regulations of the law".

Now that I had successfully completed school in Italy, I wanted to fulfil my dream of becoming a mechanical engineer. I had always been interested in all kinds of technology. This required me to study at a technical college. For me, this was a matter of course. So I couldn't understand when my father told me that I couldn't study for the time being. He came up with all sorts of explanations: I hadn't reached the minimum age of 18 yet, I should go back to school until then, etc., etc. The truth that I was forbidden by law from studying at a technical college only came to light later. I slowly realised that we no longer had any human dignity, that we had to live our lives completely without rights and in isolation.

So what was left? I should first learn a trade and then we would go on from there. My father, in particular, was of this opinion and refused to realise what was going on despite the deterioration in the situation. On 1 February 1935, he was awarded the Cross of Honour for front-line fighters (1914/18) by order of the "Führer and Reich Chancellor", and as a non-Aryan he lost the lease on the Prinzen Pharmacy at the end of 1936, which he had held for 17 years. My father still believed in a miracle in March 1936.

Through some acquaintance we learnt that an apprenticeship was available in a men's hat factory. So I was to become a hat maker! It's not hard to understand why I wasn't overjoyed at this news. Father and I set off one day to introduce myself at this hat factory near Hausvogteiplatz. I still remember that "Canossa walk" up the stairs to the office. The boss took a look at me, he thought that I was a bit too old for this job as an apprentice of almost 17 years. My certificates from Florence weren't there yet either. We were told that we could audition again once we had received our certificates. However, the boss couldn't guarantee that the position would still be available. As difficult as the way up was for me, the easier it was to get down. I was spared having to become a milliner.

A somewhat distant relative from my father's family, also a Siegmund Pulvermacher, had a furniture factory in the 1920s. He produced furniture in the Italian Renaissance style with the help of Italian wood sculptors and could draw beautifully, which really impressed me. I can still remember as a child how he painted the white tiled stoves in our flat with wonderful motifs for parties. Unfortunately, this decoration didn't last, he used watercolours.

This Siegmund came to visit us one day and we discussed my situation after I had finally given up hat making. I had shown an interest in drawings before and in the course of the conversation he asked me if I wanted to become an interior designer. I had nothing against this suggestion, as long as I wasn't a hat maker. Siegmund now wanted to try to get me into the REIMAN SCHULE, a school for architecture and design, but not on the basis of a university. As this school was privately run rather than state-run, I had no difficulties due to my "ancestry". After a few days, Siegmund told me that there was a place for me in the interior design department. I presented myself and was accepted, but I had to fulfil certain conditions.

The school didn't have its own workshops for practical exercises, so I had to get an internship in a furniture factory, which was an absolute prerequisite. Siegmund was consulted again. He had sufficient connections to furniture factories and so I also got a place as a trainee in a large company, Hecht & Co. Fruchtstraße, in the eastern part of Berlin. Acceptance at the Reimann school and furniture factory meant that I received practical "apprentice training" as a cabinetmaker 6 days a week from 7 a.m. to noon, and until 1 p.m. on Saturdays, with everything that went with it, including sweeping out the factory floor. This training only lasted half the day. In the afternoon I went to the Reimann school, every day except Saturday from 2 to 9 pm. I used the lunch break to eat in a relatively cheap restaurant. I followed this daily routine for the next three years.

The theoretical training was of a very high standard. I learned drawing in all its phases, furniture design of all kinds, materials, colour theory, but also interior design such as shop fitting, permanent

furnishings in villas etc. etc. I often think back to an episode in the last year of my training. We had a very good teacher, Professor Breuhaus. One day, some students and I had to go with the professor to a large villa on Heerstraße to measure a furnishing project. What always struck us about Breuhaus was that he was never without his walking stick, even during lectures he had it with him. Breuhaus walked along the wall with his walking stick, holding it horizontally, and told us, for example, 8.6 metres. We looked at each other with a smile because we didn't believe his measurements. Breuhaus just said: "Gentlemen, you don't need to smile, take your folding rule and measure". Our eyes got bigger and bigger, it was right down to the centimetre. He didn't have any measurements on his walking stick. It was and still is a mystery to me how Breuhaus was able to measure so precisely in this way. The man must have had an incredibly good sense of proportion. We tried to put him to the test on other occasions and he was always right.

Hecht & Co, a Jewish company, was one of the largest furniture factories in Berlin. It employed around 120 people, from rough cutting to polishing. Although I only worked half days, I had the opportunity to go through all the departments and gain a lot of experience. I had two other Jewish colleagues, Fritz Raphael and Günter Wachsner, but they were both real apprentices and the same age as me. Both had already completed a year, but they didn't treat me as a "newcomer". Apart from us, there were three other "Aryan" apprentices who were more or less about to take their tradesman's examination. We were trained by the foreman Busacker and a tradesman apprentice called Tredup. My first task, after receiving a set of tools and a workbench, was to plane a thick, raw piece of pine wood until it was the right size. The saying: "Where there's planing, there's shavings" proved true in this case, I sank into a mountain of shavings. The first piece of furniture I had to make was a simple footstool. Planing out the feet, sides and top was no problem, but chiselling holes and cutting tenons was something new again. After a few attempts, I managed to produce a footrest, which was scrutinised very critically for possible faults, but in the end was found to be good. I then very proudly gave the footstool to my "Little Grandma".

The years 1937 – 1939

The three-year apprenticeship, both practical and theoretical, was a hard and labour-intensive time, but one that I still remember fondly. I learnt a lot, but I didn't yet know that this profession I had learnt would one day save my life.

When I returned from Italy to an unfamiliar flat and environment, I didn't know anyone my own age. My fellow teacher Fritz Raphael belonged to the "Berliner Ruderclub Welle Poseidon" (Rowing Club) in Berlin-Grünau. He helped me to become a member there too. I met a lot of like-minded people there, because the club, although it had already existed for over 50 years, was under Jewish management at the time. Before 1933, the members were primarily people who were dedicated to rowing, no matter what denomination they belonged to. After 1934, the rulers of the Third Reich demanded that Jewish members leave the club. But things happened differently. The non-Jewish members left the club in protest in order to preserve the club for the Jewish members. At the same time, the club now had to call itself the "Jüdischer Ruderclub Welle Poseidon in Berlin". Until 1938, our coach at the time was Erwin Michaelis, one of the old members. The Nazis demanded that he leave us in no uncertain terms. Hans Herrman, one of our members, then took over his coaching duties.

I was really looking forward to getting out on the water with proper rowing boats, but it wasn't as easy as I had imagined. I first had to learn to row. This took place in a training hall under the city railway arches at Jannowitzbrücke (Jannowitz Bridge). In this hall there was a concrete box with sliding seats and oars for four rowers, with water ditches on both long sides. The oar blades only had a wire construction, as it would never have been possible to pull a normal oar through with a full blade in a "fixed boat". On Saturdays, usually in the afternoon, the beginners were trained there. After a reasonable amount of time, we were then allowed to move to the boathouse in Grünau (suburb in Berlin), which was located directly on the so-called regatta course, a very attractive place. Expectations were now high to finally get into a real boat, which happened very thoroughly. All the newcomers had to undergo a "baptism". There was a single rowing boat with oars laid out on the jetty. It was a so-called racing boat and no wider than approx. 40 cm. Now it was time to get into the boat. Of course, there were no instructions. The "old hands" stood around and waited to see what would happen. It wasn't hard to guess. When I got in, the boat flipped over and I was in the water, to the cheers of everyone else. I was now a recognised and fully-fledged member. I spent many wonderful hours in the club, we did a lot of rowing trips in twos, fours and "sixes", but also in eights, which I was later assigned to. It was the "long eight", all the boys were over 1.80 metres tall. I was already that height back then. In 1937, we were allowed to take part in an internal regatta and I was also in the long eight. We came 4th out of 6 boats. For me, it was the first and last internal regatta, after which these opportunities were taken away from us too.

Of course, the Gestapo had their eyes on us. Every Thursday, the individual boat crews were determined for the coming Sunday. This list had to be submitted to the Gestapo. You could be sure that at least two "officials" would be outside the boathouse on Sunday morning to check whether the line-up was correct. Our chairman at the time kept reminding us with the words: "A scheduled event is a scheduled event" in order to avoid difficulties. There were a few other things that I will come back to.

The little free time I had - it was only the weekends and holidays - wasn't just spent at the rowing club. I certainly got to know a lot of people through it, but it was also important for me to meet people with other interests. I now lived in the right neighbourhood, i.e. all my later acquaintances and friends lived not too far away from me.

At the age of 18, I naturally wanted to socialise with girls. Easier said than done. There was only one girls' section at the rowing club, schoolgirls aged 14 - 15. They weren't the "right" thing for me. So I had to find another way to get involved. I signed up for a private dance lesson circle. We were 15 couples who were supposed to learn to dance and socialise under the guidance of a somewhat elderly lady, Mrs Frieda Bernstein, and a semi-good piano player, Mr Adam. It was a Jewish circle; the racial laws forbade us to mix with "Aryan" girls. The lessons took place every Saturday afternoon for about 2 hours. The location of the activities was moved to the girls' homes, to their families. In those years, people still had relatively large flats and a "Berlin room", as it was called, sometimes had up to 50 square metres of space. We practised and practised and were glad when the official part was over, because only then did things get interesting. Some of the young people went home after the lessons, but over half of them stayed until late in the evening. Friendships developed from this circle and we grew into a clique. New people joined us and we stuck together more and more during this difficult time.

However, I don't want to forget that my "Great Grandma" insisted on arranging a "dance" for her grandson on a Saturday. At first I didn't agree at all, I felt like I was being "supervised". My objections weren't accepted, but I was promised that the older ones wouldn't show their faces. Grandma had two sisters, Clara and Gertrud, who also lived in the large flat in Charlottenburg. My parents were certainly there that Saturday too. Grandma and the housekeeper Frieda were only visible when it came to the "refreshments", she was not small in this respect. Anything was possible for her grandson. Music in the form of records that sounded better than Mr Piano Player was available in any quantity. Everyone brought their own records.

In most cases, "Great Grandma" took her grandson's side, especially when I wanted to achieve something. My parents were away and Grandma was supposed to look after me, I was supposed to eat at her house and spend my free time with her. For transport reasons, I went home to sleep every night.

At the rowing club, like everyone else, we were supposed to do our kilometres. We had to row 50 kilometres with a team of 5 people, a four with a coxswain. The start time was 7 o'clock on a Sunday morning. Grandma said nothing when I explained to her that our team was already meeting on Saturday to "prepare". Grandma didn't ask where we were going to meet or didn't want to ask. So we met at our flat. It was decided to start the kilometre race the evening before with a beer outing (!!) and drive to Grünau the next morning. At our young age, we didn't take the bans and restrictions imposed on us too seriously. However, the beer trip went on until the early hours of the morning. But we were always careful not to drink too much. We got home and had enough time to shower, drink very strong coffee and then take the S-Bahn (city train) to Grünau. Of course, we hadn't thought about sleeping. We did the kilometre race in the prescribed time, after which we were so tired that we hardly knew what we had done. In the evening we took the S-Bahn home again, but tiredness got the better of us with the result that we missed our destination station and ended up at the railway station in Wannsee (very south of Berlin). We were lucky to get a train from there to take us back to the city, but this time one of us took it in turns to stay awake by standing up. That way everyone got home safe and sound. By Monday morning, everything was forgotten again.

This escapade would have been completely impossible with my parents. My father always tried to have some control over me. I remember one Saturday, I was invited somewhere and the following conversation took place between father and son:

"When are you planning to come home tonight?"

"I don't know."

"But I do know, at ½ 12 o'clock!"

That was the end of the discussion. I knew that my father was waiting for me, so I was home at the appointed time. What Dad didn't like was the tone. I could have said 2 o'clock at night and he would

have accepted it. My father was like that, there was nothing I could do about it. Basically, he only wanted the best for his son.

9 November 1938, the 'Reichspogromnacht', bitterly called the 'Reich Crystal Night' by Berliners, was also a turning point in our lives. The reason was a murder in Paris. A Jewish man named Herschel Grynszpan shot the German embassy secretary Ernst von Rath to draw the world's attention to the persecution in Germany. Von Rath was himself an opponent of Hitler and was being monitored by the Gestapo. The crudest persecutions against the Jewish population throughout Germany took place immediately. Synagogues were set on fire, Jewish shops were painted with the word "Jew" and the Star of David and also looted, around 12,000 Jewish citizens in Berlin were arrested and deported to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp near Oranienburg, where an unknown number were murdered. The attack in Paris took place on 7 November, the "Reichspogromnacht" on the night of 9 to 10 November. Everything was organised and carried out by branches of the NSDAP throughout Germany. The suspicion of concealing already planned acts of violence under the guise of a spontaneous action is therefore very obvious. All that was needed was an "official reason". The incident in Paris came at just the right time for the Nazis.

However, there was a case in Berlin where the NSDAP had thoroughly miscalculated. Near the "Red Town Hall" in Berlin-Mitte was a very good and elegant department stores' called **N. Israel**. This department store was not spared by the SA mob either. Shop windows were smashed and the facades smeared. However, it was not realised that the owners at the time were English nationals. The fierce protest from the British embassy was not long in coming. The British ambassador and his staff were immediately at the scene of the crime. The British government demanded an immediate and complete restoration of the building within 48 hours. If the demand was not met, measures would be taken against German business owners in England. The Hitler government had no choice but to comply. Göring, the "Reich Marshal", was forced to organise shop windows from all over Germany, the same SA troops were deployed to wash down the facades and carry out clean-up work. Even if the population did not actively participate in these disgraceful actions, they generally looked on intimidated and inactive. A little more civil courage on the part of the people would have been necessary Nevertheless, I believe that the clean-up work at the Israel department store brought a certain satisfaction in some circles.

The action of the pogrom night was in no way sufficient for the Nazi rulers. As early as April 1938, the "Ordinance on the Registration of Jewish Property" was issued. This ordinance created an overview that could be utilised at the appropriate time. The Paris attack was the starting signal. The Jewish population was fined by the Reich one billion Reichsmark in cash. At the time, there was talk of a very high levy on bank or savings bank deposits, securities, etc. My father was also affected by this measure. I never learnt anything about the amount of our levy. At the same time, Jewish property began to be "aryanised", which was effectively tantamount to complete expropriation. Germans who were loyal to the Nazi line came into possession of businesses and shops for ridiculously low prices. I am thinking here in particular of the clothing companies, which were largely in Jewish hands. The Hermann Tietz department store became HERTIE, the elegant Grünfeld lingerie shop became Max Kühl. The owners of the furniture factory Richard Hecht & Co. also had to give up their positions. Shortly afterwards, they succeeded in establishing a new business in America shortly afterwards, in which the sons of the two owners played a large part. For the remaining company in Fruchtstraße, a fiduciary management was set up with foreman Busacker at the helm. He always behaved completely correctly towards us, so there were no changes for me and my Jewish colleagues. I was also able to continue attending the Reimann School.

There was one change for my father. As already mentioned, his lease on the Prinzen pharmacy was cancelled in 1936. He was then able to continue working as a pharmacist with deputising in various pharmacies. After November 1938, he was also stripped of his licence to practise as a pharmacist. That was the end of his career as a pharmacist for that time; he was 57 years old at the time. I believed that

these events would finally mark a turning point in my father's views. I often asked myself the question: What was my own attitude to the events? The way I was organising my life with my friends, there was nothing I could do to change the situation. On the one hand, I was still in education, which I wanted to complete at all costs; on the other hand, thanks to our "Aryan background", our family was not directly exposed to persecution, apart from my father's professional ban. Life just had to go on and it did. The restrictions ordered were, as before, largely ignored by my friends and me. Despite the property levy, there were no financial worries in our family. In any case, we had enough money to last until the end of the war. Nevertheless, my parents tried to improve the situation. They were both able to make themselves useful "behind the scenes" in the Luitpold pharmacy, which they knew well.

The rowing club "Welle Poseidon" also got into trouble at the end of 1938. We were not wanted on the official regatta course in Grünau. We had to give up our beautiful boathouse in Grünau and were allocated a run-down boathouse belonging to the "RC Alemannia" on Bullenbruchinsel in Oberschöneweide for a short time. It was the worst possible swap in terms of location, but what choice did we have? It should be noted that the boathouse on Bullenbruchinsel could only be reached by boat transfer. Our previous rowing destinations such as Müggelsee, Seddinsee, Gosener Graben etc. were almost impossible for us to reach due to the long journey; we were condemned to stay in the urban area. One by one, we lost the desire to continue rowing with the club. Many, including myself, went into business for themselves. The club was forcibly dissolved without compensation. The last members' meeting took place on 2 February 1939.

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It was 55 years before I received any sign of life from my rowing club "Welle Poseidon". In an advert in a German newsletter, they announced that they were celebrating their centenary in June 1994 and were looking for old members. I immediately made contact and travelled to Berlin and met about 40 old comrades, all but a very few of whom had completely fallen from my memory, comrades who had escaped the terror of the Nazi regime by emigrating all over the world in time. Unfortunately, there were also many who fell victim to the Nazi regime. After the end of the war, the club was re-established; I had no idea about it myself. Today I am a senior member again, together with club mates from younger generations. I feel at home again in my old / new

BRC Welle Poseidon,

no longer in Grünau, but in a smart boathouse on the Großer Wannsee.

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I found a boat in a boathouse in Pichelsdorf, a paddle boat at a price I could afford. A die-hard rower like me can't and won't change his habits. I sold the paddle boat very quickly and bought a rowing boat, a single with a coxswain. I bought the boat in Grünau, but wanted to have it in the same boathouse in Pichelsdorf. A former club mate and I rowed the boat from Grünau through the Teltow Canal, Stölpchensee, Pohlesee, Kleiner Wannsee and Großer Wannsee to Pichelsdorf, a very good day's work for us. So the weekends in spring, summer and autumn always had a destination. There was very rarely a lack of helmsmen, most of whom were "helmswomen". They were also preferred by me for understandable reasons.

The time came for me to complete my training. I was about to take my exams at the Reimann School. I had worked hard for three years to achieve my goal and now the time had come. We were 15 students who now had to show what they had learnt. It started with the distribution of the exam papers, 15 sealed envelopes with different exam papers. Everyone had to choose an envelope. I was given the task of completely furnishing a men's goods shop. We were provided with a floor plan of the premises. My task was to work through this project from start to finish, with proposal sketches, working

drawings, descriptions, a quotation and, as a final step, an interview with a fictitious customer. I was lucky because Hecht had a large shopfitting department, which I was able to familiarise myself with as a trainee. We had four weeks to complete the exam. I was certainly nervous, but I managed it with an iron will. I was very proud when I received my diploma as an interior designer. At the same time, my internship at Hecht & Co. was over. I didn't want to be satisfied with just a certificate. When I asked the foreman if I could also build a tradesman piece, I was told that I had only learnt half the time without an apprenticeship contract. After much pleading on my part, they finally agreed to let me build a tradesman's piece under almost the same conditions as all the others. However, it had to be a piece from the factory production. Then there was one more condition: My parents had to buy the piece, an oak bookcase, once it was finished. My parents had nothing against it. So I got started. Most of the work on a tradesman piece had to be done by hand. Some machine work was allowed, but I wasn't allowed to do it myself. Slotting framed doors and tonguing drawers had to be done by hand. It took me 5 weeks, now full time, until I was finished. The "acceptance" was extra hard for me as a "Half Jew", but fair. The tradesman's piece was recognised and I was able to prove that I had mastered the craft. After the bookcase had been given the exterior treatment in the polishing shop - I didn't have to do that - I asked my father to pay. Dad came to the company but was hugely disappointed: the cupboard was no longer there, it had already been sold. On the one hand, we saved money, on the other hand, I was given the proof that I had achieved a good result. We eventually found the cabinet in the window of a very upmarket furniture shop on Budapesterstrasse. Next to the sign "Gesellenstück" (tradesman's piece) on the top of the cabinet was the "Hitler bust". This was irony on a grand scale. I stayed at the Hecht company as a tradesman for a few more months until I was given the opportunity to look for and carry out work on my own.

On 1 January 1939, we faced further discrimination. All people labelled as Jews had to bear the additional name Israel or Sara. From then on, my name was **Walter Israel Grunwald**. This name had to appear on all identity cards and other official documents. The same applied to my father, my mother was of course spared.

On 30 January 1939, Hitler announced the "annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe" in the event of war, a message that no one could have imagined.

In June 1939, I received the call-up order for the labour service and military draft. I was naturally surprised that I was supposed to go to the draft as a "Geltungsjuden", (Validated Jew) but there was no escape. I turned up punctually at the appointed time. I was examined just like everyone else. There was a bit of a barracks atmosphere, but that didn't bother me. When I was finally given my papers, I was already assigned to some branch of the armed forces. But then they realised the mistake and gave me an exclusion certificate. Reason: descent. The last officer just shook his head when he handed me the certificate. He seemed to have a different opinion. So I had nothing to do with either the labour service or the military.



Exclusion certificate from the Wehrmacht

The obligation for Jews to hand in all precious metal objects and jewellery was laid down in an order dated 21 February. It was also decided to repeal the tenant protection law for Jews and to hand in all radio sets. My parents complied with the obligation to hand in a minimal amount. We kept the radio. My father refused to give up the German-language news programmes from England. These programmes were vital to him. The set was hidden in a wardrobe and the news was also listened to in there.

The Second World War broke out on 1 September 1939. We had to expect that further restrictions would come into our lives. I can still remember today how we assessed the new situation in our family. Dad's assessment was brief but direct: "***With the war started by Hitler today, Germany has lost the war. A leader who has made no more than a private cannot wage war against the whole world without failing himself.***" After the first lightning victory over Poland, father's prophecies sounded somewhat unlikely, but he was proved right. At the time, he did not realise what would happen in the meantime. Thanks to the foreign news, which was much more objective than the Germans, his optimism began to grow again. Despite all the hardships imposed on him during the war, he was able to survive the time at my mother's side and was finally a free man again at the age of 64.

There were also opportunities for us to leave Germany. But my parents couldn't come to terms with the idea and so there were no prospects for me either. I was ready to turn my back on this country forever. I had already made attempts to emigrate, but I was not yet "of age" at the time and could therefore hardly count on my father's consent. After 1 September 1939, it was too late. There were certainly attempts to leave the country illegally, I'm thinking here of my fellow teacher Fritz Raphael. In his attempt to escape across the border to Switzerland, he was shot at the age of nineteen.

The years 1940 – 1943

The years that followed were characterised by uncertainty, fear and despair. Contact with my friends and acquaintances grew even closer in order to withstand the increasing persecution. We were young, we wanted to enjoy our lives a little more, we consciously disregarded many regulations and perhaps didn't realise that we were playing with fire.

Despite discrimination and other arbitrary measures, we still had some time to do more enjoyable things. I made the most of my rowing boat wherever my free time allowed. At the age of 20, I also had a steady girlfriend, her name was Marion, called Muschi, almost three years younger than me. Muschi wanted to be a beautician, which was noticeable in the way she always appeared "covered with make-up". But it wasn't quite suitable for rowing. The boat sponge was often used when the make-up was too much. In the summer of 1940, we met our friends near Lindwerder on the Havel and on the Großer Wannsee. Some came by boat, others by bus or bicycle. But there were also other places where we met: the Café Uhlandeck on Kurfürstendamm, an ice-cream parlour near Bayrischer Platz. We stayed with families and tried to make the most of our free time.

The year 1940 brought a serious new regulation. From July onwards, we were forced to do our shopping in Berlin only between 4 and 5 pm. Since the outbreak of war, food was only available on ration cards. Dad's and my cards were stamped with a "J". This shopping restriction had no direct significance for our family, as my mother was not affected. Nevertheless, we didn't get all the food we needed, including no white bread, no butter, only margarine, only swedes for vegetables and the occasional piece of meat. My mother had to provide for both of us with her card.

Mum was always very inventive. She had a baker who knew our situation. When she went shopping, she always ordered the goods and handed in her stamps. When she collected the bags later, she had the goods and the stamps were back in the bag. The shopping restrictions caused incredible difficulties for the Jewish population. Due to the scarcity of goods, often there was nothing left in the afternoon. However, it also turned out that some of the shops did not comply with the inhumane regulations. The danger that buyers and sellers could be denounced for non-compliance was in the air. At the beginning of August of the same year, our telephone lines were also withdrawn. We had less and lesser rights.

Our flat was still in Kulmbacherstraße. A Luftwaffe colonel with a golden Government Party Badge (stating a member of the party before 1933) also lived in this house. In the Berlin jargon, he was a "Goldpheasant". This colonel also acted as air raid warden in the house. He was instructed that all tenants had to contribute to the extension of the air-raid shelter. However, there was an order from the highest party leadership that Aryans and Jews were not allowed to be in the same cellar, i.e. the non-Aryans were to have their own cellar. At the first meeting in the courtyard of the house about the extension of the cellar, I drew the colonel's attention to this decree. He only replied that he was the air-raid warden, that all families were to be involved in the extension and that there were therefore no differences. He was not interested in this decree. It was hard for us to believe that we were regarded as fully-fledged people by such a party comrade. We built the cellar on the best of terms with the other tenants and the colonel stuck to his opinion. I myself never visited the cellar after it was finished as a shelter.



The "house community" during the extension of the air-raid shelter

From March 1941, there was a "work obligation for Jews from the age of 14", in other words, the able-bodied Jewish population was conscripted into forced labour. This population, which the Nazis hated so incredibly and wanted to destroy, was good enough to do the hardest labour for the war effort. This forced labour also affected me. I had to give up my job at the Hecht company because it was apparently no longer considered important for the war effort. A special labour office in Sonnen-Allee in Neukölln arranged for me to work as a coal shipper and porter at the Matern coal company, Halensee goods station. We were a group of six men aged between 19 and 25. At the goods station, we had to load coke from open railway wagons onto trailers using a coal fork, which was hard and very dirty work.



Forced labour: shovelling coal (Walter at the front in the middle)

Without mechanical help, our daily workload often amounted to 4 - 6 wagons with 15 tonnes each. But our work also included carrying coke into the cellars of apartment blocks. A basket of coke weighed about 40 - 50 kg, depending on whether it had rained beforehand. In some places we had a long walk from the wagon on the street to the boiler room, where the coke also had to be shovelled in order to transport the ordered quantity. A lorry consisted of a tractor and one or two trailers. I'm thinking here

of a tractor driver who couldn't understand that we had to do this kind of work by force. He could choose his team in the morning. If we came to him, we could be sure that they were "easy jobs". It always didn't work out. We were paid for this dirty work, I don't know how much today, but it was certainly the lowest reasonable pay.

It was during my coal days when I learnt that a delivery of coke was going to our house of all places and I was there too. I tried to get into another team, I didn't want to show my face in my own street. It was no longer possible to change the team. So we drove to Kulmbacherstrasse. After about half an hour of public coke dragging, the colonel suddenly stood in front of me. I must point out that he was very well informed about our family circumstances. When he asked how I got this job, I explained to him how it was. He wrote down the name of the coal company and the address of the labour office. He wanted to do what **he** thought was right. Two days later the coal work was over for my colleagues and me. To this day, I still don't understand what motivated the colonel in 1940 to stand up for "second-class" or "subhuman" people like that or was it because he was the "Goldpheasant".

We were all placed with the company called Holzbau in Lichtenberg, which made barrack parts. At Holzbau, we were a large group of conscripts who worked in three shifts, from 6 am to 2 pm, 2 pm to 10 pm and the night shift from 10 pm to 6 am. In the factory, we didn't work past midnight in the evening. For the rest of the time, we were assigned as air raid wardens.

The company Holzbau only produced barrack parts. Exterior walls, partition walls, roof constructions and other individual parts were part of our work. For me, this work was like paradise after shovelling coal. Because of my previous training, I mostly worked on machines. At the night shift I was on air-raid watch. If there was no air raid alarm, we could rest on reasonably good wooden bunks with mattresses and blankets and get some sleep. If there was an alarm, we had to go on guard duty in the large wooden yard, equipped with steel helmets, to track down and extinguish any fire-starting bombs. Drills were frequent during the night shift, but we were spared direct attacks. We often witnessed unique spectacles at night when the British aeroplanes flew over Berlin. They came in large squadrons, we heard the sound of the engines, we saw the sensors of the ground searchlights to detect the planes. If they succeeded in catching an aircraft in the beam of the searchlights, the English bombers had a special tactic: the anti-aircraft guns fired from all barrels. The aircraft that were caught went into a dive and simultaneously left a stream of fire behind them. This was to show that they had been hit. For reasons of economy, the searchlights went out and the defence guns fell silent. This trick got them out of danger and allowed them to reunite with the other aircrafts. There was no doubt that we silently cheered at this spectacle. Locating an aeroplane in the night sky was like looking for a needle in a haystack. The steel helmets gave us good protection from shrapnel falling to the ground, but one of our men was slightly injured once.

We got on well with our Aryan colleagues, who of course also existed there, without any difficulties. We never heard a swear word, they treated us as if we were their equals. Not only that, they helped us when the "shoe pinched" (Berlin jargon: Needed help)

It was the summer of 1940, and we went to Lindwerder again. Among the people who had already arrived, I saw a new face, a tall and very pretty girl who had come with her mother. Her name was Stefanie and she was 1 ½ years younger than me. She seemed a bit aloof or perhaps withdrawn. The presence of her mum didn't bother me or the other friends. We got talking and it turned out that she had a small hearing impairment, which didn't prevent her from taking part in all the events normally. She also lip-read some of the conversations. I liked Stefanie, or Steffi as I called her, from the very first moment, she was a cheerful and even-tempered girl, a completely different person to Muschi. I was drawn more and more to Steffi, so that a separation from Muschi was inevitable in the foreseeable future.



Lindenwerder in the summer of 1940 (Steffi 2nd from left)

On 1 September 1941, the Jewish population was subjected to further sweeping discrimination, the "Police Order on the Identification of Jews". We were ordered to visibly and publicly wear the yellow Jewish star on the left side of our chest, a Star of David with the word "**Jew**" in imitation Hebrew script on a yellow cloth background.



We had to buy it for 20 Reichspfennige. According to the law, father and I had to wear this star. My mother could never believe that her husband and son were subjected to this dishonour, she cried bitter tears as she sewed on the stars. At the same time, a "**Jewish dwelling**" was to be labelled with a star on the front door. We were also affected by this measure; it didn't help that my mother was "Aryan". Dad had to stick the star on the door. With this decree, we were labelled "**fair game**". We were exposed to the arbitrariness of being mobbed on the street. Everyone could see who they were dealing with because of the shameless labelling. At the same time, we had to have a permit to use public transport only if our workplace was more than six kilometres from our home. We were not allowed to sit on any means of transport, we had to complete the necessary journey standing up.

Very often we did without the star, we were still so young and couldn't accept the restrictions that were imposed. The risk of being caught was of course very high. If we had realised the consequences back then, we would certainly have been a little more cautious.

Coming back to the star on the front door, after a short time the doorbell rang and the Air Colonel was standing in front of the door, the torn-off door star in his hand. He asked us to come in and told us categorically that he would not tolerate any signs of this kind in the house. He had also asked the caretaker couple to prevent unauthorised persons from entering our flat. We could rely on the caretaker couple in every respect. We were still amazed. The man was probably in his fifties, had seen

part of the First World War and knew that father was a major and, despite being the "Goldpheasant", didn't understand what was going on around him. Did he realise in time that he had backed the wrong horse? I never received an answer. I tried to track down this peculiar air colonel after the war, but I never found him. I wish there had been a lot more people like him, then the whole thing would have ended a lot sooner.

I'm also thinking of a lady, Else Galster, the childhood friend of my two aunts, Else and Anna. She was a senior magistrate who they wanted to force to join the party. She asked her superiors whether her work would improve if she joined the party. Apparently, she didn't get the right answer. It was suggested to her that she could possibly be removed from office. Her answer was that the Civil Service Pensions Act would continue to apply and she would then be entitled to an appropriate pension. After that, things went quiet, she did not join the party and continued her previous work. Else Galster was a true and sincere friend to our family during all those difficult years.

At the end of 1941, five of my work colleagues and I were taken away from the timber construction company and sent to a furniture and cabinetmaking company, Otto Gleichmar, in Zossenerstraße. We were all trained carpenters, so my practical training came in handy again. The boss was an older gentleman with a flowing shock of white hair, he could have been Albert Einstein, if you like. He was a decent man in contrast to his son, who had a printing job with the SS. He was a real thug and treated us, as he had probably "learnt", as sub-humans. There was harassment in all forms when it suddenly occurred to the master. Our work was of various kinds, including making transport boxes for optical equipment, lined on the inside with the finest white felt. Some of this felt was organised by me for my own purposes. I had no morals in this respect. Three other colleagues were busy making a large wooden model, about two by three metres in size, for the "Reich Forestry Office" that was to be built later. The Nazis still had illusions. The model was never finished, and the original even less so. When I had to stop working there, I could not imagine that I would see this company again, including the junior SS boss, but under completely different conditions.

I had the opportunity to invite friends over. It so happened that we were four couples. My parents promised not to "disturb" us. Steffi also came to this party. Of course, my father and mother had to greet the guests, first mum and then dad, they came separately. I didn't find out what happened at my parents' house after the greeting until much later. My mother told my father to find out which girl he liked best. I can still clearly remember this situation on our balcony in Kulmbacherstrasse, my father chatting to everyone. Of course, I didn't have the slightest idea about this 'test'. Father's choice was clearly Steffi. Of course, this didn't affect my existing and future behaviour towards Steffi, as I was already very fond of her.

Times became increasingly difficult for the Jewish population. On 10 January 1942, we were obliged to hand in fur and wool items. Our family didn't "donate" anything, my mother had seen to that.

At a conference held on 20 January 1942 by senior SS officers, Gestapo officials headed by Reinhard Heydrich and Adolf Eichmann, as well as senior representatives from various ministries, the organisational framework plan for the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" was presented and worked on. No direct decision was made at this conference, as the deportations of the Jewish population were already in full swing. The measures discussed at Am Grossen Wannsee 56 - 58, also known as the "**Wannsee Conference**", were the final starting signal for the "extermination of Jews in Europe", as Hitler always shouted in his speeches and slogans. The fact that nothing was made public about the immense and bestial measures to come - they were treated as a **strictly secret matter** - naturally helped to keep us completely unaware of what was actually to happen. If the measures had been made public, many of those affected would certainly have found a way out to save their lives in some way or to put an end to their existence.

The day of the "Yellow Star" arrived. From then on, we stayed away from the public eye. The rowing

boat, Lindwerder and Uhlandeck were no longer accessible to us. Contact with friends became closer, we were more dependent on our families. There were certainly times when we didn't follow the rules: We went to the cinema without a star, had a beer in a restaurant without being directly aware of the dangers we were exposing ourselves to. I was often invited to Steffi's family home with others. She lived with her mother and grandmother in Paulsbornerstraße, near Olivaer Platz. Steffi's parents were divorced and her biological father, Eduard Blum, lived in Argentina. Her stepfather, Emil Caro, was also divorced from Steffi's mother. Steffi came from a well-off family and was always happy despite her forced labour at Siemens in the electric motor factory. She had trained as a technical draughtswoman, but had no use for it. Over time, a true and intimate friendship developed between us.

Our friendship became ever stronger and more sincere. We made the most of every possible spare time to be together. When Steffi came to visit us, I would pick her up from her home and of course bring her back, a 25-minute walk in each direction. For us, these were always precious and longed-for minutes that we could spend alone.

Steffi turned 21 on 14 March 1942. I wanted to give her something very special for her birthday. I knew that she did a lot of tailoring for herself with great taste and thought that a hand-made sewing box could bring her joy. I was still working in the Gleichmar joinery, so the conditions were right. I built a sewing box with drawers, walnut veneer and inlaid marquetry, a little piece of jewellery. Steffi's birthday came and I will never forget that day. I handed her a wrapped parcel. At first she didn't know what to do with it. She unwrapped it, looked at the sewing box and was completely silent. She looked at me, looked at everyone else present, slowly approached me, hugged and kissed me so warmly in front of everyone that I hadn't expected this "lucky streak". At that time, it was not the order of the day to openly show one's feelings in front of everyone. What usually only happened in secret was now public. I had mentioned earlier that she seemed a bit reserved, but that was no longer the case. I no longer recognised my Steffi. Despite all the misery around us, it was a marvellous birthday. But it didn't end with the presentation of the sewing kit. In a quiet moment, when we were both alone, we made a joint and completely spontaneous decision that would change the rest of our lives: **we got engaged**. I was firmly convinced that I could be a help to Steffi through my 'lineage' and protect her from persecution. So this birthday was perhaps a little different than normal; Steffi and I were the happiest people. On that day, no one of those present had any idea what had happened.

Of course, our common demeanour had changed after our secret engagement for the time being, because there was now nothing left to hide. There was no talk of an official indication of Steffi's hand in marriage with her mother, once Steffi was now "mature", which she herself emphasized very strongly. She also thinks that a tradition is too old-fashioned. Our relatives may have been a little surprised, but certainly not surprised, when we told them about our engagement. There was no objection and everyone congratulated us on the most heartfelt. My father was especially fond of his future daughter-in-law. Steffi immediately had a very good relationship with my parents. Despite persecution and humiliation, we had a new time ahead of us, we hoped that we would survive the time and believed that it would be easier with the two of us. We planned to get married quickly, because what else could we wait for? Living with my parents was not possible due to lack of space, as they were forced to give up a room to a subtenant. Living with Steffi wasn't possible for a while either, as the family were told that they would soon be leaving the large flat. However, they were then given a flat in Xantenerstraße near Olivaer Platz, which was sufficient for the young couple. On 23 July 1942, we went to the registry office in Schmargendorf and returned from there very happily as **Mr and Mrs Grunwald**. We celebrated this day in a very intimate circle, unfortunately overshadowed by the news of the beginning mass deportations, especially of older Jewish people. The "Final Solution to the Jewish Question" began to seek its victims.

We lived our lives as best we could, we did not let our happiness be diminished. We were always united in all our decisions, we dared to do a lot despite all the dangers that surrounded us, we didn't want to give up under any circumstances.

I turned 23 on 4 September 1942, a birthday that was already very much influenced by the events that affected Steffi's family in particular. Steffi's grandmother, Agnes Knopf, an eighty-year-old, very sprightly and distinguished old lady, was informed that she had to be ready for "resettlement" to Theresienstadt in a few days. The old people they wanted to get rid of first had been tricked into signing a "purchase contract" that would guarantee them accommodation and food in Theresienstadt in a so-called old people's home for life (!). The unbelievable impudent cynicism of the Nazis for this "offer" was nothing more than confiscating people's assets under an official cloak and confiscating them for the benefit of the "Reich". The grandmother was picked up with 30 kg of permitted luggage on 10 September 1942 and deported to Theresienstadt on 14 September on the 2nd Great Transport of the Elderly. The old people were collected in a covered furniture van in full view of the rest of the population. I'll talk about my grandmother again.

On my birthday, we did what was possible at the time. My dear young wife wrote a poem especially for me. The content still impresses me, even though more than 50 years have passed. The lines speak for themselves.

To 4 September 1942.

*Today on your birthday
I wish you, my good man, the very best.
love you dearly and deeply,
Much joy that surrounds us both.
Only happiness should always surround you,
health and a long life.
We must conquer the seriousness of life,
Then we will surely achieve something.
We are living in difficult times,
I hope the good is not far away.
Let's start all over again later,
Things can only go uphill.
By joining forces,
we will succeed in moving the hard stone out of the way.
The hours in life are serious and cheerful,
With an iron will we'll get on.
Head high and on our feet,
Then the gate of the world will open.
With fresh courage we want to walk through it,
Happiness and love should always accompany us.
And with healthy, strong strength,
Everything we want will be achieved.
Look into the future with clear eyes,
Sorrow and worry must pass.
As strong as our unbreakable bond,
Let us work hand in hand.
And now, my only good thing, in conclusion,
You will receive a very firm kiss. This shall be a seal,
That our love shall be eternal.
Happiness and blessings until 100 years.
That we will make it, that is quite clear.
from your dearly loving
little Steffilein*

This poem, written by a young woman in love to her husband, is not just a birthday poem, it is a vow. These lines speak of unbroken optimism. We truly believed that a better time lay ahead of us.



Steffi's birthday poem

The deportations to the East became more and more frequent. Places like Auschwitz, Birkenau and Treblinka were mentioned, but also described as rumours. Nothing leaked out about the organised extermination of innocent people. The secrecy was 100 per cent.

The main tenant of the flat in Xantenerstraße, Tilly Lövi, was deported at the end of September. So there were only three of us left in the large flat, which we had to leave after a short time. In the meantime, my parents' lodger was also deported. Steffi and I would have liked to move in with my parents, but on the other hand we didn't want to leave Steffi's mum completely alone because she was very anxious by nature. We got two rooms in a 4-room flat at Westfälischestraße 85 in

Wilmersdorf. The flat was in a side wing of a large villa, formerly Jewish property, then the office of the Harms property management company. The flat was on the ground floor with a kitchen and bathroom, central heating and hot water. The house had a garden, but we didn't use it much in autumn and winter. We just wanted it to stay that way.

I was appointed as the main tenant in Westfälischestraße. As a married couple, we were entitled to a room; single people were also entitled to a room. The kitchen and bathroom had to be shared. There were two older women living with us who also had to do forced labour. Despite a certain amount of cramped conditions and consideration for other people, we felt quite comfortable in this flat.



In the garden, January 1943

It was winter and we were lucky to get this flat. The resolution of housing issues was completely arbitrary. If a party bigwigs needed a better-class flat, the Jewish tenants were thrown out very quickly, especially if they lived in so-called Aryan houses. They were put together with other fellow sufferers in flats that had previously been Jewish-owned or simply deported, because in the Nazis' view they were no longer a "nuisance" and they were gone.

The deportation of Jewish people who were not conscripted into forced labour continued unabated. My father and Steffi's mother, like everyone else, also had to do forced labour. By chance, they both worked for the same company, CATADYN. The work was said not to have been hard, but I can't remember the details. This meant that there was perfect communication between the families, the telephone had been taken away from us long before.

The number of people still remaining in Berlin, most of whom were conscripted, totalled around 15,000. Everyone between the ages of 14 and 65 had to work in the war industry, whether male or female, it didn't matter. For us, this situation was a waiting game. We believed that our deployment protected us from deportation, we imagined that we were needed. My father was protected by my mother's mixed marriage. There was no direct danger for me as a mixed race person and therefore also for Steffi, at least that's what we assumed. Steffi took the opportunity to tell me that her biological father was Protestant. We immediately went to the relevant registry office to get a marriage certificate for Steffi's parents. Her father's religion was indeed Protestant. My mother and other "Aryan" relatives had multiple copies of all the papers that were important to us.

The time came when the serious question of going into hiding and waiting for the end of the war in illegality came up, because things went downhill for the Nazis after the turn of the year 1942/43. The chances of a revival of the earlier successes in the war were nil. It was now a matter of holding out.

Unfortunately, there were very few practical opportunities for us to go into hiding safely. It might have been possible with my aunts Gertrud and Margarethe, who lived in a villa in Eschersheim near Frankfurt/Main. But going into hiding could also be dangerous for our relatives. So we had to abandon this idea. Today, I have to credit our youth at the time with the fact that we were able to lead a happy and harmonious life despite all the turbulence around us. We spent most of our free time with our immediate family.

In January 1943, my parents also had to give up their flat in Kulmbacherstrasse. The house had changed hands and the new landlord didn't want any mixed marriages in his house. The air force colonel had also moved out in the meantime and no more help came from this side. The parents got a nice 2 ½ room flat in Prinzregentenstraße 5, third floor in the side wing. We spent almost every weekend with my parents, and we lived with Steffi's mum anyway. Time passed and the political situation became increasingly worse for the Hitler regime. In January 1943, Stalingrad fell on the Russian front. There were no alternatives for the German troops, the retreat was a fact and in full swing. In spite of the constant stream of defeats and certainly in the knowledge that the war could no longer be won and thus the end of the Nazi dictatorship, the Gestapo struck the final blow. **The "Holocaust"** was unleashed in its entirety to carry out the "total annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe". There was fierce resistance and many casualties on the war fronts. As compensation, the Gestapo was able to attack completely defenceless people. Most of the elderly were deported to Theresienstadt and Auschwitz, leaving the forced labourers. No-one had any idea what was happening, and the awakening was all the worse.

Saturday, 27 February 1943

For the tortured, persecuted and defenceless people, this day meant the **KATASTROPHE**. In a large-scale of "factory action", the Gestapo, with the support of SS henchmen, took all Jewish forced labourers out of factories, workshops and other workplaces completely by surprise. The operation began in the early hours of the morning and, with a few exceptions, was completed by the afternoon. Around 1000 people were arrested in one fell swoop and loaded onto lorries to huge collection camps. There were means of transport, petrol and people for this operation, when everything else was in such short supply. As if by a miracle, Steffi and I were spared from this action for the moment.

That Saturday morning, Steffi told me that she didn't feel well and wanted to stay at home. Steffi's mum and I made our way to our respective workplaces as usual. When we arrived at the Otto Gleichmar joinery, rumours were already circulating about the action that had been started. I immediately made my way back home without a word of apology. On the way, I thought I saw transports to collection centres, but in the excitement I wasn't sure. When I arrived home, I found Steffi safe and sound. She wondered what had happened; of course she had no idea about anything either. After I told her about what I had heard by rumour, we decided to stay in the flat for the time being, not to open the door to anyone. When I arrived home, I found Steffi safe and sound. She wondered what had happened; of course, she had no idea about anything either. After I told her about what I had heard by rumour, we decided to stay in the flat for the time being, not open the door to anyone and wait, at least until the time when we expected the other flatmates, including Steffi's mother, to return. Time passed, nobody came, we remained alone. We could now realise that something had happened, but what? Later that afternoon, it was already dark, we made our way to my parents' house without any wearing the stars. My mum was stunned, dad wasn't at home. Father had now also been caught. In the evening, a so-called Jewish transport helper came to my mother, it was Kurt Crohn from the orphanage in Pankow, who now had to do this very sad job. He brought greetings from my father, who was imprisoned in the community centre in Rosenstrasse. All people who lived in mixed marriages, who were half-breeds or other "Aryan-mixed race" in Nazi jargon, were taken there. Kurt Crohn told us about the scope and size of this operation, which was carried out in broad daylight with an unbelievable amount of lorries (trucks) and SS louts to round up these poor people in collection camps. There was no turning back from there, the security was impenetrable. None of these people could have guessed what fate awaited them. How the armaments industry was suddenly supposed to manage without these forced labourers was not revealed. There were protests, but what use were they? Opposing the Gestapo was completely pointless and associated with risks.

Very depressed and worried, Steffi and I went back to our empty flat late in the evening. We had no news of Steffi's mother either, we didn't know where she had gone. We kept quiet, didn't switch on any lights, nothing happened, but the great uncertainty didn't let us rest.

On Sunday morning, a large demonstration of Aryan women spontaneously started in front of the collection camp in Rosenstraße, demanding the immediate release of their husbands. This demonstration lasted for several days and around the clock. The demonstrators included people who had no direct connection to the arrest operation, and men in Wehrmacht uniforms were even seen protesting very loudly and very harshly. The SS made threatening attempts at deterrence. Machine guns were even brought into position, but the women did not give in. Nobody knows today what would have happened if the SS had fired into the agitated crowd. In the end, they were successful. Today I can no longer remember whether my mother also took part in this demonstration; I don't know. As I only found out much later, this action was the first and probably last public protest against the Nazi regime. It was just a very small sign of a long-awaited civil courage.

Monday, 1 March 1943

This day brought no news at first. Going to our workplaces was out of the question, so the day passed and we didn't really know what to do. The ceiling simply fell on our heads. We both felt the need to get out of this sad situation. We believed and it seemed that the wave of arrests had calmed down. Despite everything, we decided to visit a restaurant in the evening. As we always made decisions of any kind together, it's impossible to say today which of us came up with the idea of going out to a restaurant. We ended up at the "Zigeunerkeller" (Gypsy Cellar) on Kurfürstendamm. We felt comfortable, we didn't think about the present, it was as if we were living in a very deep anesthesia. After all the misery, we wanted to get our minds off things. But it didn't take very long before we were harshly and firmly brought back to reality. Two men dressed in overcoats and slouch hats, unmistakably Gestapo officers, approached our table. They demanded our identity cards. Our fate was sealed. Escape was out of the question, the entrance was guarded. None of the other guests took any notice of the incident, as raids were very common. We only had to pay for what we had already eaten and then we left. There were three trucks outside the door, two for men and one for women. The trucks were already full of other people, not just Jewish people, there were also some deserters. A wave from my Steffi was the last thing I saw of her before she boarded her truck.

I never saw her again.

I have often asked myself whether our actions on that Monday evening were right or wrong. Did we provoke our fate? What would have happened if we hadn't gone to the "Gypsy Cellar" that evening? Would we have been caught in a different way? These questions tormented me for a very long time, nobody could give me an answer. Going into hiding after the events of Saturday was not possible either, it was neither planned nor feasible. A world collapsed for me that day, a short and very happy marriage was destroyed by the actions of infamous criminals. **Why?**

Today I find it difficult to describe the following days chronologically. As a mixed breed or half breed, I was not taken from the Zigeunerkeller to Rosenstrasse, but directly to the collection centre in the Große Hamburger Strasse, the former Jewish retirement home. I suspect that Steffi was also taken there, but I couldn't find her and didn't know where she had gone. I came to this collection centre as I was walking and standing. I immediately claimed that I was a mixed-breed. There was unparalleled chaos. Nobody knew what was going to happen next. We were accommodated in the rooms available, a straw sack on the floor, no blanket. Jewish helpers took our personal details. We didn't get any answers to our questions and we hardly saw anything of the SS. In this chaos, where people were coming and going, it would have been very easy for me to escape from there, but the great hope of meeting Steffi stopped me from doing so.

Tuesday, 2 March 1943

During the morning, I met Kurt Crohn by chance. I asked him to go to my mother immediately and tell her about what had happened. That afternoon I met Crohn again with my mother. She brought the necessary papers for me. My mother enforced to speak to me. She told me, among other things, that she had a message from Steffi and that she was in Rosenstrasse. A helper had given my mum a written message. It read:

**"Please go to my parents, Mrs Paula Grunwald, Berlin W 30, Prinzregentenstraße 5 at Prager Platz. Where is Walter and Mum? I'm in Rosenstraße.
Greetings, kiss, Steffi.
SEND FOOD HERE!!!
Bring Aryan papers!
Do this labour of love for me."**

When I heard that, my hopes of a reunion again rose. I tried to be transferred to Rosenstraße, but that didn't work because this camp was only a reception centre. On the same day, my mum received a second message from Steffi:

**"To Mrs Paula Grunwald
Berlin W, Prinzregentenstraße 5 Gth. III
Please register the ration cards at Eisenbahnstraße
at the school. Wednesday 9-11 am.
Household card is at home. Steffi."**

These two messages came from Steffi in the Rosenstraße camp. My mother quickly got the aforementioned marriage certificate of Steffi's parents and other papers to her collection centre. It was impossible to find out what else happened there, I never learnt anything more.

Gehen Sie bitte
zu meinen Eltern
Frau Paula Grunwald
Berlin W 30
Prinzregentstr. 5.
am
Magorplatz
Wo ist Walter und Matti,
bin in der Rosenstr.
Grüß kurz Steffi.

Schickt Essen
her !!

Artsche Papiere
um Sie diesen Liebesbrief
mitbringen
für mich

An Frau

Paula Grunwald
Berlin W

Prinzregentinstr. 5. Ghs III.

Bitte die Halbzahnticket Eisenbahn-
str. in der Schule anzumelden. Mittwoch
9-11 Uhr. Haushaltskarte liegt zu
Haus.

Steffi.

Steffi's handwritten messages, received on Tuesday, 2 March 1943

Wednesday, 3 March 1943

I am still in Große Hamburger Straße. Kurt Crohn, who was able to move freely between the various camps as a helper, told me that my father and Steffi were still in Rosenstraße. He also told me that my father had met Steffi and was able to talk to her for a long time. It turned out that she was able to register as mixed-race, which she wanted to prove with the marriage certificate she brought over. She had also learnt that I was in Große Hamburger Straße and thought I was coming there. My mum came to see me that same afternoon. I asked her to get the most necessary things for me and Steffi from our flat and to take them to the respective camps with the help of Kurt Crohn. As improbable as it sounds, my mother managed to visit me in my collection camp almost every day, but she never came to Rosenstraße. Perhaps it had something to do with the demonstrations by the Aryan women.

Thursday, 4 March 1943

The next morning, my mother and Kurt Crohn brought me the things I wanted in a rucksack, such as rough clothing, shoes, solid food, etc. There was also a rucksack for Steffi. A rucksack was also packed for Steffi, which Kurt Crohn took to Rosenstraße. From this point onwards, there was no more information about Steffi's whereabouts. She could no longer be found in Rosenstraße and enquiries were unsuccessful. I looked for her in my camp among thousands of others, but she wasn't there. That day I was also told that I was to be sent to Theresienstadt as a mixed race. I was given a transport number, **1/90-12036**, and was assigned a place on the 4th floor, the floor of the Theresienstadt camp. I still believed that Steffi would join me, I just couldn't understand where she had gone. It was only at a much later date, which I will come back to, that I learned that Steffi had been deported to Auschwitz on Thursday, 4 March 1943 on a transport from the east without the most essential items. As proof of this, my parents received a message from Steffi at the end of April 1943 that she had been thrown off the moving train. The message came in an envelope in the post and read:

"5.3.43

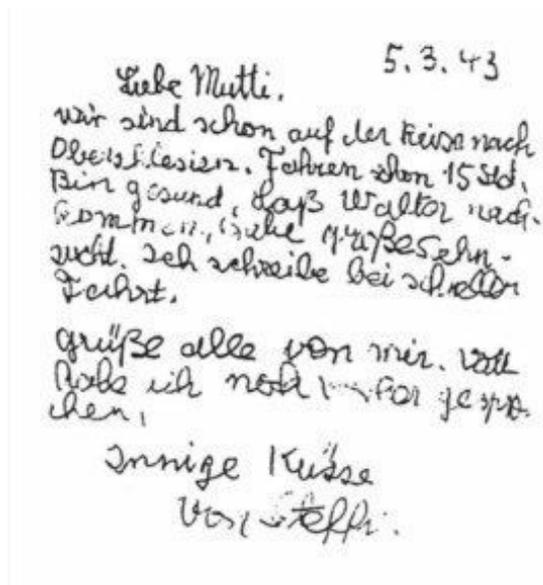
Dear Mum!

We are already travelling to Upper Silesia. We've been travelling for 15 hours. I'm in good health. Let Walter join us. I have a great longing. I'll write while travelling fast. Give my regards to everyone. I spoke to Dad earlier.

Sincere kisses from Steffi."

This message was the last sign of life from my Steffi. What was going on inside her when she wrote these lines? Uncertainty about what to expect? Hoping to meet me through my offspring? She was innocently murdered by a system and criminals whose aim was to exterminate the Jewish race. I only got to read these lines after the war: I am grateful that I have them in my possession today as originals alongside other memorabilia, including the sewing box mentioned earlier, the birthday poem, etc.

Steffi's last sign of life



5.3.43
Liebe Mutti,
wir sind schon auf der Reise nach
Oberschlesien. Fahren schon 15 Std.
Bin gesund, das Walter auch.
Komme in 1-2 Wochen nach Hause.
Ich schreibe bei schneller
Fahrt.
Grüße alle von mir. Ich
habe ich noch 1-2 für je
den.
Innige Küsse
von Steffi.

So there were people who managed to keep away from the Nazi terror. They must have noticed on the railway line what was hidden in the freight wagons. Thanks to these courageous people, Steffi's last sign of life reached the right address. However, this message gave us very sad news.

On 8 March 1943, my father was released from Rosenstrasse after ten days in prison. Thanks to my "Aryan" mother, he was able to return to the flat we shared as a free man.

At the beginning of 1992, 50 years later, I began researching myself and other family members. The Berlin State Archives and the Federal Archives, Potsdam Department, were of great help to me. German thoroughness in the Third Reich was so great that documents about the persecution of the Jewish population were largely preserved. In this way, I had access to my and Steffi's papers, transport lists, the inventory of the confiscated flat in Westfälischestraße, etc. etc. Steffi arrived in Auschwitz on the 34th Osttransport on 4 March 1943, where she had to go the same way as many millions of other people. I found Steffi's name in the transport lists of the 34. Osttransport at the very end with a transport number that led to speculation. Her initial number was 1/90, but no further digits. It is therefore not impossible that she was assigned the same main number as me for Theresienstadt. It is possible that she was called up at the Rosenstraße camp but, due to her hearing defect, did not realise it or was exchanged for so-called "privileged Jews" who were to be sent to Theresienstadt and thus sent to Auschwitz and certain death on the next transport to the east. Such manipulations were part of the Gestapo's daily routine in order to fulfil the prescribed transport quotas. As I said, this is speculation. What happened will always remain a great uncertainty for me.

Further research revealed that Steffi's mother was deported to Auschwitz on the 31st Osttransport on 1 March 1943, the second day after the action. She suffered the same fate.

Back to Große Hamburger Straße. The days passed, nothing happened. Every now and then, SS-Obersturmbannführer **Adolf Eichmann** arrived at the camp for inspection. This man was in charge of the practical organisation of the arrests, the transports, the extermination apparatus of all the camps. He organised and directed the perfect execution of the "extermination of the Jewish race in Europe" ordered by Hitler. He was responsible for the heinous murders of millions of people. He did not vilify himself, he gave orders to his people to carry out the dirty exterminations for him. The Israeli secret service tracked him down in Argentina after the war. He was brought to Israel, a sensation that went around the world. Eichmann was brought before a court in Jerusalem, where he repeatedly claimed that he was a soldier and had only carried out the orders he had been given. His pitiful arguments were of no use to him; he was sentenced to death by hanging and executed a few months later. Anyone who still survives the Holocaust today knows the role that Adolf Eichmann, an SS Obersturmbannführer from Austria, played in the Third Reich. His name alone aroused the greatest fear and anxiety in everyone.

Tuesday / Wednesday, 16 / 17 March 1943

My parents visited me as often as they could. The day came when it was time for me to go on transport. Beforehand, I had to sign that all my possessions would be confiscated in favour of the "Reich" and that I had lost my German citizenship. I had no possessions and I was happy to renounce my citizenship of this state. In the days before the deportation, my parents reported that both of my mother's brothers, Alfred and Hans, visited the already sealed flat in Westfälischestraße to retrieve personal belongings. They didn't bother with the Gestapo seal. From the seal we can conclude that they were looking for us there too.

When I think back today about the thoughts and uncertainties that moved me during those days, I can no longer recapitulate them. Could I have guessed what lay ahead of me? Did I have hopes of seeing my Steffi again? Was there a chance of surviving this crime? I didn't know at the time.

On 17 March, the transport left for Theresienstadt. My parents came the evening before to say goodbye. It was a very difficult time for all of us. I could have walked out of Große Hamburger Straße with my parents without any difficulty, there was a great deal of disorganisation. The door guard had lost control. But where was I supposed to go? Endangering my father again by running away was not an option for me. Besides, I still had a very small hope of meeting Steffi in Theresienstadt. None of us knew about Steffi's last message. When we said our difficult goodbyes, neither my mother nor I could have known that we would meet again in a few months under completely different circumstances.

The next day, Wednesday 17 March in the afternoon, the time had come. There were 1164 of us in various age groups getting ready for transport. We were driven on trucks with our luggage to the Lehrter freight train station. As the "loading" took place in broad daylight, the "spectators" on the bridge above the freight train station had a full view of what was happening. Covered freight wagons, or rather cattle wagons, were waiting for us there. The SS servants present herded 75 people into the individual wagons with brutal beatings. There was a thin layer of straw on the floor of the wagons and in one corner there was **a bucket for defecation!** This time women and men were not separated. We received some food from the Jewish community beforehand, but nothing to drink. What these details meant for a journey of indefinite duration need not be mentioned here. Barbed wire had been nailed over the ventilation hatches from the outside to prevent an escape. After the wagons were filled with the human load, the sliding doors were locked and sealed from the outside and we were trapped. I was lucky to get into a car with people of almost the same age. None of us knew whether the journey was really going to Theresienstadt. This ignorance gave rise to rumours of the worst kind. When the train started moving, we tried to make ourselves as comfortable as possible, depending on the circumstances. With the little space we had available, we alternated to stand, squat or lying down to get some sleep. The people standing at the ventilation hatch had to report which station names they saw. As we travelled through Dresden's main station, we breathed a sigh of relief, our doubts disappeared and we headed in the right direction. There were many stops along the way, which extended the journey time. The next morning we reached Bauschowitz, a railway station near Theresienstadt. With a lot of shouting and orders from the SS we were able to leave the carriages. We were finally able to stretch out. We had to line up in rows of four, then we were marched off, this time guarded by Czech gendarmes, apparently also Nazis true to the line, there was such a thing. After walking 4 kilometres, we reached Theresienstadt with our luggage. A new but very uncertain chapter in my life began.

The march towards Theresienstadt was slow and silent. None of us knew what to expect, everyone had to deal with themselves. We came to the gate of the casemates. As we passed through, I was fully aware that there was no turning back for me, that my time was limited and that there was virtually no hope of survival.

The marching convoy wound its way to the first stop, the Hanover barracks. All the barracks had been given German names. We arrived at the so-called "airlock /lock", where we were scrutinized and our luggage checked. Money, valuables, jewellery and food were taken away from us. To our utter astonishment, we realised that some of the checks were carried out by ghetto inmates on detachment, who were sometimes not much inferior to the SS in tone and behaviour. It was unbelievable that our own people behaved like that. Every now and then the SS made an appearance without intervening significantly. It later turned out that most of the important positions in the self-administration had been filled by Czechs. They were apparently given the privilege because they were there first ones there. A certain hatred of the German newcomers, "**the Reich Germans**", could not be mistaken. The inspection of my luggage went relatively quickly. I kept what valuables I kept, my wristwatch and wedding ring, as well as my food in dry form. Nobody asked any questions and that was the end of the matter for me. I went on to registration. The most important identification was my transport number, which always followed me into the future. I was asked about my ability to work, what work I had done before, my state of health and much more. The next step was to assign me a place to stay. Men and women were separated, and that also applied to married couples. In the beginning, it was also forbidden to visit each other in the individual accommodation centres. I was given a place in the draughty attic of the Hanover barracks with a mattress made of paper fabric, filled with very little straw, measuring 190 x 80 cm. The mattresses lay on the floor with gaps of about 15 cm between them, the transport number on the wall. The place in the attic was to be my home for the next few months. I had a blanket in my rucksack, which served me well. We had neither sheets nor pillows, we slept with our clothes on. The wind whistled through the open rafters and you had to keep warm because there was no heating of any kind. Desperation grew more and more, but what did I have to choose from? Over time, you became numb, you didn't care about anything.

Each department had a "room elder", who in turn was subordinate to the "floor elder", who also had a "superior", etc. etc. I also got my rations from the floor elder, i.e. the meal card, rations such as bread, margarine and sugar. I can't remember today how big or rather how small the rations were, it was too little to live on and too much to die on. Bureaucracy flourished here. Everything had to be applied for in writing and receipted, and employment was provided. The corruption was enormous. In the first few days I suffered from insomnia; the nights were the worst. You could hardly save yourself from vermin. The sanitary conditions were completely inadequate. In the cellar of the barracks there were some LATRINES with a so-called "thunder box or dunny", in another room the washing facilities, a stone channel on the wall with a row of cold water taps.

If you left your mattress, you had to worry about being robbed. You had to hide your few belongings well, you learnt that pretty quickly. It was said that the accommodation was guarded by the ghetto police and that theft led to severe penalties. I couldn't come to terms with this environment. I was close to giving up.



(Worthless) ghetto money

Armed with a food tray, which I had in my luggage, I went to my designated food counter at a certain time. The food distribution was located next to a kitchen in a completely different barracks. There were already long queues of people, some of them gaunt, waiting to pick up the little food they had. A small section of the meal card was cut off and carefully placed in a small tin with a slot. It can be assumed that they were counted later. Hot food was only served once a day, at lunchtime. In the morning, they were given an indefinable black liquid called coffee. The hot food was 100 – 150 mls of soup, which was called lentil soup but had nothing to do with lentils. It was warm water with some kind of soup powder. Despite everything, it was a much sought-after supplement for many people, because they often heard the words: "**Does the Gentleman take the soup?**" I was hungry myself, but when I saw the haggard, old figures of people, I often gave them the soup I was entitled to. The rest of the hot meal usually consisted of 1 - 2 potatoes cooked in their skins, often already rotten, with a thin sauce on top. If you got a few small pieces of meat with it - there were some in the big barrel - you could consider yourself lucky. Sometimes there was pearl barley or millet porridge; you had to take what was available on the day, there was no choice. The cooks and kitchen staff were of course not reliant on these small portions, there was a lot of pilfering going on. You got further with connections. The people coming from Germany usually got the short end of the stick. To this day, I have never realised that there was so much "bread envy" among my own fellow sufferers. Everyone thought of themselves first, and would walk over dead bodies if necessary to gain an advantage.

Shortly after arriving in Theresienstadt, I developed an ulcerated infection on my right index finger, which required surgical intervention. There was a doctor's department in the Hanover barracks which, to my great astonishment, was very well equipped. The operation was performed under local anaesthetic and a thick bandage on my finger prevented me from working. I used the time to try to find out the names of members of my family and their accommodation through all sorts of "offices". As I didn't know what fate had already befallen Steffi, I naturally also looked for her in Theresienstadt, but she was nowhere to be found. So I had to get used to the idea that she had travelled to the East and that there was no hope of seeing her again. There were already rumours about Auschwitz, of gas chambers and other exterminations, but nothing could be confirmed. This knowledge or lack of knowledge was unbearable.

The first person I met was Agnes Knopf, Steffi's grandmother. What had happened to this tall, stately lady in the space of six months? She was living in the backyard of a block of flats in a poorly insulated shed with five other old women in an area of just under 10 square metres. Three-storey bunkbeds, a bench to sit on, a few nails in the wall for the remaining clothes - that was all the "furniture". But that

was also the result of the "purchase contract" that was forced on the old people before their deportation. Where are the guarantees they were led to believe? What was left of all the promises? I saw it, an infirmity, a waiting for the redeeming death. The grandmother recognised me immediately and asked if Steffi was with me. She also asked about her daughter. She asked me to tell her everything, but I couldn't give her any more information. She just shook her head, she couldn't understand it either. Nevertheless, the old lady took the news in her stride. I would say that she could no longer fully comprehend what had happened. Through later research, I found out that she was deported to Auschwitz on 18 December 1943 and died on 30 December 1943 at 8.20 am. Cause of death: old age. She was 82 years old. There is no need to comment on this "official" information.

The next person I found was my father's brother Max. He used to live in Düsseldorf with his Aryan wife. After the racial laws were announced, Max's wife divorced him. This made him an outlaw (free). Unfortunately, this kind of divorce happened often. I remember that my mother also received the 'offer' to divorce my father. There was no offer for my mum. However, I can well imagine that her response was in no way ideologically in line with the Nazis' view.

Max Grunwald came to Theresienstadt in the summer of 1942. When I met him, he didn't recognise me and couldn't do anything with me, even after my explanations. He was completely apathetic and could hardly speak. He died in Theresienstadt shortly after I met him.

Outside work at Heydrich Castle

Once my finger was as good as new, I had to report to the "labour recruitment". Again, I was asked what I had done so far. I said that I was a cabinetmaker and wanted to work in my line of work if possible. Everyone who was healthy had to work. Now it was time to wait for what was to come. It didn't take long, it was probably the end of April, and I was called to the "job placement centre". I was told that I had to arrive with my belongings the next morning at 7am. When I asked what that meant, they just told me to wait until the next day. At the same time, I received instructions for a new overall and shoes. For the life of me, I couldn't imagine what was going on. It was a sleepless night: theories were put forward, but I couldn't come to an acceptable conclusion.

The next morning I arrived at the job centre on time with my belongings. First I had to hand in my meal card, then I was told that I would be travelling to an external labour detachment near Prague accompanied by a Czech gendarme. They only said that a group was already working there. I would find out everything else when I got there. The gendarme signed me out, he knew very little German, but enough to tell me, after we had left Theresienstadt, to take off or cover up the yellow star. I don't remember what I did then. He probably didn't feel comfortable leaving with a "Jew". We travelled in a carriage to Lobositz railway station and from there on a normal train to Kojetice, a journey on a passenger train that took about 2 hours. Not a word was exchanged during the whole journey and the other passengers didn't pay any attention to us either. We got off the train in Kojetice and were met by an SS man with a car. After about half an hour, we arrived at our destination in Panenske Brezany, the summer residence and castle of the **widow Heydrich**. Reinhard Heydrich was killed by Czech resistance fighters in a bomb attack at the end of May 1942. His widow kept the castle, which formerly belonged to a Jewish sugar manufacturer. She lived there with her two sons and a daughter. I was delivered to the guardhouse at the entrance, where I was met by an SS-Hauptscharführer Warnke.

The following conversation took place:

"Where are you from (!!)"

"From Theresienstadt."

"Yes, I know that. From the Reich and from where?"

"From Berlin."

The answer seemed to be enough for him. It turned out later that he had requested a cabinet maker who had to be a "Reich German". So I found myself at Heydrich Castle. The name sounded very bad to me, as I knew what was associated with that name. We were a group of 120 men aged between 25 and 40, all Czechs, some from mixed marriages. In Czechoslovakia, unlike in Germany, Jewish men were also arrested. Apart from them, there were another six "Reich Germans" in the group. Our job was to turn the rather overgrown garden into a large-scale horticultural business with huge greenhouses, cold frames, orchards and much more. Hauptscharführer Warnke was the site manager, he must have understood something about the trade. We worked from 7 am in the morning until 5 pm in the afternoon, sometimes even 6 pm, then it was evening. Sundays were rest days. Despite all the negative things I had experienced so far, I had to recognise that Warnke behaved correctly towards us in every respect. There were never any punishments or beatings. He couldn't put us out of action if he wanted to achieve his work load goal.

The two Friedmann brothers were in charge of our group compared to Warnke. They had to iron out some things for us, but they were always on our side. The "madam", as we had to call the widow Heydrich, had procured very cheap labour for her company. It can hardly be assumed that she had any other expenses with us apart from the very miserable rations of food we were offered. She used binoculars to check from the castle balcony whether we were working sufficiently. The castle guard, which was located in a house at the entrance, consisted of about 12 to 15 SS men who were apparently

no longer fit for war. Some had wounds, others were older. They were also polite to us and sometimes spoke to us; it was an acceptable relationship. The guard was commanded by an SS-Oberscharführer Kohl, who was also a decent bloke. We weren't shouted at, the tone was correct. After what I had experienced so far, it was a great relief for me.

Our accommodation was the former, very large horse stable with a high ceiling. That meant two floors of living space. As the group had already been working there for three months, the "furnishings" were already ready. I was given a bedstead with a relatively good mattress on the top floor, a fantastic feeling after the attic in Theresienstadt. Most of the trades were represented in this group. I worked in the carpentry workshop, an angled building next to the horse stable. The equipment in the workshop was not modern, there were no machines. I had to rely on manual labour and my earlier skills were a great help. A glazier from Hamburg, also of mixed race, worked with me. There was also a butcher among us, our cook, who had to provide food using a "Gulashkanone" (German for Field Kitchen). Officially, we sometimes ate porridge cooked from blood, which tasted horrible, and sometimes a thick meat sauce with peeled potatoes. Every third evening we sat outside in summer and inside in winter and peeled mountains of potatoes. When we were outside, it could happen that a few SS men would sit down and talk to us. The official food was richer and better than in Theresienstadt, it just lacked variety. Here we always talk about "official", but unofficially it was quite different. We were allowed to receive parcels in unlimited quantities and sizes. Some comrades received a parcel every day, others every second or third day. Prague wasn't that far away, most of them came from there. They also had their Aryan wives, who supported their husbands in every way. That was no use to me at the moment, as my parents had no idea where I was. One thing we were forbidden to do was to write officially. One of my comrades, Hans Levitus, helped me to arrange a "submarine", i.e. an illegal letter to my parents via his Aryan wife in Prague. After about 14 days there was a surprise for me: I received a parcel from my parents. The parcels we received made life much more bearable. The parcels my parents sent were always very thoughtful. In addition to solid foods such as peas, beans, etc., there were also some tonics (dextrose, vitamin tablets). The parcels came from the post office every day on a trolley. They were distributed at the roll call, but we had to open them for inspection. I don't know what they were looking for, we could keep everything anyway. Maybe they were looking for weapons. My mum was very inventive with my parcels. There were always cigarettes hidden in packets of peas or glucose, which had no significance from the point of view of the inspectors.

After work, our accommodation was transformed into a "canteen kitchen". People were cooking, frying and preparing food everywhere. My comrades had electric hotplates, frying pans and pots. I was amazed where it all came from, but soon the mystery was solved. We smuggled in everything we could. This was tacitly tolerated by our guards, no-one was interested in raising any objections.

There were certainly some things that were unpleasant. When we met the "madam" on the castle grounds, we had to stand at attention in front of her, only then were we allowed to go on. This could happen dozens of times a day. Once I walked past her, I must have been thinking without stopping. She called me back, spat in my face and snarled at me. I would have liked to repay her in kind, but what's the point? My father always had a saying: "You can't ask a cow for veal." In this respect, it applied to this woman. Not only was she very snooty, she was also completely uneducated. You could tell by the way she spoke.

Our group was building this big plant. One of my mates was a construction engineer. He had to make all the drawings for the greenhouses. Foundations were poured, tripods welded and everything glazed. Our glazier had his hands full. We dug out, created new paths, sowed vegetables in the existing sheds, moved the young plants and finally transplanted them into the hot/cold frames. Fruit trees were planted, everything that was necessary for a large farm. As I came to the castle in spring, everything was already in full swing. 120 people can do quite a lot. I also had a lot to do in my carpentry workshop to play my part. When the harvest of tomatoes, cucumbers and other vegetables got underway in

summer, everyone had to help. It's not hard to imagine that some of these products ended up with us during the harvest. We got a good vitamin injection.

As the castle was often visited by very high-ranking SS leaders, we were entertained by rabbit hunting. When the "gentlemen" returned in the evening, the prey followed on a cart. Sometimes 50 - 60 hares were lined up on poles. We were also officially given some lean hares that nobody wanted. We had to unload the hares. Of course, our butcher and cook was there to sort them. He did this carefully, some of the fattest rabbits came to us. There was no control.

We had a job in the castle cellar, enclosure had to be built for the coming apples and pears. The cook at the castle was a Czech woman, who we knew didn't think much of the "rule". Two mates and I were working in the castle cellar. Suddenly, a rude voice with swear words rang out on the cellar stairs, the cook was on her way down. She was carrying a covered basket and continued to rant. Once downstairs she was suddenly very quiet, put her finger over her mouth, uncovered the basket, it had the best food in it. She said to us quietly: "This is for you, first you, then the "madam". She left the basket and went back upstairs, scolding us. We enjoyed our meal. There were still people who took pity on us. We looked after ourselves to the best of our ability, we had no scruples. We had no moralising towards the Nazis we hated.

On Sundays off in summer, there was often a very special event: in the afternoon, a group of 25 - 30 comrades were allowed to go to a gravel pit to play "football" with just two SS men as guards. We Germans were gladly taken along because **we** had to play and the others had other things to do. We got to the pit and suddenly discovered a crowd of women waiting for us. They were the wives of our inmates. As the illegal correspondence worked very well with the help of the local Czechs, my inmates knew who to expect. The SS men were keen to go along as guards, because they were properly spiked so that they kept their mouths shut, and they did. Of course, the women brought parcels and parcels, they could talk to their husbands in the pit without being seen from outside. We also learnt a lot about the political situation, so we knew that things were going downhill. The parcels that our people were carrying again passed through without any checks. Everyone knew what was going on, the "madam" had no idea. Once it even went so far that we had to do a job with ten men in the neighbouring village and then went to a cinema. We were unlucky though, the nanny discovered us. Of course there was a row at Warnke's, but it was hushed up and there were no punishments. Sometimes I couldn't stop marvelling.

There was another event that affected me. It was Sunday again, we had the day off. I was doing my laundry when a man from guard came and told me to go there. As I also had a lot of work to do for the guards, I told him I had the day off and would turn up tomorrow. He went off, but came straight back and gave me an order from Oberscharführer Kohl that I had to come straight away. I had no other choice. I got to the guardhouse, Kohl took me in and just told me to go to a room. No sooner said than done. Who is in this room? **My mother!** I was completely taken aback. Kohl told me that he wanted to leave us alone, but that we shouldn't talk about politics. We had other things to do. My mum spontaneously said to me: "*Boy, you've never looked so good.*" I was naturally curious to find out how mum had managed to visit me. She had contacted Mrs Levitus in Prague and wanted to make the same journey via the gravel pit. I wasn't there that Sunday. She was in the gravel pit, couldn't find me and went straight to the castle. She thought it was worth a try. To get into the "protectorate" at all, she had to have a travel permit. At the relevant office in Berlin, she said she wanted to visit her son, who worked at Heydrich Castle. The name Heydrich was apparently the key to the gate, she got the permit and set off, of course packed with all sorts of things. The journey from Prague was very arduous, first by train, then by bus and a lot of walking. But what doesn't a mother do for her son? We sat undisturbed for over three hours. Kohl came in once and said that he was taking the permission for the visit on his head, as Warnke was away at the time. Mother had, of course, provided the whole guard with cigarettes. Who would have thought it possible on the last evening in Große Hamburger Straße that we would be sitting opposite each other again? There was a lot to talk about. Mum told me about

Steffi's last message, which was a very hard blow for me. She brought me a picture of her and I kept it with me the whole time afterwards. She also told me that shortly after my deportation, father was once again conscripted into forced labour. He was sent to Krumme Lanke to build tracks on the underground railway. His strength was no longer sufficient for this work. He was put on sick leave and was spared until the end of the war. My mother was also conscripted after she lost her job at the Luitpold pharmacy due to some regulations. She was in a factory where she had to remove carbon sticks from used batteries. Apparently she was so clumsy that she was gladly refrained from continuing to work there. She was released from all service obligations with a medical certificate.

Time flew by. Kohl came back at the end. The conversation revealed that he had been drafted into the SS. He assured my mother that he would do everything he could to ensure that I could enjoy a bearable existence at the castle. We said goodbye. Mum said she would come back if it was at all possible. I asked her to bring me some important things. It only took two months and she really did manage to come. But this time Warnke was there and authorised another visit without any problems. We had a whole afternoon to ourselves, but were not allowed to leave the guard room.

One summer's day, a big accident happened at the castle. The Heydrichs' eldest son rode his bicycle through the castle gate at high speed and crashed into a passing truck. The gate guard tried to stop the boy, but it was too late. The boy was taken to the guards seriously injured, Warnke immediately sent for our own doctor, but the widow Heydrich refused to allow the boy to receive first aid from a Jew. He died of his injuries on the way to hospital. We had to hastily dig a grave in the garden and the boy was buried there in a zinc coffin. All the SS bigwigs imaginable attended the funeral service, with Himmler at the head. We weren't allowed to leave our accommodation that day.

I remember another episode. One day, Heydrich's daughter, who was probably about 8-9 years old, came to my workshop. She brought me some doll's furniture that was broken and asked me to repair it for her. I explained to her that she first had to go to "Uncle Warnke" to give me permission. Warnke gave me the go-ahead. The girl came almost every day to see how I was getting on. She was incredibly friendly. When she came to collect the doll's furniture, she put a small parcel on the workbench for me. When I asked her what was in it, she said "Cigarettes". I wanted to know where she had got them from. She said she had taken them from mum. I had no choice but to give the packet back to her. I didn't want any trouble.

One of the last big jobs was to build a swimming pool in the garden. All the shaft work was done without machines. We had to form, reinforce and finally pour the concrete. The pool was approx. 15 x 6 metres and 1.50 m deep. It was the only time we had to work for about 30 hours of continuous labour. We poured in shifts so that one part could rest in between. We probably had a mixing machine, but the concrete had to be carted to the site on planks. It had to be carted continuously, otherwise it would have gone wrong. Later, the tiles were laid and finally a bathhouse was added.

I was often asked later whether anyone had escaped from there. The answer is NO. Everyone knew that escaping was pointless, you would have immediately risked reprisals against your free relatives. The same applied to us Reich Germans. We certainly believed that our activities would last longer and that we could possibly see the end of Nazi rule there. That was shattered at the beginning of February 1944. We had to return to Theresienstadt. The gardening work was to be continued by imprisoned biblical scholars. We never learnt anything about the fate of these people. We were all taken to Kralup railway station and travelled to Theresienstadt in passenger carriages. We knew that the Nazis couldn't go on much longer, the end was in sight, but when? I was glad that I had a favourable period, considering the circumstances. I also believed that the upcoming stay in Theresienstadt could be bridged. Despite everything, my health improved and I wanted to see what was in store for me.

Back in Theresienstadt

We arrived in Lobositz in three normal passenger carriages and a freight wagon for our luggage. We only had one SS man per carriage as a guard. We couldn't regard them as directly friendly, but the earlier style of shouting and snarling had disappeared. We were surprised that we weren't taken to Bauschowitz, the actual railway station for all arrivals. In Lobositz we were uncoupled from the scheduled train and a small steam locomotive pulled us directly to Theresienstadt, to the so-called Bahnhofstraße. That was news to us. In the meantime, a railway connection had been built, which was primarily used for the numerous transports to Auschwitz. It would have been completely impossible to "ship" transports from the east of around 1000 people outside Theresienstadt.

We got off the train; as usual, they wanted to lead us into the "airlock" to check us. So was the theatre about to start again? After 10 months on the outside, they wanted to "frisk" us again. But it didn't come to that. Apparently there was an order from the commandant's office to leave us in peace. We were now sent to Theresienstadt with things that you weren't normally allowed to have. This time I didn't end up in the attic of the Hanover barracks, I was allocated accommodation in a house in L5/4 (Parkstraße) on the 2nd floor. The house belonged to the ghetto fire brigade. The firemen lived in this house. There were four beds in the room assigned to me, one of which I was given, another one was occupied and two beds remained empty. My room mate, an older man, told me that an unbelievably large number of transports had gone to Auschwitz in the previous months, which in practice meant that thousands of people were being sent to extermination. Theresienstadt now had the status of a transit camp. No-one was sure when an eastern transport would arrive. The only people who were still protected from a transport to the East were the half-breeds. After my stay in "Schloss Heydrich", it was a real setback for me. I certainly knew a bit more about the political situation and that the military situation was catastrophic for the Nazis, but was that enough to be sure that I would survive? I couldn't decide my own fate.

It wasn't long before the labour office contacted me. I learnt that there was an outdoor job at a road construction site in Leitmeritz, which was hard physical work. You were also supposed to get a special allotment of food on this job, as you left the city in the morning and only came back after eight hours of work. A decent cabbage soup was served on the construction site, which was a good supplement to the normal rations. Our Theresienstadt allotment was also increased by 50% for this work. Instead of two, we were now given three more potatoes and half a ladle of sauce. Nothing had changed in the choice of food. I signed up for this work because I didn't want to stay in Theresienstadt, I didn't want to see the people and, above all, I didn't want to have anything to do with the bureaucracy of this self-administration. The so-called "fat months" in Heydrich Castle were over. Receiving parcels from my parents was also over. Above all, I had no more contact by letter; my parents only learnt that I was going back to Theresienstadt.

It was February 1944 and relatively mild. I did the road construction work, it didn't bother me, I had stored up well beforehand. At the end of February, I saw on a notice that experts and craftsmen were being sought for the "**Zossen barrack construction**". The first group was asked to volunteer. There was no hesitation for me. Once you've tasted the flavour of an outpost, you want more. I was accepted. I had no idea what lay ahead of me. I could only work out that it was near Berlin. I saw this as an advantage.

Wulkow barracks camp, known as Zossen

The Wulkow barracks camp was intended to serve as an alternative camp for the **Reich Main Security Office** as the bombing raids on Berlin became increasingly frequent. The "masters" no longer felt safe. Why the name "Zossen" was always used was not entirely clear to me at the time, as Zossen was located to the south of Berlin, while Wulkow was to the east, roughly halfway between Berlin and what was then Küstrin (now Polish). It can be assumed that the place called "Zossen" for secret tactical reasons. The actual village of Wulkow is not far from the Oderbruch area. At the end of the village in the direction of Neuhardenberg was a very large wooded area where a large barrack town was to be built, equipped with water, sewerage, electricity, kitchen barracks, garages etc. etc. This work was now carried out by us, prisoners from Theresienstadt. The construction manager and camp commander of this group at the time was a 34-year-old Austrian-born SS-Obersturmführer, **Franz Stuschka**. As I have seen from later documents, he belonged to the closest circle around Eichmann, which he always denied in much later times. I will be talking about him very often.

The first group to which I belonged consisted of 50 men aged between 18 and 45. We were ordered to the recruitment office in Theresienstadt, the same procedure as I had experienced before. We had to be ready with our luggage at 7 a.m. on 2 March 1944. There was a normal passenger wagon and four fully loaded goods wagons with parts of barracks, tools, a tractor with trailer and a field kitchen on the railway tracks. We left Theresienstadt in the course of the morning. We were taken back to Lobositz. There we were coupled to a scheduled train in the direction of Berlin. The windows of the carriage were not covered, so we could follow the journey closely. We had an SS-Oberscharführer Stiasny with us as a guard, an Austrian and a shouter, but otherwise quite harmless. It was a very strange feeling for me to be travelling by train in the opposite direction to a year ago. The journey went relatively quickly, we bypassed Berlin and arrived at the Trebnitz railway station, our destination. We were shunted onto a railway siding. Stuschka welcomed us in Trebnitz. We hadn't yet got a proper impression of our "boss", so we didn't yet know what this man could do. All the freight wagons were unloaded in Trebnitz. It turned out that the barrack parts were intended for us, parts of the simplest construction, no insulation or other refinements, they were simple wooden shacks. A team was formed to load these parts onto the trailer and transport them to Wulkow on a four-kilometre country road with the help of the tractor. The driver of the tractor, Robert (Bobby) Behr, one of our own who was allowed to drive with Stuschka's authorisation, had his work cut out for him, as the journey between Trebnitz and Wulkow was a difficult shuttle commute. On the day of arrival we had no opportunity to set up our own barracks; the first night's accommodation was in the open air. We were lucky, it didn't rain, but there was still a thin layer of snow. I often thought about how we were guarded that first night and the days that followed. There was nothing but forest and more forest. There was no fence either, you could have escaped from there, but the same question kept coming up: Where to? The few Berliners we had among us couldn't really orientate themselves as to where we had ended up. Later, a number of young SS men arrived and took over the guard. They were under the command of SS-Oberscharführer Hanke and Stiasny as well as SS-Scharführer Proschek and SS-Unterscharführer Hardenberger.

We 50 men were now divided into work groups. The transport group continued bringing the material. We now began to create a place on the outer edge of the forest, east of the road to Neuhardenberg, to erect our own barracks. As I said, they were very flimsy wooden shacks that offered little protection from the cold or wet, and the roofs were not watertight. Water for the field kitchen was fetched in barrels from the village, there was no washing water at first. The first few days were more than primitive, but we knew that things would soon have to change, as it was impossible to carry out a planned project of this magnitude under such conditions. It wasn't long before we got our own water. A Master fountain builder called Wilhelm Voss, a man in his fifties, came from Berlin. A working group of 6 men was formed, to which I was assigned to "**The Wellbuilders**". We had to drill the first well on this site under very simplified conditions without any mechanical aids. Everything was done by hand.

The ground consisted of pure sand, so drilling was not too difficult. It wasn't really drilling in the sense of the word, but a kind of "pumping". A ram was suspended in a 12 cm thick outer pipe, which was moved up and down with a water supply and manual traction. This caused the sand to grind up and be collected in this ram. The outer pipe sank deeper and deeper into the ground with certain manual rotations. The ram had to be emptied constantly. It was hard labour but bearable. We normally got water at a depth of 10 - 12 metres. After a few installations, we were able to fit a hand pump; we finally had the water we had longed for. Our group of 6 comrades stayed together the whole time. We became a team that was also used for a number of other jobs. The next contingent of 40 men arrived 5 ½ weeks later. Our own camp was ready in a few days and we were quickly fully deployed for the actual work. The rations, which were delivered every 14 days by a railway wagon from Theresienstadt, was somewhat better. It was probably also due to the fact that our cook, Robert Meder from Berlin, stood by us; there was no mischief-making like in Theresienstadt. We were 90 strong in April, mostly Czechs, but also Germans and some Austrians. We got on well, there were no differences, on the contrary, we stuck together wherever we could. The group was to be expanded to 250 people by August 1944, including 20 women. The first 50 people included three ghetto guards, who were supposed to keep "order" among us. The 'chief' of the guard, Georg Einstein, claimed that he was a nephew of Albert Einstein.

Before we put up the real barracks, the forest had to be cleared first. Paths were laid out, fences erected and water and drainage pipes laid. We could move freely within an area, but of course we were not allowed to leave it. Working hours were from 6 a.m. to around **8 p.m. to 10 p.m.** in summer and from **7 a.m.** to dusk in winter, with a midday break of one hour and a short break for lunch in the late afternoon. There were no days off; work was done 7 days a week. During working hours, so-called roll calls were ordered every morning, midday and evening to check that all prisoners were present. These roll calls were the most feared performances in the satellite camp.



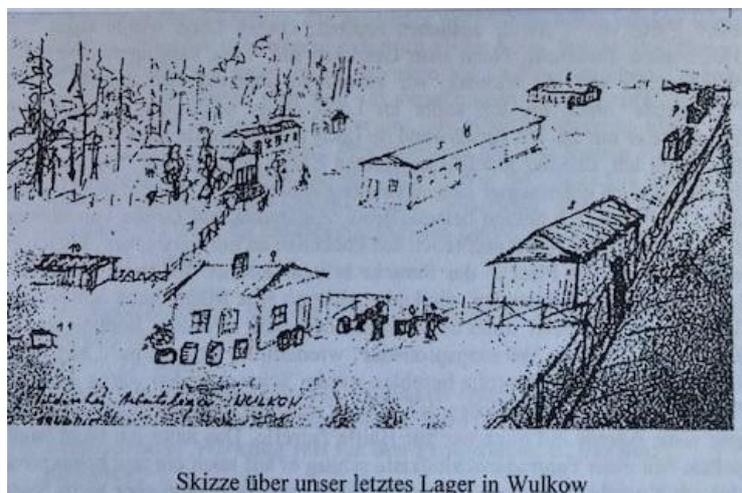
Daily roll call

SS-Obersturmführer Franz Stuschka proved to be a sadist of the crudest calibre, a thug of the worst kind. We never knew what he had cooked up for us again. If one of us had hit him once, Stuschka would have fallen like a plank and never got up again. With his customised SS uniform and his boots always polished to a shine, he exercised his power. We had to submit, we had no other choice, we had no rights and were at his mercy for better or worse. After many years, I was able to find out that Stuschka had not completed any schooling or vocational training in Austria. Among other things, he worked as a textile labourer. He was trained as an SS man in the "Austrian Legion" in Germany in 1936 and joined Adolf Eichmann's "Central Office for Jewish Emigration" in Vienna after the Anschluss. This central office was the starting point for all persecutions of the Jewish population of Austria.

The work progressed. It is impossible for me to describe the individual phases of the work processes. It was very hard work, which Stuschka kept pushing forward in the most absurd ways; he hardly let us rest. We very quickly noticed a very strange peculiarity in him, which was of great importance to our existence. When there was a new moon, his behaviour was fairly normal, but when the moon was full, he was unbearable. He could think of things to make our lives hell, despite the hard work. Sometimes it occurred to me that it was crazy of me to volunteer for this work. But who could have guessed what we were about to experience?

After a few months, we had to break up our first camp; we were in the way of the other barracks. We set up our next camp in a sand pit on the edge of the village. A well was also drilled there and a latrine was built a little "away" from it. We also got a kitchen barrack, where our cook Robert could manage better. For security reasons, the situation was also better, the guards could march around above the pit. On Stuschka's orders, the ghetto guard was also increased to 6 men. Georg Einstein was replaced as head of the guard by Willy Görner, also a Berliner.

In August 1944, the rest of our inmates arrived from Theresienstadt. The 20 women, aged between 18 and 50, also followed with this transport. Their task was to clean the barracks that had already been erected, to look after our laundry and, if it suited Stuschka, to do the same hard labour as us. As the space in the pit was now too small for 250 people, we moved again before the others arrived. We were assigned a place on the edge of a forest, west of the road to Neuhardenberg, which bordered on an open field. First we had to put up a simple 2 metre high barbed wire fence around our own site. We now had a better barrack to live in. The wooden shacks were used to build a special barrack (more on this later), an infirmary, a washing barrack, which was also the women's accommodation, and a somewhat larger kitchen barrack. The now necessary latrine was built a little way along the fence. Due to the presence of the women, there were certain difficulties in sharing this "sanitary facility". However, we were able to solve this problem among ourselves. In the meantime, we had learnt not to be so "squeamish. Away from our own compound was the storage and workshop barrack, which housed the carpentry workshop. Stuschka had a room to himself in this barrack, where at certain times he carried out "special treatments" on our inmates. He would beat them up for no reason at all and they would often come out of there covered in blood. We very ironically christened this place "Stuschka's Laughter Cabinet". Stuschka had a "living and command barrack" built for himself, with a clear view of our camp. His "villa" had a number of fine features: a complete armoury, storage rooms for food and a separate bedroom (!!) for his secretary. So he took care of himself. He had an earth bunker dug in the immediate vicinity, in which some of my inmates had to sit for days on end, often as a punishment for completely trivial offences. Being in this bunker, where you could hardly stand, was like physical torture.



Much later, a former camp mate drew a sketch of the last camp from memory. Unfortunately, it does not quite correspond to the facts as far as the location of the individual prisoners is concerned.

In the following segments I will try to describe certain events in which I myself was involved in order to provide information about what happened.

As already reported, I was one of the well builders under the direction of Wilhelm Voss from Berlin. Voss did his work, which was assigned to him by a Berlin company, and we were his assistants. I can no longer remember all the names of my colleagues with certainty, but I would like to mention three: Heinz Holl, Heinz Frankenstein and Günter (called Jonny) Girr. We soon realised that Voss wasn't a Nazi and that he didn't have much use for Stuschka and his SS. He treated us correctly, often dropped a packet of cigarettes for us, we could be happy with Voss. Now that we had warmed up to him a bit, I tried to ask him to get in touch with my parents in Berlin. It wasn't so easy to talk to him about it. I could understand that he didn't want to take any risks. Voss travelled to Berlin every Saturday and came back on Monday morning. I managed to persuade him, but told him not to tell where I was. After my mother's "excursions" to Heydrich Castle, a visit to Wulkow would have been a small thing for her, but for me it would have meant the end. I couldn't take such a risk with Stuschka. In order to understand the following, I have to say in advance that we first had to dig a hole of 1 m² with a depth of 1 metre when drilling a well. This hole was then covered with wooden planks. A few weeks passed after the conversation with Voss. It was a Monday and we arrived at our workplace. Voss "snapped" at me, telling me to check something in the hole. At the same time, he winked at me. I disappeared into the hole and discovered a small parcel. I knew then that the contact with my parents had worked. As Voss had also smuggled the parcel under his work clothes, it couldn't have been very big. I received sandwiches, cigarettes and greetings from my parents. I had to go to great lengths to hide the parcel on me until I was finally able to take it to my place in the barracks. I shared what I had received with my comrades, who unfortunately didn't have such an opportunity. It was agreed with Voss to keep tight under all circumstances, come what may. This "Monday process" was repeated several times until one evening I was ordered to see Stuschka. He usually said something like "**You bastard Jew**" or something similar. I made it clear to him that I was a half-breed and that his form of address only applied halfway to me. I shouldn't have said that. He hit me with a bicycle chain and claimed that I was in contact with my parents etc. etc. But he didn't name Voss. But he didn't name Voss. I remained stubborn and of course didn't admit to anything, I didn't care what he did to me now. He continued to beat me and tried to beat a confession out of me, but he didn't succeed. I could have knocked Stuschka to the ground with one blow, but then I would have risked the lives of the rest of my comrades. He finally gave up and I was able to walk away. Today, the scars on my back still bear witness to those blows. I had to suffer a lot under Stuschka, as an Austrian he couldn't stand the Berliners.

We drilled about 12 wells with Wilhelm Voss. Our work also included lining the well shafts, installing the electric pumps, laying the pipes and then checking that the system was working properly. After 1 - 2 barracks were completed, they were already occupied. They were in a hurry to get out of Berlin. The following events already had a certain significance in the summer of 1944.

Heinz Frankenstein and I had the job of inspecting a well shaft. When we were back on the surface, a barrack window opened and we were shouted at to come to the barrack immediately. Over time, we had learnt to obey. We stood at attention in front of a high-ranking SS officer who ordered us into the barracks. We felt a bit queasy, but in the barracks the man changed his tone. In his room, he asked us where we were from. Heinz Frankenstein's Berlin dialect was unmistakable. The SS man was also a Berliner, as he said. To our utter amazement, he offered us sandwiches, beer and cigars. We were speechless. The conversation suddenly became informal and he said that we probably didn't have it so "**dick mit die Fressage**" (Berliner dialect "not enough food"). We had to eat the sandwiches and beer at his place and hide the cigarettes in our clothes. This procedure was repeated several times.

This SS officer, his name was Prochnow, wasn't always there when we were in the well shaft. We often expected it, but very often we miscalculated. Once we were called back into the barracks when Stuschka suddenly stood behind us and we had to stand still. Prochnow saw this from his window. He came out and shouted at Stuschka: "What's going on here?" Stuschka had to give Prochnow a "Hitler salute" in front of us. Hitler salute", a marvellous image for us. A dialogue developed that I will remember for a long time.

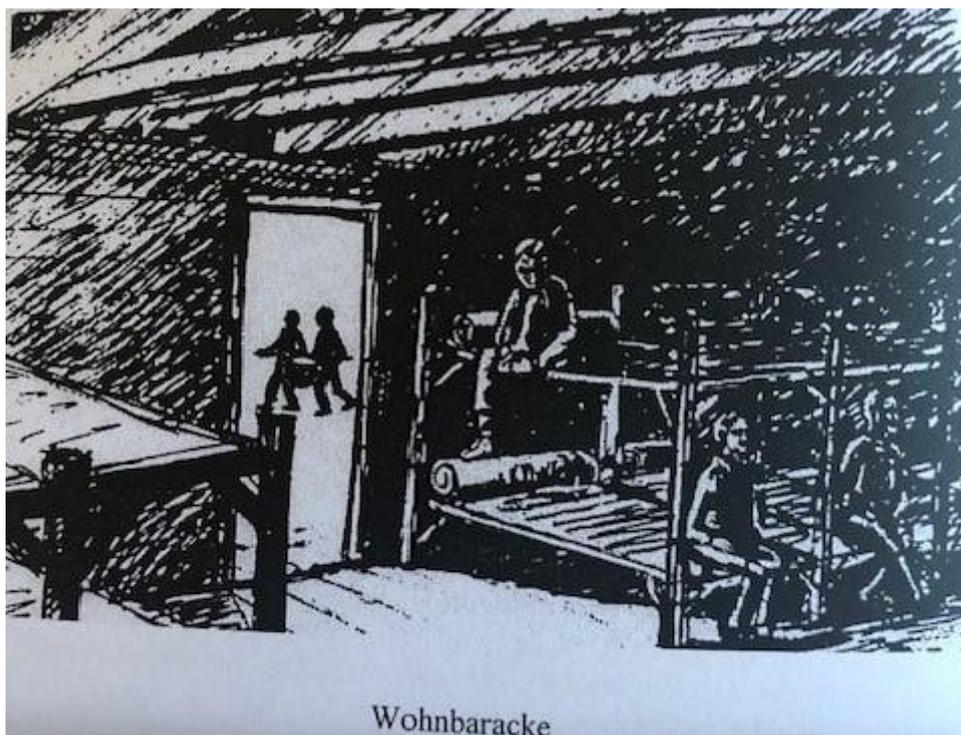
Stuschka: "I've learnt that the Jews are being fed here."

Prochnow: "So what?"

Stuschka: "That's forbidden."

Prochnow: "You don't decide that. Let me tell you something: if anything happens to these two, I'll find out immediately, you'll be ready for front-line service with immediate effect. Is that clear? Stand down!"

What did Stuschka have to say? Nothing! The military rank was decisive. Perhaps the Berliner didn't like Austrians either. We never heard anything more about this matter from Stuschka, he had apparently had enough, because his command of our group was a very pressurised post. The strange behaviour of a senior SS officer in the summer of 1944 made us wonder. Had the Allied invasion on 6 June, of which we understandably knew nothing, already left its mark? Was Prochnow trying to provide himself with an "alibi"? It was and remained speculation.



Barracks in Wulkow

We had a Berliner among us, he was a half-breed. I can't remember his name, let's call him Hans. He suffered a lot under Stuschka, but there were no particular reasons why. At lunchtime roll call it was discovered that he couldn't be found, he must have escaped. Stuschka immediately set off for Berlin. When Hans returned to his Aryan mother a few hours later, Stuschka was already in the flat. Handcuffed and beaten, he brought Hans back to Wulkow. He was introduced to us at the evening roll

call, he was given a bowl of food, but he couldn't do anything with handcuffs, Stuschka tipped the bowl in his face, then he was taken away and we never saw him again.

But there were also other experiences that were typical of Stuschka's sadism. Here is one example: It was evening roll call again. Stuschka got into position and fetched Heinz Frankenstein, who only had one front tooth left. Heinz stood up straight and Stuschka said in his Austrian dialect: "**Frankenstein, I've brought you something.**" He pulled a denture out of his pocket, which of course had nothing to do with Heinz. Heinz took the prosthesis, put it in his back pocket and disappeared back into the line. The roll call continued - suddenly Heinz screamed terribly. He had to come forward again and was asked why he was shouting. There was only one answer for Heinz, the native Berliner from Kastanienallee, he held the prosthesis in his hand and said in a completely calm tone: "**Obasturmführa, det Ding hat mia in Arsch jebissen**"(Obersturmbandführer that thing bit me is my arse). That was the end of the calm, a roar of laughter came from our ranks, even Stuschka couldn't remain serious, apparently it was a new moon. On another occasion, Heinz said to Stuschka: "**Obasturmführa, mia könn'se dotschlagen, aba meine Schnauze müssen se extra dotschlagen**"(Obersturmbandführer, you can kill me but you must hit harder to shut me up). Heinz was incorrigible, what did he have to risk? He lived according to his style for as long as he could.



Heinz Frankenstein, 2001

Another very sad chapter is called Paul Raphaelsohn, known as Raffke. Raffke lived in a mixed marriage and was convicted of black marketeering, sent to Theresienstadt and later to Wulkow. Raffke developed into one of the most disgusting characters in our group. He denounced our inmates to Stuschka in order to gain advantages for himself. If Raffke didn't like anyone - and there were a lot of them - they were sure to be punished. He tried to connect himself with the women, but to no avail. Somehow he got himself a leather coat á la Gestapo and tried to "impress" us with it (ridiculous), but that didn't work either. The more rejection he suffered, the worse he became. He had cover from Stuschka. Raffke himself often received slaps in the face from him; for us it was a source of satisfaction. We had no other option but to ignore him completely and wait for the time to pay him back. This came, but later.

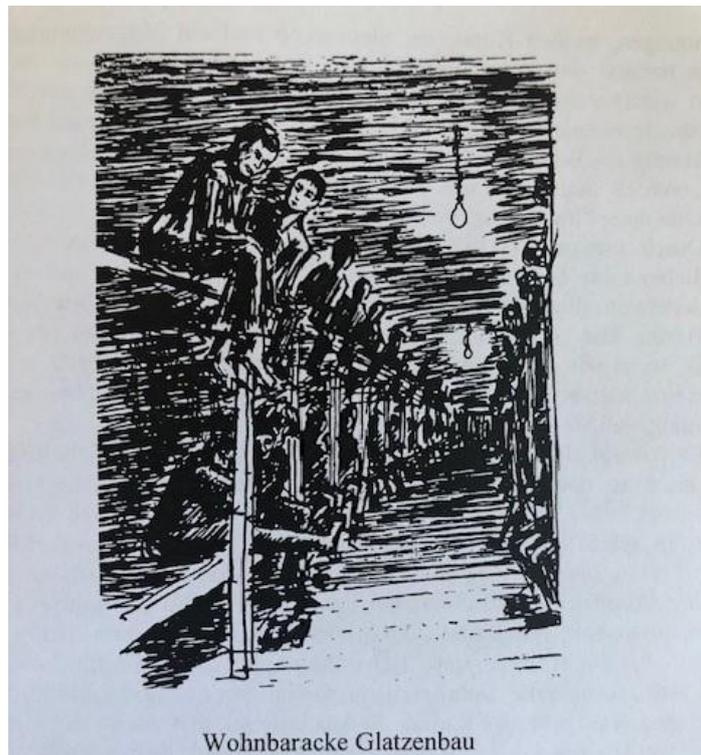
Our guard consisted of very young SS men, about 18 - 21 years old. They didn't really know what to do with us. They were commanded by the Oberscharführer Hanke and Stiasny. They tried to use their supposed power against us, but when things got serious, they failed. It was a warm summer's day. Our team of well diggers had the task of digging holes for power poles on a road to neighbouring Hermersdorf. A young SS man with a loaded carabiner was supposed to guard us. He took off his uniform jacket, lay down on the grass and fell asleep. Heinz Frankenstein saw this, put on his jacket, took the carabiner and marched up and down in front of the sleeping SS man. Suddenly he woke up, not knowing what was happening to him. He asked Heinz to give him back his jacket and carabiner, he

wouldn't do anything, in other words, he was more scared than we were. After Heinz had taken the last of his cigarettes, the story was considered closed.

Hanke was another person we couldn't really make sense of. We reckoned he was in his late twenties. The SS normally addressed us as "Du" (**Du** informal address to one person, **Ihr** informal address to more than one person, and **Sie** formal address to one person or plural), starting from Stuschka up to the SS snobs. Oberscharführer Hanke was an exception. He never said "Du" to us, sometimes he addressed us as "Ihr" if he wanted to appear friendlier. It so happened that our team was once again outside; he himself went along as a guard. Out of the blue, Hanke said to us: "You have it good, you have the chance to survive, I don't." We were speechless. What did the man mean by that? We asked him straight out. The answer we got was: "I got myself into this soup with the SS, I'll spoon it up when the time is right." He then pulled out his pistol, took out the magazine, it was empty. There was a cartridge in the barrel. "That's for me," was his reply. It was not the order of the day to have such conversations with SS men. We made it clear to Hanke that that if things got better for us, we could help him (still utopian for us in the summer of 1944). He simply waved us off, he had apparently made his decision and carried it out. We will talk about Hanke again later.

Stuschka's inventions to put us to work were relentless. If he felt like it, he could keep everyone, including the women, busy carrying stones or tree trunks from one place to another. When we thought we had done it, we carried everything back again. Sweeping the forest paths was a particularly important job, which of course also included "dusting the trees", i.e. we had to remove the sand from the tree bark with a broom. There was also another hobby for him: if he had any of us on his goat, he sabotaged our hairstyle. On Stuschka's orders, the hair had to be cut off completely of the "Guilty man". He also had to move from the barracks to the special barracks, the "Glatzenbau" (Baldness building), as we called this shed. My own hair was cut off twice and I was a permanent guest in the Glatzenbau. The wind whistled through the simple wooden walls, it was freezing cold in winter and there was no heating in this barrack. Today, it is considered a miracle that we didn't get any serious illnesses.

We in the Glatzenbau had a particularly hard time because of the cold. I remember covering myself at night with a coat as well as a blanket. It could get very cold sometimes. When I woke up in the morning, my coat would be frozen stiff and I could put it against the wall.



I can't remember today what Stuschka's reasons were for cutting off our food for three days. It came like a bolt from the blue. The work had to continue, of course. The first day passed; everyone was looking at the food barracks. We knew that our provisions were stored there. The second day also passed. We learnt that Stuschka wanted to go to Berlin. We prepared an action. We waited until we were sure that Stuschka had disappeared. Stiasny and Hanke were supposed to monitor us to ensure that the food ban was observed. Stiasny could be seen from time to time, but there was no sign of Hanke. Some comrades had planned to break into the provision's barracks. After Raffke had been isolated - he preferred not to live with the rest of us anyway - the break-in took place on the second night. They took what we were entitled to. The break-in was carried out so skilfully that it was never discovered. At the end of the three days, the food distribution went back to normal.

In our camp there was also the "infirmary", a wooden hut with 6 plank beds. We had a Czech doctor below us who was supposed to look after our health. His equipment consisted of a dirty white coat, a stethoscope and a stomach pump (!!). If someone called in sick, he was sent to the infirmary and the little food was cut in half. If you were unlucky, your stomach was pumped on Stuschka's orders, no matter what you had. An injury to the leg or hand was enough to set the machine in motion. There were no limits to sadism here. I was lucky, I never had to make use of this "institution".

As Berlin was about 60 kilometres away, we often had the opportunity to experience an enormous spectacle during the day when the sky was clear. Hundreds of allied aeroplanes gathered for the bombing raids on Berlin. The black clouds of smoke were fully visible. It was like music when we heard the roar of the engines. I was certainly worried about my parents, who were in the city, but I always hoped that they wouldn't be harmed.

It was an afternoon, it was pouring with rain and there was no question of working outside. Heinz Frankenstein, who had also taken up residence in the Glatzenbau, gave us a "performance". He had grabbed a bucket, shouted into it and imitated Hitler in a big speech. But it wasn't long before the barrack door was ripped open and 10 SS men stormed in with their carabinieri ready to fire, shouting: "Where's the radio? Everybody out to a roll call!" At first we didn't know what was happening to us until we learnt that "the Führer" was giving a speech on the radio at the same time. Heinz couldn't have known that, of course. Stuschka came and demanded the immediate release of the radio. He announced that we would be left out in the rain until the radio came out. Nobody knew what to do. There was no radio, just a bucket and Heinz. After a moment's thought, Heinz trudged back into the den, picked up the bucket and stood up in front of Stuschka without a word. When asked where the radio was, Heinz pointed to the bucket. **"Are you kidding me, you pig of a Jew?"** Stuschka shouted and beat Heinz up. It was cruel. Heinz continued to point at the bucket. Finally, Heinz picked up the bucket again, shouted into it as before and did the whole theatre again. Heinz could only win, he had nothing left to lose. Stuschka just turned round and disappeared. Stiasny couldn't help but smile. We could walk away, there were no more penalties.

One Sunday in October, Stuschka had a very special orgy. It had rained a lot again, the area in front of the women's barracks was completely soaked and there was a large pool of water. Stuschka got some women out, ordered them to sit on the ground and push the mud into a certain spot with their buttocks. He also ordered a few women to lie down in the puddles of water. Confident of victory, he also placed his polished boot on the back of a young girl. It was disgusting because we men had to watch, would have liked to kill him. This spectacle surely must have had something to do with the full moon., as he was totally out of control.

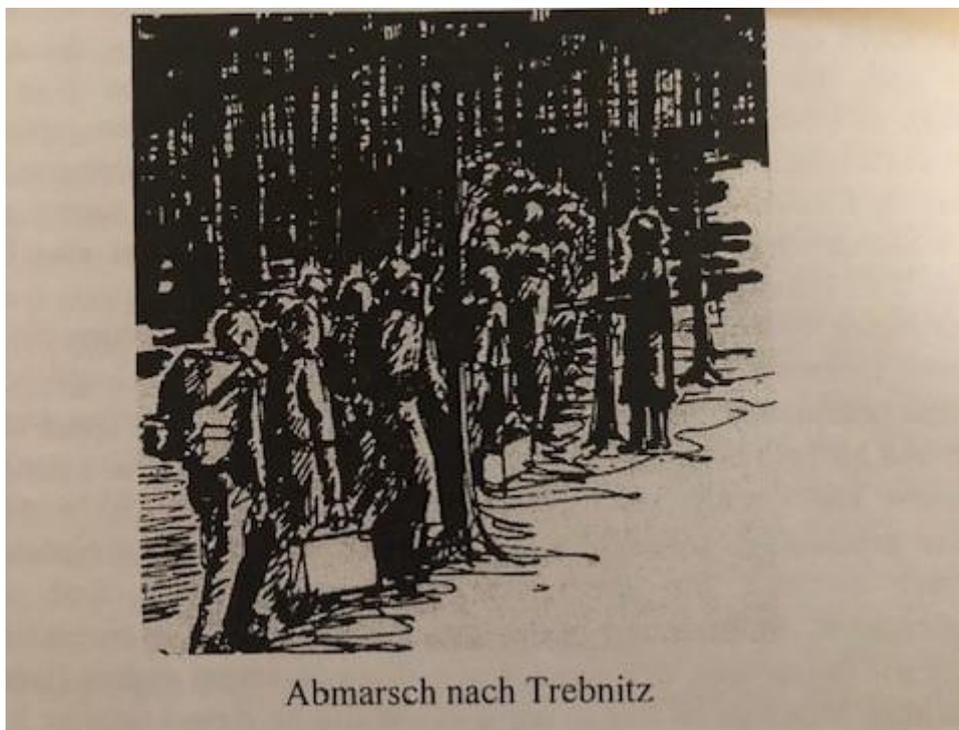
Christmas 1944 was approaching. Stuschka told us that we were off work on Christmas Eve in the afternoon, that we could get a tree and decorate it with a few paper cut-outs. We had no particular ideas about celebrating this day in any other way, we were free from work, which meant so much to us. We arranged the "Christmas party" in the laundry hut, which was heatable and big enough to accommodate everyone. Stuschka also promised us an increase in our food ration. We built a small podium, Heinz Frankenstein wanted to "perform". He told jokes non-stop, Stuschka also got his fair share. We enjoyed ourselves and forgot where we were for a moment. Suddenly it went quiet, Stuschka and Stiasny were standing in the doorway. The mood was gone, what is happening now? Both SS men sat down directly in front of the podium and just said to Heinz "Carry on". What else could Heinz do, he carried on with all his strength. Stuschka seemed to be having a great time, he applauded and we were speechless. After a short time, he stood up and took four of us with the words "come with me". We feared the worst. But after 10 minutes they were back again, packed with parcels that relatives of our comrades from Theresienstadt had sent. Each of us was given a whole cube of margarine (250 g), sugar, an extra allotment of bread and a double food ration. However, the Christmas party had a very serious aftermath that we had no idea about in advance. Stuschka had searched the barracks during our party and found a carpenter's axe, which was normally handed in to the tool store after work. In his madness, Stuschka now believed that they had planned an attack on him, that they wanted to kill him. We had to line up for roll call in the deep cold outside the barracks. Today I can't say for sure whether we had to freeze for 3 or 4 hours. The order to "Dismissed" was a relief for us. The "new moon theory" had not materialised.

In January 1945 we sometimes heard rumbling or thundering from the east, but we couldn't make much sense of it. However, it was clear that there was a lot of activity in the barrack town. Trucks

were loaded with boxes and furniture, was an evacuation imminent? What would happen to us? The unrest grew among us. A committee was formed in secret to find out what was happening to us. Our electricians made a kind of rubber truncheon for each of us from underground cables, one end dipped in molten lead. During an impact test, we found that this weapon penetrated a tree trunk about 10 cm thick. From then on, we carried these weapons in the sleeves of our clothing. One blow with this weapon was enough to incapacitate an opponent. If something happened to us, we wanted to take as many of the others with us as possible. We couldn't get rid of the unrest, we were kept busy with work that was completely pointless. One night we noticed unusual activity in our kitchen barracks. The cook, Robert, had been joined by four more women, and they were hard at work.

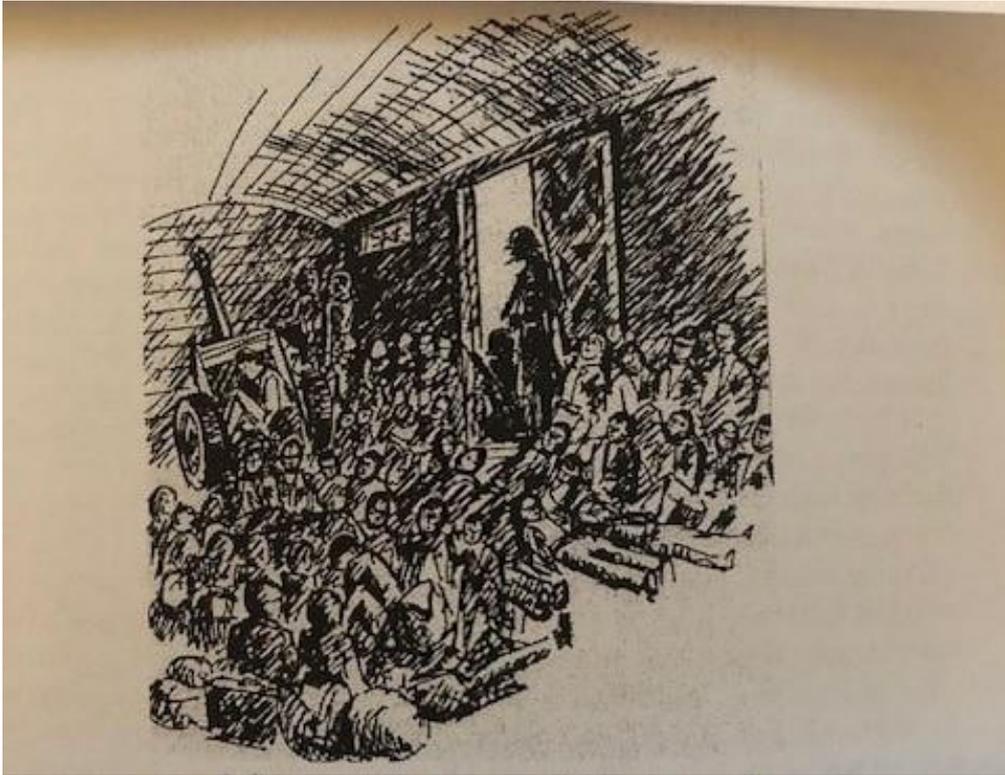
The next morning, it was 2 February 1945, we couldn't get out of our barracks, the doors were guarded by SS men, nobody knew what was going on. We had an advantage in the Glatzenbau, we could see out through the cracks in the boards. At around 8 o'clock in the morning, Stuschka became visible with a machine gun slung over his shoulder. We prepared to strike back, but it didn't come to that. The thunder from the east became stronger again and we suspected it was Russian artillery. Stuschka entered the individual barracks, told us that we should "grab some food" shortly and then get ready to march off. We were only allowed to take the bare essentials with us, everything else had to stay behind. It didn't take long before we got our food. Two large Bohemian dumplings and a delicious meat sauce, but nobody touched the food. We had never had such portions before, were we going to be poisoned? One of my comrades was hungrier than he was afraid, he grabbed the food, nothing happened to him, and then we followed his example.

We had to line up with our small bundles, were counted as usual and received a ration consisting of half a loaf of bread (500 grams), some margarine and a packet of "Zavor ka" (coffee substitute made from barley).



Well guarded by about 10 SS men, we marched the 6 kilometres through the village of Wulkow to Trebnitz railway station. That was the end of a period of 11 months for me. When I look back on this satellite camp today, I have to realise that all the work in Wulkow was completely superfluous and pointless. The barrack town, which we ironically christened "**Eichmannstadt**", was barely finished before it was abandoned again, head over heels. We left a lot of the work and equipment we had started behind. Only one person benefited from this work: it was Stuschka, he was able to avoid being sent to the front.

After about 1 ½ hours on the march, we arrived in Trebnitz. There were already 5 freight wagons and a passenger wagon there. We men were distributed over 4 freight wagons according to the familiar pattern, Stuschka with his guard and the women travelled in the passenger wagon. The fifth freight wagon was loaded with material unknown to us, and there was also some food in the form of salted dried meat. Each wagon was guarded by an SS man. He sat on a chair by the sliding doors. He snarled at us, apparently annoyed that he had to go on such a journey. We stood in Trebnitz all day and night. The next morning, the train set off in a westerly direction. It was only now that the question arose of where we were actually going. Everyone reckoned that our destination would be Theresienstadt, because we could work out that Auschwitz could no longer be an option. The journey was interrupted countless times due to rail damage and other cancellations. Shortly before Berlin, near the suburb of Friedrichsfelde, the train stopped once again. It was an air raid alarm. The first to leave were Stuschka and his men. Suddenly we were completely alone, nobody cared about us. We could see that we were attached to a freight train, which was equipped with an air defence canone at the front and rear. Our train was being shot at by low-flying fighter planes. A bomb hit the field right next to the locomotive. We were incredibly lucky not to have been hit. We couldn't think about escaping because we didn't know what was happening around us. We didn't know the general situation, the risk of being shot by the SS at the last moment was too great. The alarm was cancelled, the locomotive had to be replaced, again we stood for hours and hours. The hunger made itself felt. We couldn't work out when we would get out of the wagons at this "travelling speed". We sparingly ate up our bread, but what should we do with the coffee substitute? We told ourselves that, at worst, we could chew the barley. As on my first transport, we had a "bucket" with us in the wagon, but it had to be emptied because we had been travelling for two days and nights. When and where was always the big question. We were definitely heading south, as we could see from the names of the railway stations. We had a long stop at a goods station near Leipzig. Stuschka let us out wagon by wagon so that we could wash up a bit, and at the same time we were given some of the salted dried meat. It was hard as a rock and sooo salty. Hunger drove us to eat it and we were terribly thirsty as a result. At every station stop we tried to get water to quench our thirst. Did the sadism of a Stuschka go so far as to torment us to the end? Our train stopped at Furth im Wald, a town on the border with Czechoslovakia. We were pushed onto a railway siding and stood there for two days, I think. Apart from the meat, we had nothing left to eat, the supplies had run out.



Eight days in the cattle wagon

We were allowed to leave the wagons again, could wash ourselves and were even ordered to shave. There were very few razors with blunt blades. Stuschka was nowhere to be seen, we only had the SS men with us. It must have become known in the village what kind of freight is standing at the railway station, because people came to bring us something to eat. The SS tried to stop it at first, but the protest was too great. Finally we were able to move on. We were once again coupled to a train that took us back to Lobositz via Prague. From there we finally got back to Theresienstadt on 10 February 1945. The journey from Wulkow to Theresienstadt took 8 days. We had already given up on ever getting off this miserable train alive.

About 50 of my inmates had to leave our group during the entire time in Wulkow, some of them were sent back to Theresienstadt because they were ill, others were punished and sent to Sachsenhausen. Only very few of these 50 inmates were able to experience liberation.

Arrival in Theresienstadt for the third time

Once again we were standing in Bahnhofstrasse with our cars, finally able to leave. We realised that we were completely isolated from the other ghetto inmates. We were taken to the "Hamburg barracks", which bordered on Bahnhofstrasse. We were given a hearty soup. I was able to take my first **hot** shower since March 1943. We were given beds with sheets. We slept for 24 hours after this journey, it was fantastic. In the meantime, the relatives of our inmates tried to get in touch with them, which was more or less successful. Why we were shielded remained a mystery to us. After two days we were able to leave the "Hamburg barracks". I went back to my accommodation in the fire station. My bed was free, almost everything was free. I was told that around 25,000 people had been transported to Auschwitz for extermination between April and November 1944. With a few exceptions, the ghetto was supposed to be completely emptied, but this was thwarted by the timely liberation of Auschwitz by Russian troops. The members of the "barrack builders" were lucky enough not to have to go on transport.

The head of the ghetto fire brigade, an engineer called Holzer, asked me if I would like to join the fire brigade, he had no more people, most of them were travelling east. Three of my inmates and I were "hired" by Holzer. We became firefighters, got better food and didn't have much to do apart from exercises. We were given new clothes and a fire brigade uniform cap. I could be satisfied with this kind of work, it was first class in contrast to Wulkow.

On 12 March 1945, something happened that I never thought possible. The Wulkowers, with the exception of the women, were all ordered to the Koammandantur, where the current and last ghetto commander, SS-Obersturmführer Rahm, received us. We had to line up in four rows in the courtyard, one metre between each row. We no longer understood anything, what was all this supposed to mean? We didn't have to wait long, Stuschka appeared at Rahm's side. This couldn't be true. What had we done to see this tormentor in front of us again? There was dead silence. Stuschka walked through the rows without saying a word, he had a list he was looking at, he looked at us with his piercing eyes. First he pointed to our cook Robert with the words: "You, out". This ceremony was performed on everyone he dismissed. I didn't escape his gaze and pointing finger either, I also had to step out of line. He took 50 of the former Wulkowers together. The others could step away, they disappeared like a bolt of lightning. What was this man planning to do with us again? We soon knew what was in store for us. Once again, we had to turn up at 7 o'clock the next morning with our luggage in Bahnhofstrasse. A new detachment was to leave Theresienstadt. We were not told where we were going. The afternoon before our departure, we were given brand new overalls and shoes. We noticed that the overalls were labelled with a "yellow star", which surprised us. We were only told that it was an order from the commandant's office. Heinz Frankenstein was also there, as was our master carpenter Haas. Wild speculation was of course going on, it was mid-March 1945 after all, the military situation was untenable for the Nazis, it had to end soon.

Schnarchenreuth, the last satellite camp

The next morning we went to Bahnhofstrasse. There was a train on the tracks with a passenger coach and 4 fully loaded goods wagons. It was a relief, Oberscharführer Hanke was our only escort. We got on and the train left Theresienstadt very soon. We tried to force an explanation out of Hanke. He just said we should wait and see. Everything would work out for the best. This time the journey went through Czechoslovakia, we passed Komotau, Karlsbad and came to Marktredwitz in Germany, where we were coupled to another train heading north. The journey came to an end in Hof, Lower Bavaria. The mood among us improved during the journey. Hanke contributed a lot to this, he handed out cigarettes and was also a bit talkative. There was no sign of Stuschka. When we arrived in Hof, we were pushed onto a railway siding. We were able to leave our carriage, nobody looked after us. Hanke also disappeared for a while, but then came back and told us that we had to wait for trucks to transport the material we had brought with us. He had 50 stamped postcards and some pencils with him. He handed them out. We could write to our relatives, but we shouldn't say where we were. This request was completely pointless, the postmark indicated the place of despatch. We were supposed to put the cards in the letterbox at the station building ourselves, we could also go to the station restaurant to have a beer, it would already be paid for. We didn't understand anything anymore. The card I wrote to my parents never arrived for some inexplicable reason. Understandably, the idea of leaving everything behind and simply "running away" began to circulate. But where were we supposed to go? We were in civilian clothes and had no ID. Any military patrol could pick us up. We couldn't fathom the situation; the risk was too great. We certainly sensed from the excessive flight activity that it would soon be over. We overcome with uncertainty again and again.

After about an hour of waiting, two trucks turned up. We started to load the materials we had brought with us - pieces of wood, bags of cement, tools - onto the trucks. Some of our people joined the trucks to Schnarchenreuth, a small village about 18 km north of Hof. Hanke stayed in Hof with 10 people, including me, to continue unloading. The transports shuttled back and forth. It took many hours to unload the goods carriages. The route to our destination in Schnarchenreuth was somewhat hilly, and the drivers often had to "reheat" the wagons on the way, as they ran on wood gas. On the last transport, it was almost midnight, I was alone with Hanke. There was an air raid alarm and we had to go to an air raid shelter. Hanke insisted on going with him. He didn't react at all to my comment that he couldn't go into an air raid shelter with me; it didn't seem worry him. On the other hand, he couldn't leave me alone either. Maybe he was worried that I would disappear. It was already after 1 a.m. when we arrived in Schnarchenreuth. We had been put up in a barn with plenty of straw on the floor. Because of the darkness, I couldn't see what was around me, which would only become clear the next morning.

We were woken up at 7 o'clock. Now I could see where we had landed. It was a very large estate with an enormous four-storey manor house, you could describe it as a dilapidated castle. We had to line up, Stuschka appeared and described the work to be done. It was our job to renovate this house in order to set up new "offices", apparently a last resort for the Gestapo. What else was to be housed there in March 1945? Stuschka's demeanour had changed a lot. After I had been his whipping boy in Wulkow, he now left me alone. The other inmates also had it a bit better this time. He probably couldn't do what he perhaps wanted, we were in the middle of the village, the people weren't supposed to notice. Did he perhaps also suspect that his "power" would soon come to an end?

We now started to "renovate". It was more of a tidy-up. New doors and windows were to be installed, new floors etc. etc. The material we had with us wasn't enough, we had to get material from the village sawmill, completely free and without any security, because we saw no sign of the SS. Hanke had also disappeared. We worked normal working hours. The food that our cook Robert prepared was also normal in terms of quantity and quality. We often had to interrupt work because American fighter-bombers were firing on the nearby motorway. Fighter planes were constantly circling in the sky. It happened that Heinz Frankenstein and I were with Stuschka near the manor house when a fighter

plane suddenly swooped down on us. Stuschka threw himself directly into a ditch that was filled with water. We disappeared on the other side of the road and the ditch was dry. The pilot must have seen a uniform, a cluster of bullets went half a metre from Stuschka into the ground. Pale like lilly, he pulled himself out of the trench, completely wet, and disappeared from our sight. We knew nothing about the military situation. When asked, the villagers couldn't give us a reliable answer either, as they only heard the German news, according to which everything was in perfect order. The German population was deceived and lied to until the very end.

It was the morning of 22 April 1945. We were woken up very early and called to roll call. We had to get ready to march off within 10 minutes. Again we had to leave everything behind. There were two trucks covered with tarpaulins on the estate, each with a long drawbar. We were never told where the trucks suddenly came from. We had to attach ropes to the trucks. Twenty-five men each were asked to pull these trucks. The march from Schnarchenreuth was a fact. The longest march of my life began. Six old Volkssturmmen accompanied us. Stuschka rode a motorbike. We had no idea where we were going. On the first day, we marched along a stretch of motorway towards Plauen. We had some orientation thanks to signposts and road signs. The difficulty of the march lay in the fact that we were "horses" had to pull a very heavy load that we didn't know what it contained. It was uphill and downhill. The breaking of the trucks to slowed down was managed very poorly. Our daily distances in wind and weather were around 30 kilometres. We spent the nights on farms. We slept in barns, horse stables or, if the weather permitted, outdoors. We were so tired that we could have slept standing up. I remember once sleeping in a horse stable and in a trough without straw or hay. Stuschka demanded rations from the farmers. The food was often quite hearty. The farmers probably understood what was going on.

Our route led via Adorf and Klingenthal over very mountainous terrain across the border towards Karlsbad. We could work out our destination: Theresienstadt. We passed through the large towns such as Karlsbad, Komotau and Brüx at night. You couldn't see the miserable shape we were slowly becoming. The men from the Volkssturm were with us on the whole march. One of them already had his old carabiner ready to kill Stuschka. Heinz knocked the rifle out of his hand, it wouldn't have done any good. We were often pursued by fighter planes, but nothing happened, even though we were an excellent target. We soon had the solution to the riddle. We reached Lobositz in the late afternoon of the 8th day of the march. We still had 7 kilometres to walk to Theresienstadt. Shortly before the town, everyone had disappeared, no Stuschka, no Volkssturmmen, we were suddenly all alone. There was still enough daylight to examine our load. The two carts were full of weapons and ammunition, with large Stars of David painted on the top of the tarpaulins. The witnesses must have seen this, I have no other explanation. It was our salvation. We discussed what to do and came to the decision to pull the wagons the last few kilometres and deliver them to the commandant's office. Late in the evening, on 29 April 1945, we arrived in Theresienstadt. It was the **fourth time** in two years that I had passed through the gates of the casemates. When I later calculated our route, I realised that we had walked 240 - 250 kilometres in 8 days as the "horses" of two heavily loaded trucks. We parked the trucks. Nobody looked after us. We saw no SS men, we saw no commandant, everything seemed to be in disarray. Much later I learnt that the Americans were only 10 kilometres away from Schnarchenreuth on the day of the march. We could have spared ourselves the march if we had had more knowledge. Nobody could have guessed that the war would be over in a fortnight and that the "Third Reich" would no longer exist. If we had known, no Stuschka or Volkssturm would have stood a chance, in the worst case they would not have survived.

Theresienstadt, a nightmare in dissolution

After the long march, I returned to the fire station tired and with injured feet. Nothing had changed in the weeks I had been away, I had my old accommodation back. Rumours were circulating that heavy fighting was raging around Berlin and that Hitler had shot himself. In Theresienstadt itself, we didn't realise any of this. The camp commandant Rahm, a Scharführer Haindl and a handful of SS men were still supposed to be in the commandant's office, but there was no confirmation of this. At the same time, we learned that a representative of the IRK (International Red Cross), Mr Dunant, would be in Theresienstadt. He was already supposed to be negotiating the takeover of the camp. I continued my work as a fireman. We had an observation post at the top of the church tower in case a visible fire broke out in the town. Two mates and I were on duty on the tower. As we could also see the area around Theresienstadt, one morning in early May we observed a long convoy of white trucks approaching the town from Lobositz. We immediately passed the news downstairs. It turned out that the trucks were from the IRK, bringing food to Theresienstadt. We could now work out that our time in the ghetto would soon be over.

Theresienstadt seemed to be the only camp still in existence, because freight trains with prisoners from other concentration camps were still coming to us every day. It was a miserable sight when we opened the carriages. We didn't know who was still alive. They had travelled a long way. We had the most difficulty with the survivors: They didn't want to believe us that they would soon be free. Unfortunately, a lot of people died as a result of the food aid; they simply couldn't cope with the enhancement.

We realised that chaos was brewing, nothing was working anymore. The self-administration had lost its grip, there were no more orders from the SS. They were already over the mountains. For the moment, we had nothing else to do but wait. The wait was short. Today I can't give an exact date, I think it was 9 May 1945. We heard a loud rattling outside the town, Russian tanks drove into the town from all sides, they rolled down the wooden fences around the market square and set up their tanks on the square.

WE WERE FREE PEOPLE AGAIN

Unfortunately, there were casualties among us. The joy was so great that some of our people died through their own fault when the Russians marched in. I will never forget that day, flags were waved everywhere and national anthems were sung. Many people didn't realise what had happened, but everyone was happy and content. Me too, of course, I survived 26 months in prison. However, there was one very bitter pill for me to swallow: my Steffi didn't live to see that day.

Immediately after the IRK and the Russians took over the camp, a complete quarantine of six weeks was imposed. It turned out that typhus had broken out in the town and nobody was allowed to leave the town without authorisation. Russian doctors and nurses set up examination tents on the market square and the existing hospital was supplied with medicines. The general diet was initially based on a special diet to get people used to a normal diet again. At first it was simply boiled pearl barley, which was then supplemented with meat and fat. We could eat as much as we wanted. In the end there was so much and so much variety that we couldn't manage it any more. The good things from the IRK had to be put away first, but we got them back later. The quarantine period was also used to register us, which was very important for our return home.

We Wulkowers still had one task ahead of us: we had to settle accounts with Raffke. We searched for him for days until he was found in the cellar of a house. All our comrades gathered in a street one afternoon and the women were told to stay away. What we were going to do with Raffke was not for

them. We were about 160 - 170 men, each armed with a truncheon. We each lined up halfway with an alley between us. Raffke was brought in, he had to **run the gauntlet**. Everyone now had the opportunity to more or less get even with him. Raffke collapsed after the first round. He recovered using his own method, which he had used in the past: a bucket of water over his head and then he continued. After we no longer knew what was Raffke's front and back, we let him go. Some of us took him to the hospital, where he was patched up in a makeshift manner. He was later put on trial in Prague and is said to have been executed in 1947. I have no definite confirmation of this myself.

The first weeks in freedom passed. I continued to work for the fire brigade. But we had another job to do: next to Terezín was the "Small Fortress", a construction site similar to the city. Under the Nazi reign, it was a Gestapo prison. The former prisoners were now the guards for the now imprisoned party bigwigs. Every day we brought 50 Nazis from the Small Fortress to Theresienstadt to work. We were 12 - 15 men to guard them, armed with a rubber truncheon, with strict orders to use it only when necessary. I have to admit, it was a marvellous feeling for me to have power myself for once. Three weeks ago it was the other way round. The work that these Nazis were supposed to do included digging and cleaning the latrines in the barracks. I will refrain from describing this in detail for obvious reasons. After work, we had to hose them down with a hose and cold water, they stank to high heaven. There were also beatings if they were rude with us. We showed no consideration or thought about forcing these people to do the most menial labour. It's not that easy to forget the treatment we had experienced ourselves until recently.

The quarantine came to an end and it was time to leave Theresienstadt as free people. We were given an identity card in four languages, which entitled us to free rail travel, accommodation and food until we reached our home town. We got ourselves new clothes, overalls, which I labelled with my transport number, a new fireman's cap and various other things that we needed on the journey home. The three of us, Herbert Hirschberg from Wulkow, a fireman and Berliner, Traute Goldschmied, a girl who was also from Wulkow, a mixed race and Berliner, and I, set off around 10 June 1945 to return to our old home town of Berlin.

Returning home

We left Theresienstadt on a bus that took us to Lobositz railway station. As I walked through the casemates for the first time almost 27 months ago, I didn't think I would ever walk the other way round in freedom. At that moment I thought of what I had experienced, of the humiliations and beatings, of the great hardships, of the poor quality food. But I also thought about the fact that many of my camp mates were not allowed to experience this day. They had been sent from the "model ghetto Theresienstadt" to the East for extermination. Very few of the Berliners who were sent to Theresienstadt survived this incredibly difficult period of imprisonment.

Research revealed that 14,663 people were deported from Berlin, of whom only 1728 survived. Of my transport, which comprised 1164 people, 170 survived, and I was one of them.

In Lobositz, we waited about 2 hours for a train to take us to Dresden first. At the completely destroyed main station, we were told that it was impossible to get to Berlin by train for the time being. There was nothing to do but stay in Dresden and see how the situation changed. We were sent to an "anti-fascist committee", where we would get further help. And that's what happened. A man from this committee went with us to a block of flats. He had a pistol with him and shot once into the air, causing everyone to look out of the windows. He asked in a loud voice who would volunteer to take the three of us in for a week. A woman on the second floor agreed to take us in. It turned out that her husband had been arrested as a party bigwig, she probably wanted to clear her name. The woman was very nice, she talked a lot about what had happened and was very understanding of our situation, but certainly had a bad conscience. We two men moved into the bedroom, Traute slept in the living room, the owner of the flat had a smaller room available. We received double ration cards for heavy labourers and were amazed that the food rationing worked to some extent. What we received was enough to feed our landlady. One day we went to a cigarette factory that was working again; we wanted to get something to smoke. Each of us got 200 cigarettes, what more could we ask for? We felt very comfortable in Dresden, we had plenty of enticement.

After a week we wanted to move on. The train connection was still broken. We decided to walk towards Berlin, maybe something would turn up on the way. I was used to long walks, so the three of us marched towards Berlin. We had our passes for board and lodging. It generally worked everywhere, We suffered no hardship. Our first stage was to Großenhain, about 30 kilometres of walking. There we learnt that there was a train connection from Bad Liebenwerda to Jüterbog. We spent the night in an Inn and walked another 35 kilometres to Bad Liebenwerda the next day. We arrived in the evening and the next morning at 6am a train was due to leave for Jüterbog. The place was packed with people. Our accommodation for the night this time was a doctor's surgery. I remember sleeping on the doctor's examination table. Herbert Hirschberg wanted to get to the railway station very early. I said that half an hour before would be enough time. No sooner said than done, we got to the station and there was a huge crowd of people waiting for the train. Our chances of getting on were very slim. Suddenly Herbert spotted something. He pushed his way through the crowd, with us following behind. All of a sudden Herbert was slapping people in the face. He had caught a man who had forgotten to take off his Nazi party badge. In the excitement of the battle, the train pulled into the station. We were practically the first ones in a compartment on the train. Herbert, a tall and strong man, couldn't hold back at the sight of the badge. This is how we got to Jüterbog; we had made two thirds of the journey home. We spent the night in a hotel. The next morning there was a train connection to Lankwitz, a suburb of Berlin. When we got to the station, the train was already overcrowded. We walked along the platform. We heard from a compartment where four young men in civilian clothes were sitting: "**Now the KZ-ler are coming home.** (Very derogative language for returning concentration camp prisoners)" That was too much for Herbert. He wanted to take the lads on. But I advised him against it and called the railway police instead. It turned out that the

Four men were members of the SS. They were taken off the train and arrested, we sat on the train. After a few hours of slow travelling, we arrived in Lankwitz, a southern suburb of Berlin. We had reached our destination after much effort.

Back in Berlin

On the way, we were already thinking about what we could do in Berlin, as we knew nothing about our relatives. Traute had an address where she wanted to go. I learnt from Wilhelm Voss in Wulkow that my parents had been bombed out in Prinzregentenstraße and were living in Niederschönhausen. Herbert had no place to stay for the time being, so he asked me if he could go with me. We parted company with Traute in Tempelhof. Herbert and I tried to get to Pankow, where I knew my mother's brother Alfred and his wife Maria lived, partly by bus, partly by underground, partly by tram and a lot of walking. I first wanted to see for myself how my parents had fared. Aunt Maria almost fainted. She greeted me with the words: "Where have you been so long, your parents have been waiting for you for a week." Of course, I had no idea that there was a list of survivors from Theresienstadt in Berlin, so my parents had been informed about me. Maria immediately made hot water and we were able to bathe and get dressed in borrowed shirts. In the meantime, Alfred arrived. Naturally the happiness was immense. I also learnt from both that my father had been reinstated in his pharmacy immediately after the capitulation, albeit only as a trustee after a Nazi. My parents were healthy, but very worried that I hadn't arrived yet. With Alfred being the forerunner we came to Niederschönhausen. The parents lived on the top floor of a villa in Moltkestraße with a direct view of the street. Herbert and I kept our distance. We sent Alfred to my mum's house and as Dad was not home until the evening. Alfred certainly hadn't expressed himself well when he rang the doorbell. My mum came running straight out of the house. It was a greeting I will never forget.

I was home again.

I can still remember exactly how I sat at the kitchen window that evening and saw my father coming. He saw me too, he ran for all he was worth at the age of 64. We fell into each other's arms, it was such a lovely reunion. Herbert was able to stay with us of course, he wanted to look for his people the next day.

I'll never forget that first evening in my parents' house. Father went down to the cellar and brought a bottle of wine upstairs. He had saved it for the moment when I came back. If I hadn't come, the bottle would never have been opened. I can still see the place in front of me today where my father asked me: "**Well, my little boy, it's all over now. Have you thought about what will happen?**" After everything I had experienced, I had only one answer: "**I want to get out of this country as quickly as possible, I've lost nothing here.**" My father hadn't expected this answer, however, and it came as a huge shock to him. Many years later, he had to admit that he had understood me in this respect, even if it was very difficult for him.

It wasn't easy to get used to the everyday life that now prevailed. I had no financial worries, I received an appropriate contribution, I had the highest ration cards, I didn't have to wait for anything anywhere, I could do as I pleased, I was given a "victim of fascism" card. What use was it to me? I couldn't live with people around me who I knew, couldn't raise their hands high enough and shout "Heil Hitler" just a short time before. These people later claimed to have known nothing about anything. They saw us with the **Yellow Star**, they could observe the **deportations** on streets and railway stations. Everything took place in public, facts that they didn't want to see. They were "**these silent spectators**" of assaults that resulted in the cruel deaths of countless innocent people.

Many fellow travellers of the Nazi regime approached me with the request to help them obtain a so-called "Persilschein" for denazification. These people had "**never had anything against the Jews**". I asked the same people what they had done to help the persecuted Jews in their distress and despair. They always failed to give me an answer. I could not and would not help them.

The prospects of leaving the country were very slim shortly after the end of the war, the general situation had not yet really stabilised. I couldn't bring myself to leave the house straight away either. I decided to wait and see what happened next. I was offered tempting jobs, but I couldn't decide on anything. I continued to live with my parents in Niederschönhausen in the north of Berlin. It was virtually impossible to make a new circle of friends. Over time, I did make contact with a few people in the western part of Berlin, but it was always difficult to get there. After all the destruction, transport links were still very poor and, above all, not continuous. I sometimes borrowed a bike from neighbours, which made it easier and quicker.

After the end of the twelve-year terror regime, I had time to reflect on my past. I remembered my earliest youth, my school and schoolmates, my later youth my education, my friends, my Steffi. I had to remember the crimes of a regime under which I myself had suffered greatly. My young wife and countless friends had to go to their deaths innocently. I myself was very lucky to survive this terrible time. I was able to survive the hard and discriminatory forced labour and subsequent imprisonment due to my young age and relatively good physical condition. The humiliation and psychological terror that had been systematically built up against the Jewish population since 1933 was far worse. Laws, regulations and violence were used to control a completely defenceless and, above all, completely blameless population group until they were gradually deported to concentration camps and finally brutally murdered. I searched for an explanation for what had happened. I searched for a long time, I didn't find it and I never will.

Slowly I became stir-crazy again. I had to look around for something to do. There were no opportunities to work as an interior designer at the end of 1945. I tried working as a carpenter in a joinery workshop for windows and doors in Pankow. I was accepted immediately. The work itself appealed to me, but there was no future for me.

At the beginning of 1946, my father finally got his long-awaited pharmacy. He was 65 years old when he took it over. I would have liked him to retire after the years he had experienced, but my father wanted to have his own pharmacy once again. We realised that he didn't want to give up. He was given the Katharinen pharmacy in Weißensee, which was in pretty poor condition. I was able to put my skills to good use here. I repaired and altered things, I tried to create something with the materials available to us. Father was also lucky and got good employees. His most fervent dream came true. He worked in his pharmacy for another 10 years. He was happy and, above all, rehabilitated.

I was very worried about my own situation. I couldn't see a future, I wanted to leave the country but didn't know where to go. The situation seemed hopeless to me. I now decided to go to the highest position in my profession. I also wanted to become a master craftsman in the furniture trade, it couldn't be to my detriment. In January 1946, the carpentry guild was already working again. I made my way to them to explore my options. My prospects were pretty poor. Firstly, I didn't have an official tradesman's certificate, secondly, I was too young at 26½ and thirdly, I didn't have enough practice. After I had made it clear to the gentlemen at the guild who I was and what I had experienced, they gave me permission to build a masterpiece with an appropriate level of difficulty. I decided on a so-called bachelor's wardrobe, a walnut veneered dressing cabinet, framed doors set off with difficult profiles. The wardrobe met the rather tough requirements for obtaining the master craftsman's certificate. After just a few days, I returned to the guild with a 1:10 scale sketch, which was approved. Now it was time to make a complete working drawing on a scale of 1:1. I procured a large plywood board, placed it on the dining room table and then I started drawing. Lesson learnt, after three days I was finished. When I turned up at the guild again after such a short time, the gentlemen asked what I wanted again. My answer was to present the work drawing. They couldn't believe that I had already finished it. They told me to go and have a glass of beer and come back two hours later. They checked the drawing very carefully but couldn't find any mistakes. The gentlemen told me that they hadn't expected such a drawing from me. I couldn't put them off any longer, I explained to them what training I already had. I could have told them that straight away, they thought. I took some pleasure in it myself.

The submitted drawing was approved and I was able to start. Now I had to find a joinery that had the necessary materials and machines as well as space for me. Who better than Otto Gleichmar, the last company before my arrest? I travelled to Zossenerstraße with great expectations and went into the office I knew. Who was sitting behind the desk? None other than Gleichmar Junior, the former SS man. At first I didn't think I could believe my eyes, but it was him. I didn't know if he deliberately didn't want to recognise me. I told him who I was and reminded him of times gone by. He certainly wasn't very comfortable in his own skin. After the shock had subsided in both of us, Junior showed such exuberant friendliness that I wanted to turn back. I told him what I wanted. Of course, I could do my masterpiece with him, it would even be a special honour for him, I didn't have to pay anything etc. etc. I just told Junior that I didn't want anything from him as a gift, I didn't want to repay like with like. I paid what I had to pay and that was the end of the matter for me. It took me about six weeks to complete the work. The cabinet was accepted without any faults. Gleichmar junior offered me the position of foreman at the company, but I declined, saying that I would not work under him a second time. He said that times had changed. My answer was simply: "***Of course times have changed, but people and their past have not.***"

Before the theoretical examination could take place, a practical work test had to be carried out. We were 10 candidates for the master craftsman's certificate. As I said, I was the youngest, the others were 45 - 60 years old. They were already skilled craftsmen, but they had to do the master craftsman's certificate to be able to train apprentices. We had to bring tools and planed pine wood with us. We had to make a frame with four different corner joints as a work sample. We started at 1 o'clock in the afternoon, I was the first to go home at 3 o'clock and the last to leave at 7 o'clock in the evening. I didn't have any problems with the theory exam either, I had already learnt most of it beforehand and now had a use for it.

Of the 10 candidates, 6 passed the exam without a mark and the remaining 4 were given another chance after 6 weeks. I received my master craftsman's certificate on 15 June 1946. This meant that I had achieved everything there was to achieve in my industry and also had a solid reason to look forward to a better future outside Germany.

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My masterpiece remained in the former East Berlin for 47 years, as there was no possibility of exporting it under the GDR regime. Today, the cabinet is back in our flat in perfect condition, and the work drawing has also been preserved. If it is possible, both should one day pass into the possession of my grandchildren Kirstin and Tm in Australia.

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After receiving my master craftsman's certificate, I looked for a better position within my profession. It was still impossible to find a satisfying job as an interior designer. There was a lot of chaos due to the financial situation. The old Reichsmark wasn't worth much and the black market was flourishing. I applied for a job as a foreman at the Gründler furniture factory on Kott-Busser Damm and got the job straight away. This company had the task of dismantling existing and usable material from the former Reich Chancellery and reworking it for other purposes. It was a great experience for me to take a look inside this former "centre of power". It was amazing what we found in this fireproof but partially burnt-out building. In addition to SS uniform parts, medals of various kinds and other Nazi trophies scattered across the floors, there were still very usable wall panels of the highest quality. Access to this building was only possible with permission. Once I had the opportunity to take my father with me. We visited "**Hitler's office**", which was still in relatively good condition. Of course, none of the furniture was left, the Russians had already taken it out. The fixed furnishings such as wall and ceiling panelling were still there. My father couldn't resist standing against the wall in this room to symbolically do some business, which was probably the greatest satisfaction for him. I granted him that with all my heart.

I only stayed at Gründler's company for a few months, as I received a different and better offer through an advert. In Leibnitzstraße, which was part of the American sector at the time, there was a small furniture factory whose owner, Georg Reindler, needed a master craftsman to continue his business.

We made simple small pieces of furniture that were suitable for the existing machinery. We used the remaining material to produce various wooden toys. Most of the material was procured by "bartering". We also had orders to furnish nightclubs, which were springing up like mushrooms at the time. I was now able to use my knowledge as an interior designer in this way. Georg Reindler was responsible for the other "transactions". Georg Reindler was responsible for the other "transactions".

Returning to my parents' house brought new problems. I was living with my parents again and both of them found it difficult to understand that after an unfortunately short marriage and after everything I had experienced, I wanted to have a certain freedom of action. My father in particular tried to exercise a certain amount of "supervision" over me again, which limited my independence as I saw it at the age of 27. The generation gap was becoming more and more noticeable. I was certainly convinced that he meant well with me in his own way, but he couldn't understand that I was now a grown man. Apart from minor "differences", the relationship with my parents was in no way clouded. Having an open discussion about this topic, as one would do today, was not generally possible back then. I tried to put myself in my parents' shoes. They didn't have much of their son in their lives. As a child, I was ill a lot, my stay in Italy, the time of persecution, the announcement that I would leave Germany as soon as possible - everything certainly contributed to wanting to turn back the clock. I also had to remind myself that my life had to go on. I was still too young. There was nothing I could do about the murder of my young wife, as bleak as it may sound.

During this phase, I met Ursula at the beginning of 1946. We got on very well and met more and more often. Of course I talked about my past, but very consciously avoided making any comparisons with my previous marriage.

My mental and sometimes nervous state after the persecution was not particularly good. Ursula tried in her own way to change my mind in order to get over the past. My plans to leave Germany for good were still on the table. I left no doubt that I would carry them out at the first available opportunity. Ursula did not oppose my plans and so we decided to get married and then try our luck together in another country.

The wedding took place in mid-December 1946 and we were given a furnished two-room flat on Retzbacher Weg in Pankow, where we lived for a whole year.

By chance, we learnt that skilled workers were being sought for Sweden. I applied to the Swedish immigration authorities, we were accepted and I was able to fulfil my long-awaited wish to leave my country of birth legally. On 12 December 1947, we set foot on Swedish soil for the first time. This country was to become my new home, as it was of the utmost importance for me to start a completely new life. In 1954, I was granted Swedish citizenship with all rights and obligations. Sweden became and is my new home. My marriage to Ursula resulted in two children: daughter Stefanie, who now lives in Australia, and son Rolf, who lives with his mother back in Germany. The marriage broke down and they divorced in 1959. I have the very best relationship with my daughter, her husband and two grandchildren, which is maintained by telephone conversations and occasional visits.

I married my current wife and life companion Jutta in December 1964. At that time, there were still many traces of the past that I couldn't easily get rid of. Over time, we created a balance together, a level on which we lived happily and contentedly for over 35 years. We have the very best prerequisites for continuing to organise our lives in the same way in the future and hope that we will stay healthy for a long time to come. We have the very best prerequisites for continuing to organise our lives in the same way in the future and hope that our health will stay with us for a long time to come.

Epilogue

After the end of the war, I went to see the master well builder Wilhelm Voss. It was a very happy reunion. It turned out that he was an old Social Democrat. That made me realise why he didn't have much use for the Nazis. I was able to thank him for his very risky help. When I asked him whether he had ever had any difficulties with Stuschka, he replied in the negative.

I visited Theresienstadt twice. The first time was in 1987, when the town was partly inhabited again and the barracks were occupied by Czech soldiers. Many of the residential buildings were in the same condition as in 1945 and the streets were now covered with asphalted. To my great astonishment, I found no trace of the past in Terezín itself. The Czech regime at the time showed very little interest in the great suffering of the former Jewish prisoners. When I visited Terezín for the second time in 1992, a lot had changed in this respect. Today there is a museum and an information office. On one side of the market square there are two large maps of the town, Terezín in the Hitler era and after the war. The residential buildings were still unchanged, partly inhabited, partly locked and deserted. The town made a completely desolate impression; you could be forgiven for thinking that it had not recovered since 1945.

I also visited Heydrich Castle in 1992 and it was very difficult to get in because a research centre had taken over the castle. Basically, not much has changed: Our accommodation, the stables, had been converted into a workshop. The other buildings now also have a different function. Some of the new terraced houses have been built on the site of the large nursery. The swimming pool still exists, it is sealed and is now used as a fire-fighting pond. We seem to have done a good job 50 years ago. The rest of the garden was very overgrown.

In the spring of 1990, I travelled to Wulkow to have a look around. Apart from a few concrete posts for the fence around the former Gestapo barrack town, there was nothing left to see. I was able to make out the site of our own last camp. Unfortunately, the weather didn't allow me to take a closer look. I also found our sand pit camp, which we called "**Sama Jama**" for reasons I no longer understand. This sand pit is now overgrown with thick trees. I was in a pub in Wulkow and met an old lady of about 80 years of age. She remembered the time very well. She probably knew something about our existence, but it was very difficult for her to remember the details.

I went to Schnarchenreuth several times because my late friend Günther Hartmann had his house not far from there. The manor house still stands, but is completely uninhabitable. A few years ago, Günther and I visited the house. The ceilings and floors were broken through and you could see through the floors from below. Günther said that my "renovation" had had very little success. Today I would describe the house as a half-ruin. I was unable to find out whether the manor belonging to it is still being farmed. In Schnarchenreuth itself, I visited the sawmill from back then. It still stands, but is no longer in operation; a new one has been built. I met the old owner; he couldn't or wouldn't remember anything.

A long time ago, I learnt that a meeting of former Wulkow residents was held in Berlin in 1984. Unfortunately, the organiser of this meeting, Klaus Scheurenberg, did not have my address, so I was unable to attend. The name Franz Stuschka, our tormentor and sadist from Wulkow, kept coming up at this meeting. Questions were asked: **Does Stuschka live in Austria? Was he brought to justice?** A journalist from West German radio/television set himself the task of tracking Stuschka down. After extensive and time-consuming research, he tracked him down in a Viennese suburb. With great skill and even more patience, he managed to get him in front of the television camera for an interview. This interview was broadcast by WDR in 1985 under the title: "**GESUCHT WIRD: Franz Stuschka**". I had the opportunity to see a video

of this interview and to obtain a copy. After such a long time, it is shocking to see this man before my eyes once again.

The Austrian SS-Obersturmführer Franz Stuschka was born on 3 July 1910. After the annexation of Austria to Germany, he became an employee of the "Central Office for Jewish Emigration" in Vienna, which was headed by Adolf Eichmann. Stuschka very quickly became one of Adolf Eichmann's closest confidants (which he tried very miserably to deny) and was a member of the feared Gestapo. The piercing, penetrating eyes, the sharp mouth, it was Stuschka who was my worst memory. At the time of the interview, he was an old man of 74, a loner who wanted no contact with his environment. He lived in a neighbourhood that looked like a demolition site. The windows of the flat were boarded up with plywood to prevent anyone from seeing in.

At first he was unwilling to speak in front of the camera, but in the end he gave in. He categorically denied all charges. He could no longer remember anything. He rejected everything as falsehood and fiction. From such a man, who sent a number of comrades to their deaths, who was not afraid to victimise us with his unbelievable sadism, it was not to be expected that he would admit anything or ever show remorse. Throughout the interview, he kept trying to give the impression that he was completely innocent, that everything he was accused of was made up and that he had endeavoured to organise our lives in Wulkow in a "humane way". Perhaps he was already so senile at the time of the interview that he got everything mixed up or he was still cunning enough to present his crimes as fantasies. The theory that "the victims are the guilty ones, the criminal is innocent" should apply to Stuschka.

There is documentary evidence that he was sentenced to a very long prison term after the war, of which he served 7 years. Stuschka repeatedly claimed that he only carried out the orders he was given. However, he did not only act according to orders, most of his misdeeds were based on his own initiatives and that was much worse. We, who were tormented by him to the extreme, know better.

The interview helped to make it clear to him at the time that there are still living witnesses who have not forgotten his monstrous crimes. Whether he is still alive today is questionable. There is no sympathy for this old man, the greatest contempt and disgust are the only things we survivors feel.

I also learnt that Stuschka had written a letter from the prison camp near Salzburg to our own site manager from Wulkow, in which he asked to receive a so-called "**leadership certificate**" confirming, among other things, that he had always been humane to us and had stood up for us and that perhaps other comrades could also testify to this. When I read this letter, my anger boiled up again, because I would never have thought such insolence and impudence possible.

The year 1995

In the summer of that year, I received a completely unexpected letter from a former camp inmate from Wulkow. He had received my address in Sweden in a way that was initially incomprehensible. His name is Jan Jecha, formerly Hans Bernfeld. It turned out that I was with him at Heydrich Castle. The reason for his letter was to find out from whom I had received the sketch of our own camp in Wulkow, which had come into his hands by chance. He also informed me that a meeting of former Wulkowers was to take place at the beginning of November 1995, where, among other things, a memorial plaque in Hermersdorf and memorial stones in the immediate vicinity of the former Wulkow camp were to be unveiled. There was no doubt in my mind about attending this meeting. After more than 50 years, I

met a delegation of seven Czech comrades. It was a warm reunion and there was no shortage of things to talk about. This meeting was organised by the RAA in Strausberg (Regional Office for Foreigners' Affairs, Youth Work and Schools) in connection with the "Strausberg Jewish Culture Days". In addition to the unveiling of the memorial plaque and stones, this meeting also had another purpose. We were asked to speak about our experiences as contemporary witnesses to 15 to 17-year-old pupils in neighbouring secondary schools and grammar schools. This request came as a complete surprise to me, I was not prepared for it. This was followed by several events in schools that I will remember for a long time. Among other things, I realised that the need for education about the darkest period of German history was unbelievable. I was also very surprised by the great interest shown by this generation, with whom I normally have no direct contact. It is understandable that today's young people prefer the personal accounts of contemporary witnesses, because they don't believe too much in the written word. Unfortunately, there are a number of printed reports, some of them from my own former comrades in arms, which do not always stick to the facts. Even though I only refer to Germany as my country of birth, I believe that it is necessary to remind today's youth of the past and to give them a responsibility to ensure that what happened does not happen again.



Memorial stone for the Wulkow satellite camp on the road from Wulkow to Neuhardenberg, 1995

In 1996, I met up with some of my Czech comrades in Prague, who arrange to meet twice a year. As I knew that a large number of my comrades from Wulkow were living in the USA, in the autumn of the same year I put an ad looking for my comrades in a newspaper that was also read by former victims of persecution in the States. I immediately received a reply from Heinz Frankenstein, the oft-quoted former "fountain builder", which resulted in a quick visit to New York. The wish was expressed to arrange a meeting of comrades in the USA who could still be reached. Herbert Kolb accomplished this task in a particularly commendable way. The meeting or "reunion" took place in September 1997 in Paramus in the state of New Jersey and brought together 14 Wulkow comrades who came despite their age and sometimes poor health. Some were unable to attend for health reasons, but we have not forgotten them.

Many decades had to pass to bring the past back to life, a very cruel past that we had to come to terms with in our subsequent lives. Not only did I see old comrades again through these meetings, but I also made new friends, which means so much to me. I hope that we can enjoy this experience for many years to come.

Simrishamn (Sweden) at the beginning of the year 2000

Walter Grunwald

Important dates during the time of persecution

1933

- 30.01. Hitler's assumption of power
- 27.2 Reichstag fire
- 27.3. dismissal of "non-Aryan" doctors at Berlin hospitals
- 31.03. Ban on "non-Aryan" lawyers and judges in the courts
- 01.04. Organised boycott of "non-Aryan" businesses
- 10.05. May Public burning of books with "non-German" content on the Opera Square

1935

- 25.07. July Jews are declared "unworthy of military service"
- 17.08. Preparations for the creation of a "Jewish register"
- 15.09. . Nuremberg Race Laws

1936

- 23.06. Assaults against foreigners and Jews are banned because of the Olympic Games (01 - 16.08.)

1937

- Intensification of forced sales ("Aryanisation") of Jewish businesses and companies
- 16.07. Restriction on the issue of passports to Jews

1938

- 26.04. April Compulsory registration of all Jewish assets
- 14.06. Labelling of all Jewish businesses
- 17.08. Ordinance on the introduction of the additional first names "Israel" and "Sara" (from 01.01.1939)
- 05.10. Labelling of Jewish passports with "J"
- 09/10 November "Reichspogromnacht" or "Reichskristallnacht"
- 12.11. Decree on the payment of an "atonement payment" amounting to 1 billion Reichsmark
Decree on the elimination of Jews from economic life
Ban on attending theatres, cinemas, public events and sports facilities
- 06.12. Imposition of the "Judenbann": Jews are no longer allowed to enter the government district in Berlin

1939

- 30.01. Hitler announces the "annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe" in the event of war
- 21.02. Obligation for Jews to hand in all precious metal objects and jewellery
- 30.04. Cancellation of tenant protection for Jews
- 01.09. German invasion of Poland: start of the war
- 23.09. Obligation for Jews to hand in their radios

1940

- 04.07. In Berlin, Jews are only allowed to do their grocery shopping between 4 and 5 p.m.
- 29.07. Withdrawal of telephone connections

1941

- 07.03. Compulsory labour for Jews from the age of 14
- 31.07. Göring commissions Heydrich with the preparations for an "overall solution to the Jewish question in Europe"
- 1.9 Obligation to wear the "Jewish star" from the age of 6
- 1.10. First deportation of Berlin Jews from Grunewald S-Bahn station to the Lodz ghetto

- 23.10. Emigration ban. Establishment of the first Berlin collection centre in the Levetzowstraße synagogue
- 25.11 . 11th decree on the Reich Citizenship Act: confiscation of Jewish assets in the event of deportation

1942

- 10.01. Jan. Obligation to surrender fur and woollen goods
- 20.01 Jan. Wannsee Conference: Ministerial officials and Nazi functionaries coordinate the measures for the so-called "Final Solution to the Jewish Question"
- 15.05. May: Jews must hand in their pets to be killed

1943

- 27/28.02. "Factory Action": Arrest of approx. 15,000 Jewish forced labourers in Berlin and subsequent demonstration by non-Jewish wives and relatives in Rosenstraße. Release of Jews in "mixed marriages"
- 18.12. Deportation of Jewish spouses from "mixed marriages" that no longer existed to Theresienstadt

1944

October Registration of Jewish "Mischlinge 1. Grades" and the so-called "jüdisch Versippten" (husbands of Jewish women) for forced labour with the Organisation Todt and deportation to labour camps

1945

- March / April Last deportation from Berlin to Sachsenhausen concentration camp
- 02.05 Liberation of Berlin
- 08.05. May Unconditional surrender of all military units. End of the Nazi regime of terror

Conclusion

According to transport lists found by the Gestapo, 35,366 people were deported from Berlin to the East (Auschwitz, Birkenau, Treblinka, etc.). Of these, 324 people survived. 14,663 people were deported to Theresienstadt. Of these, 1728 people survived.

Total sum

50,029 deported persons
 47,977 persons are considered missing or deceased 2052 persons survived, i.e. 4.10 %

Appendix: Family photos

Anhang
Familienbilder



Mein Vater als Offizier 1914-1918

My father as an officer 1914 - 1918

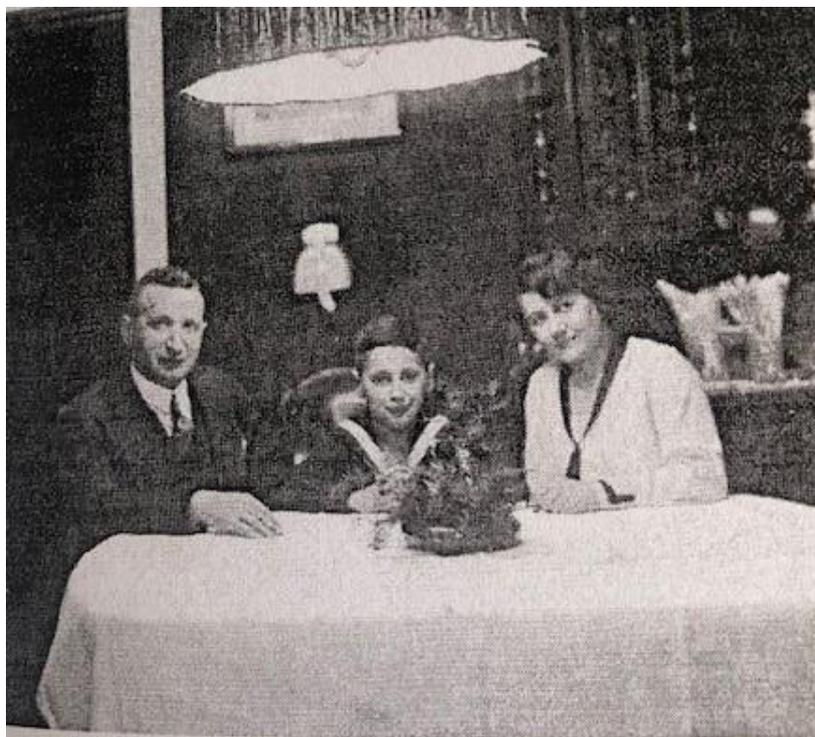


Walter am 20. Januar 1922

Familiebilder



Walter um das Jahr 1925



Meine Eltern in der Pankower Wohnung um 1927

Familienbilder



Die Familie in Kassel
r, die "Kleine Oma", Tante Maria, Onkel Alfred, Walter u. Tante Gertrud

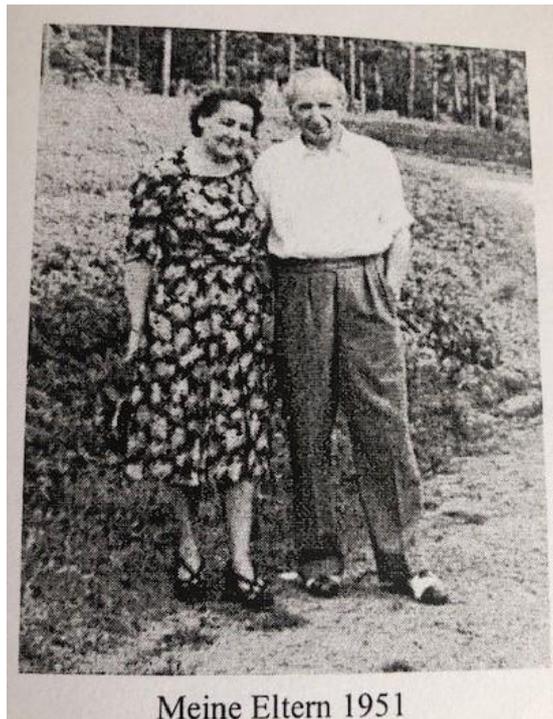
Above: The family in Kassel (father, "Little Grandma", Aunt Maria, Uncle Alfred, Walter and Aunt Gertrud) Below: A picnic outing by car



Ausflug mit Picknick und Auto



Walter mit ca. 14 Jahren



Meine Eltern 1951