

## OMA'S HISTORY

*Doro Dehn*

My parents were Carl and Gerda v. Rennenkampff and they lived on their estate Schloss Wesenberg close to the town Wesenberg (Rakvere). There I was born as the 7<sup>th</sup> child on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1918. It was very bad times. In Russia there had been the Revolution and the Communists came murdering into our country. My parents had to run away, they left with the last German soldiers (that were soldiers from Germany) in an unheated train to Riga. That was in November and since I was a tiny baby they did not dare to take me along. They left me with an Estonian Nanny Elvine. In the beginning we stayed with an old lady Mrs. Samson in Rakvere. But she was murdered soon afterwards. So Elvine took me in the country to her parents. Afterwards she brought me to my aunt (my mothers sister) Otti Dehn (Grandmother of Gero Dehn). They had fled only to Tallinn. The Estonian people together with the Baltic Germans formed "The Landeswehr" and managed to throw the Communists out. So the Dehns could go back to their farm again, and there I stayed for about 2 years.

My parents with their 6 children and a friend Miss Mickwitz had gone in between to Riga. The plan was to go from there with a ship to Germany. But since my brother Hans Dieter got very sick (he was born with heart trouble) and died, they did not reach the harbour in time. The boat left also earlier than scheduled. I think they still saw it in the distance. That was the last ship and they had to stay in Riga. Now started an awful hard winter for them. There were 5 kids to feed and very little to eat. My sisters talked sometimes about "kaffeedickkuchen", a cake they made out of coffee grounds. I have seen passport photos from my parents, not to be recognized. The worst was that the Communists occupied the city, they took my father and put him in the prison. From the little food they had my mother still tried to bring him some. Then he got sick, Typhoid Fever and came in a hospital. That turned out to be his luck. The Latvians (Like the Estonians) had formed together with the German Balts living in Latvija the "Landeswehr." In May (19<sup>th</sup>) these soldiers managed to throw the Communists out of Riga. But before that took place, the Communists massacred as many of the people in the prisons as they could. And then it was a good thing that my dad was in the hospital; the Communists did not manage to come there in time to murder everybody. So my dad stayed alive.

In the Landeswehr were some of our relatives, they came to my family, brought eggs and sugar along and they all ate "Gogglemoggel", a real feast.

My family went now to Germany to Misdroy, a small town on the Island Wollin in the Baltic Sea and wanted to wait there for every thing to get quiet. Apparently quite a few from the Baltic Germans had fled there. My parents bought a house there and stayed there until 1921. My father returned earlier to Estonia to look after his properties and to pick me up. I was quite happy at my aunts place, called her "Tante Mutter" auntie mother. With my dad I went then with a ship to Germany. I could only talk Estonian, did not know my mother and the others at all and wanted only to be with my dad. When he disappeared probably to get the luggage, I cried "kus pappa jai?" Brother Paul got quite excited "does he have a Pappagei?" (That means parrot in German)

In 1921 we returned to Estonia. My two oldest sisters Gertrud and Esther stayed in Germany to finish their highschool in Germany. Andreas, my oldest brother had as small kid polio and was very handicapped, his legs were completely paralyzed and he walked with some braces. Then there was Renate, Paul and me who all returned to Estonia.

In Estonia there had been big changes in between. The Estonians had declared their independence already in February 1918; it was not until 1920 that the independence was recognized from Russia. So far the Germans had been the "upper class" in Estonia. But the Estonians were or are smart and hard working people. Now they wanted the Germans to get out of the higher jobs. And the big farms, which were mostly in German hands, were partly confiscated and divided. Our farm in Wesenberg was completely taken away, so we moved now to Wack (Vao) a place my father had inherited from an unmarried uncle. There we still owned the buildings and some land; my dad rented then some land back. I think in the end we farmed about 225 hectares. Wack used to have lots of forests. They belonged now all to the government, but we had a small sawmill. So my dad bought every winter a piece of his old forests, cut it down and brought it to the sawmill. That gave us work for our hired men and for the horses in wintertime.

Life was fairly simple at that time, the food also was by no means fancy, everyday meals were simple. We had no pigs on the farm, only a couple or so for butchering. Behind the house there was a little barn and our cook fed them. The pigs were supposed to get very big and very fat. Hams and bacon were smoked. The other meat came mostly in a big barrel and was salted. Out of the skin and other waste products, soap was cooked. The salted meat was then cooked in soups. We ate lots of soups, mostly pea soup and sauerkraut soup. The fatty meat was cut up and we were supposed to eat it. I did not like to eat

that, but my dad did not allow to criticize or talk about the food. Wednesday and Saturday was "Grutztag", kind of porridge cooked out of barley. There was always a desert after. And I loved that, Mannabrei (cream of wheat) with fruit, pancakes or something else. Fresh meat was very seldom, (no deep freezers at that time), only at butchering time. And then there were of course some young roosters in summer and ducks and geese in fall and winter. My mother had some chickens, and in springtime quite a few hens were set on eggs and ran around with their baby chicks afterwards (no baby chicks from the incubators).

We had no power and no running water. There always stood a big barrel of water on a wagon behind the house. And like here in Canada in the beginning, we had pails with water standing in the kitchen. In winter big chunks of ice were cut in the pond or lake and brought into the icehouse. There they were piled up, and there we kept our food. The ice stayed almost till fall, then the last had melted. We had a little fridge in the house. On one side pieces of ice were stuffed in, on the other side we kept milk and a few things. All the other leftovers were brought into the icehouse. In summer we sometimes made ice cream, we had a machine for it. Sometimes we had to turn the handle for quite a while.

In summertime our house was usually full. My big sisters from Germany came and then there were always relations and friends, which stayed at our place. Our house was not too big, but my mother used to say, it has rubber walls which expanded.

About every 4 weeks clothes were washed. Quite a bit accumulated in that long time. Separate from our house we had a wash house. For this day other help came. It was quite a job at that time. First soaking, then scrubbing, then all the white stuff was cooked in big kettles, then washed again, rinsed different times, wringing by hand. It all took time. In the same washhouse every Saturday the sauna was heated. Everybody from the farm could come there for a sauna bath. When we were bigger we quite often went there too for a sauna. In the younger years we were scrubbed in barrels by mother or somebody else.

I think my parents did not have it very easy to get the ends meet, money was not spent very much. But as a kid I did not notice anything of that. I had everything I needed and I loved that farm and my parents with all my heart.

In 1922 on Xmas Eve my youngest brother Rupprecht was born. I remember that Christmas clearly. The Christmas tree was in a different room like usually, so that my mother could see it from her bed, and brother Paul was Santa Claus.

We – the Germans – were still allowed to have our own German schools. But there were no German schools in the country, so I was taught for a few years at home. In the first grade my mother taught me to read and write, and I loved to read a lot. Afterwards an old retired teacher Ms. Paslack taught me and later on there were different other ladies. One year sister Renate was our teacher.

I think I was 8 years old, when Yvonne (Io) Collongues came to us. Her father had for some not very nice reasons to leave the country and her mother stayed with her 3 girls in Rakvere. Quite a few families helped her. And the middle girl who was my age came to us. For me it was very good, I had now a companion. We did everything together, rode together horseback, drove with the hired men to get the hay, the grain or in the winter the logs. When Rupprecht got a little bit older he was the 3<sup>rd</sup> one in our group. We loved each other, but of course fought also a lot. In summer time Io's older sister was usually also at our place.

Our last teacher at home was Mrs. or Ms. Goetsch. She was very excited about us, we were learning so good, were real good children. She praised us so much, that we thought we do not need to learn so much. After a while Ms. Goetsch came to my mother and complained. Something was wrong with us; it was not going good at all any more. Suddenly everybody got excited. We had to study very hard; our homework was supervised a.s.o. In spring we had to go to the city to make an exam, because we were supposed to enter the school there in the fall. We hardly made the exam. Io failed in mathematics, but she could repeat that. And I failed in music. I sang "kommt ein Vogel geflogen", and that went not so good. I did not need to sing again.

In the fall 1930 we moved to Reval (Tallinn) I boarded there at my aunts place, Tante Lullo (mothers sister). She was not married and lived together with my Uncle Lot and uncle Niko in the Sperlingshaus (Sparrow house). The name of the little street was Sparrow Street (The street and the house do not exist anymore). Io came to the "Olgaheim", a place for kids whose parents had little money. She had an awful time there. Food and treatment were not nice. Tante Lullo took her every weekend to her place, that helped. Io's sister Mia had gone in between to Germany, where a generous lady from Buckeburg looked for a kid to love and educate. Now this lady wanted to take Io to her place too. It took lots of crying from our family and from Io, when she departed to Germany, and I did not see her for a few years.

In Reval, in the "Elisenschule" I stayed for 3 years. I did not like it there at all. Away from home, away from the farm and living only with old people. My aunt Lullo was a very good person and I loved

her. But still always wearing long black dresses I thought she was very old. (I think at that time she was maybe in her mid sixties).

There were 2 places in Reval which I have to mention, where I spent lots of my time. One was my girlfriend's Dolly Luther's home. Her dad had a plywood factory, I think they made things out of plywood. They were very well off, had a big house, lying in a park, had lots of servants. It was a very different life there, than that what I was used to from home. Dolly came sometimes in the holidays to Wack. First I was scared, that she would not like it in our rather modest place, no running water, no electricity a.s.o. But she loved it. The whole family life was different. At night we were together, played card games (Stopper) and did other things together. At their house every member of the family went their own ways. – Dolly came later to a boarding school in Germany. In 1935 we got confirmed together. Later I have seen her only once in Posen, she was married and had kids. After the war she got divorced and moved to England. She never answered my last letter, so we came apart.

The other place where I spent lots of my free time, was my cousin Annemarie Bernhard (daughter of my mothers oldest sister). Tante Renata helped there for a while in the house. They had bought an acreage outside Reval, built there a nice house, had a big garden and a barn with a horse, a pony (that was a big attraction for me). There were 2 boys, both younger than I. The older one Erwi, he was called Poja, owned the horse "Zio". Together we drove with the sleigh through the woods, or in summer I could ride on Zio. We had lots of fun. The younger boy, Jurgen was sick, he had T.B of the bones. At that time he wore a cast and was not supposed to walk. Together with him I played games or we read together. These boys lost both parents very early. Poja visited us once in Rittehude, I think he was at that time salesman for chocolates or something. It was hard for these boys which came from school to the war, had learned no trade and had to start something. Poja died a few years ago in his sleep beside his wife. Jurgen recovered from his illness pretty good, he married after the war, has a family and is still living in Germany.

In spring 1933 during the Easter holidays, my father got sick. He was moved to Reval hospital and never came back home. During spring I visited him daily in the hospital. He was somehow paralyzed; it started with the legs and went higher. I think at that time nobody knew what it was. In the summer he got a little bit better, could walk again. But that did not last long, and in January 1934 he died. At that time my oldest sister Gertrud with husband August and son Peter were staying in Wack and that was a big help for mother.

The Henning Family left Germany when Hitler came to power. They belonged to the wrong party and did not agree with Hitler. He (August) had a bookstore in Nurnberg before and now he was looking for something else. Finally they found the job in Denmark, at the "Volkshochschule", where they both were teaching.

In 1932 sister Renate had married Olaf Stackelberg, a cousin, son of my mothers oldest sister. She moved to Pernau, where Olaf was lawyer. Since I was so unhappy in Reval and my good friend Dolly was also not there any more, it was decided that I should finish school in Pernau. Tante Renate had no kids yet so I was their first child. I like Pernau lots more. The school was mixed boys and girls and we had lots of fun. Pernau had a wonderful beach, in the bay the water was already in May fairly warm, and when school started in September again it was still possible to swim. Then you could go out by boat, and in winter sailing on the ice. It came also the time with boyfriends. It was always lots to do.

After finishing school in spring 1935, I went for 3 weeks to Matthias, a little pretty country church. There I went to confirmation classes. We lived in the minister's house, it was a very nice time, I think we were 6 girls together. The minister's name was

Otto Etzold and as I found out years later, an uncle from Reinhard.

The location of Matthias was west of Reval close to the Gulf of Finland. The church was built on a beautiful place on top of the Glint, which was at that place not so close to the Gulf. It was surrounded by blooming lilac bushes and the view from there was very pretty. The minister's house was closer to the water. We were there 6 girls (also Dolly Luther was there), we had a very nice time together, besides the lessons, we had long talks with Otto Etzold and helped him on his little farm. On the weekends we drove with our bikes and explored the country.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of June it was the custom to light big fires. At home we always had a fire together with our workers we danced and were singing around the fire. Beer, Vodka and something to eat was supplied for the workers and we always had lots of fun. It never got really dark in these summer nights in the northern countries. This time we went to a resort area "Klooga", where quite a few people from Reval had cottages. With them we went sailing and swimming, and at night the fires were lit. It was an impressive sight. All around the bay these fires were burning. We counted over 20 of them. A pretty sight.

The confirmation was on July 4<sup>th</sup>.<sup>1935</sup> Then the relations came and the hospitality from the Etzolds was enormous. We had decorated the church and all was very pretty.

As confirmation present my mother gave me the visit from Io and Mia. It was the last carefree summer at home and we enjoyed it immensely. During this time the wedding of my brother Andreas took place. Andreas as I wrote before was severely handicapped through the polio he had as a small kid. But he was a very strong person. He had been through university in Dorpat (Tartu), took there mathematics. He always had lots of friends who helped him; these young men came also quite often to our place. I was very close to this brother. And now he was engaged and going to be married. I always admired his young bride (only a year older than me) that she was willing to marry this handicapped man. The wedding took place in Tammik (you remember that green house close to Wesenberg, we were there in 1993). The Welding family was living there. Andreas had fallen awhile before and broken his arm. Now he was happy that he had an excuse not to put a tie on, that was so typical of him. The couple lived afterwards in Reval, where Andreas had stayed already for a while. He earned his living by giving private math lessons to students which needed help.

In October 1935 I went to Finn, a home economy school. It was a big farm not far from Wesenberg, Rakvere. I did not know too much about cooking and so on. My mother herself was not a good housekeeper, she liked more gardening. So she did not teach me much about these things. In summer time when our house was usually full of visitors, we had to help with the dishes and keep our room clean. That was about the only chores we had to do in the house. We liked more to help outside, and my father had always jobs for us. We had to pull out weeds, imagine by hand. There were patches of wild mustard in the fields that we had to get rid of. At that time there was no spraying or anything like that. As we got older the jobs got more interesting. Then we worked with horses, raking hay and hauling manure. That was more fun. And it was very important that we could stand in line with the hired men on Saturdays to receive a few cents for our work. The money came in a piggy bank and we bought Christmas presents from it. And then I saved for a bike, and was very proud when I bought my first bike.

And now I was in that home economic school and finally learned some cooking, baking and how wonderful – house cleaning. We also had a big garden there and chickens; all was looked after by the girls. That was more interesting. In the summer we girls were borrowed for 2 weeks out to some farms which needed help. I came to Parmel, that place was run by 2 ladies. They went on holidays. I got handed out a big bundle of keys and had to give out the feed for the different animals. Besides there was a big garden full of weeds. I worked hard to get it clean, but you know how fast they grow again.

In October 1936 I finished in Finn and came home for a few months. During that time I worked in the cow barn, learned to milk, feed the calves and everything else what was necessary to do.

In between, Paul had finished the agriculture school in Elbing, Germany. (That is the place where he met Prickel). Now he came home to take over. It was not an easy time for my mother. First Paul was managing, later he rented the farm. But the trouble was, that he did not tell my mother about the things he was doing. I did not know too much about all this, because I was not at home later. But I read in my mother's diary quite a bit about these things. When Paul married later his Annemarie, everything got o.k. again. And the years when my mother stayed with Paul and Annemarie were good ones for her.

Esther and Ernst (they got married in 1936) had invited me to Berlin, and for the summer I had a job at Osten Sackens in Feldgrieben (those were the parents of Gustav, who is now living in Armstrong B.C.). So I went in January 1937 to Berlin, it was the first time that I was in such a huge city. That was sure different from what I had seen before.

On April 1<sup>st</sup> I started in Feldgrieben, but I went already once before to look at the place and I guess they wanted to see me too. The father Osten Sacken, Ulrich, was full of humor. Before I got there he had told his kids to ask me if my name was "kiss me quick". Of course nobody knew what that meant. Faithfully they asked me that question. I did not understand what they meant and finally I said, if your dad said that, then it must be so. Was a big laugh, and that name stuck with me all the time. Feldgrieben was a farm that consisted mostly of forest and a big lake, selling fish and logs was their income, only a few fields with very sandy soil were there. They were all fenced in, to protect them from game. There were plenty of elks and wild boars. I loved it there. Besides the work, kids, house and garden, we had lots of fun. It was weather wise a wonderful summer and I went swimming and boating with the boys.

S<sup>ince</sup> Feldgrieben was quite far away from town and there was only a small country school close by, which had only a few grades, the Osten Sackens got permission to teach the kids at home. The teacher was a Miss Mussow (a cousin from Birgit, Andreas wife).

I got along very good with her. Together we started to learn Ki-sua-heli, a Negro language from Africa. At that time Hitler talked much about getting back the old German colonies in Africa. He needed room



for the growing population, and we thought it was a possibility to get jobs there. But our language learning did not go ahead very good and afterwards everything turned out very differently anyway.

In the fall it was very interesting there in the woods. The rutting season started and there were lots of elk sometimes not far from the house. We heard them calling for the females and that was an impressive sound. Once in a while the boss took me along on his Elk stalking trips. That was interesting and we saw the animals sometimes very close.

On October I went back to Berlin. I had enrolled there for a half-year course for farm secretaries. I lived at the Muehlendahls in the suburb Lankwitz and drove from there every day with the commuter train (S Bahn) to the school. After a while I got a bike and drove with that to school. That way I got some exercise. Sitting all day was hard for me.

In Berlin also lived the parents of Io and Mia. Mia was there too working as a secretary, and later on also Io came there. They lived very poorly, the dad had tried different things, but never got ahead – they all were so very unpractical. (It was too bad that the good lady in Buckeburg had died very early. The good pension she got was off and the girls had not the money for a good education.)

For April, I had already a job lined up. It was in Luderode, close to Heinigen, where my Aunt Benita Degener lived. It was there a completely different kind of people than what I was used to from Eastern Europe. They were much more reserved and it was there not that great hospitality like in the east. My boss Harro Watjen was a good Nazi, in the morning he wanted to say everybody "Heil Hitler". When he was not around his wife and I said always "guten Morgen". I did not like him so very much; he stuck his long nose into everything, including the household. And I sometimes felt sorry for his young wife.

But I liked my job there. Mr. Watjen was a very efficient farmer. He had a very good breeding herd of sheep, lots of young rams were sold, and we had to weigh them every week or every 2 weeks. The milk herd was good too, but nothing special. The fields, very good soil, were in excellent shape. They also had a big garden and every week a pick-up truck went with vegetables to the wholesale. We had to bundle up the vegetables, clean them a.s.o. So it was not only sitting behind the desk. Quite often I went over to Heinigen on Sundays.

When the second kid was born, "Haha" (Klara Goetschmann) came to Luderode to look after the children. Now there were 2 of us girls and in our spare time we did lots of things together. Luderode was only about 15km to Goslar, an old beautiful little town close to the Harz Mountains. These were not high mountains. The highest peak

"The Brocken" was about 1100m high. But it was beautiful with big forests. In fall, the leaves of the trees along the roads turned yellow and red. That was very beautiful in contrast to the dark fir trees. We drove with our bikes through these mountains. I do not know how we did that. At that time there were no bikes with 12 or 20 gears. I guess we had to push quite often. But downhill it went in an enormous speed, then we raced with the motorbikes.

I wanted to leave Luderode and go back home to Estonia end of August 1939, hoped to find there some kind of a job. If not I always could go back to Germany.

My boss got a successor for me and everything seemed alright, but then the war or first an exercise started. My boss was drafted and asked me to stay a while longer until the new secretary was firm in the job. So I stayed, the war with Poland started beginning of September, was over in a few weeks. Hitler and Molotov (Russia) had made a non aggressive treaty, so the Germans in the Baltic States felt fairly safe, the Russians were not involved. But then came on the October 6<sup>th</sup> the agreement between Hitler and Molotov, that the Russians could move into Estonia, Latvija and Lithuania (Stuetzpunkte), under the condition that all the Germans could get out and move to Germany. It was said that old German land was now again occupied by the Germans, it had to be resettled and they needed the Germans who lived in other countries therefor. That all sounded o.k. It was old German land, but of course there lived now the Poles. And we were never told about the methods that were used to make room for us. But that later.

I was still in Luderode on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October. Since it was now impossible for me to go back home, I stayed in Luderode till the end of October. This way I did not see Wack anymore, I was not part of the so called "Umsiedlung" or resettlement that took part very soon after. I think it was a very well organized undertaking. Almost all Germans left, they knew what would happen with them if they stayed, murdered or brought to Sibiria. And with the few which stayed, exactly that happened, together with the Estonian intelligence they were transported away. – All what we owned, the German Government took over and we were supposed to get in the so called Warthegau something similar, Farmers a farm other business people something like that again. Hectic packing started. They could take furniture along; later on even a few animals came to Poland. Already end of October, the first ships left for Germany. My mother, Paul and Rupprecht came on the ship "der Deutsche" in November. I was at Tante Esthers place at that time. Uncle Ernst, Esther and I went from Berlin to Stettin to meet them there. It was an emotional reunion.

Then there were speeches held, the Germans who came home to the Reich (Germany) were welcomed. Somebody from the Balten answered. He said how wonderful it is to be in Germany. It was

not mentioned that the main reason why everybody came was because they were afraid of the Russians. We could not stay very long with mother and brothers. We brought them to the railway and had to say goodbye. They left for Posen in the so called Warthegau, which was a newly created name. When they arrived there they had to stay for a few days in schools or similar facilities, straw on the floor. They had to do all the paperwork until they got their citizenship papers. Slowly the people who stayed in the city got their apartments where they were supposed to live. I know from one family, what happened to them. They got the address and the key for an apartment. Happily, finally to have their own place. They opened the door and found out that who had been living there, had just been evacuated shortly before. Beds were not made, personal belongings laying around, curtains closed and on the night table was laying a German Iron Cross. That person had been fighting on the German side in the First World War. The Baltic family reluctantly cleaned up the place, what else could they do?? The next morning suddenly the door opened and the Polish housemaid came to work. She was very sorry to hear that her bosses were gone and she had not the opportunity to say goodbye to them. She stayed and worked for the Baltic family. Slowly we heard that the whole Polish Intelligence had been dragged away, they were brought to so called Central Poland around Warsaw and surroundings. What happened to them? Nobody knows. The working class stayed.

My mother and her two sons were soon sent to a big farm in the county of Wongrowitz. There, Uncle Paul was supposed to be manager. But to their surprise, they found already a manager there. They were told that this Mr. Strobell was leaving pretty soon. Uncle Paul wrote me, that I should come there to help with the office work. I was at that time in Feldgrieben to help out there. I stayed in Feldgrieben until I finally got the permission to go to Warthegau (at that time you still needed a special permission to travel to the Warthegau). Now there started a long fight with the upper Agriculture offices. For a while we were supposed to do the office work but not with much success. Finally we lost, Mr. Strobell had the better connections and was in the right party. But at least it was a nice place to stay.

"Sierniki" was a huge farm, and apparently a good one. Besides the farmland, there were big forests, a pretty lake. My mother went through the books in the house and found lots of German ones. Rupprecht was quite often there, because the schools had not started in Posen. Together we strolled through the forests like we had done as kids. For Christmas Paul went to East Prussia to his Annemarie. And we two tried to make it as nice as possible for my mother. I managed to get some tea that she loved, we had a bottle of Arrak (an awful stuff) and a little Christmas tree. For my mother it had been very hard leaving our country. Christmas was not quite as bad for her, because it was so completely different.

After New Years, Paul started to look for another farm, he wanted to get married and it was not possible for us to stay much longer in Sierniki. The good farms were of course all taken, but finally he found a place in the same county Wongrowitz. The name of the farm was Jabkowo (the German name Apfelhohe). I think it was beginning of February when we moved there. The house had been locked up since the Polish owners were gone. Finally somebody came with the keys and we stepped into an ice-cold house. Here we could see that somebody had left in a hurry. The breakfast table was still set, half a glass of frozen tea and some half-eaten pieces of bread on it. Suitcases laying around. A bag with medicines was there, and we felt sorry for the old man (that was what we heard later, that an elderly man had lived there) who had not his medicines along. – We made fire in the stoves, but it took a few days, until the house got fairly warm. It was lots of cleaning up to do, and we did not feel very comfortable between all these things that did not belong to us. It was so cold in the house that even in the cellar the wine was frozen.

End of February (the 22<sup>nd</sup> I think was it) the wedding from Paul and Annemarie was supposed to take place. So my mother, Paul and I started our journey to East Prussia. There were train delays, in Schneidemuehl we had to wait for 13 hours. To pass the time we went to a movie "Die Hochzeitsreise Zu Dritt" (Three People on Honeymoon). When finally the train from Berlin arrived, we found to our pleasure Tante Esther, Renate and Rupprecht in there, Uncle Ernst came later. The horses from Tilsewischken had been on different train arrivals already until we finally came. It was the first time I was in Tilsewischken – a very hospitable house. Annemarie's parents treated us like kings and we had a very good time there. In spite of war and shortages there was everything and all was fixed up wonderful, the Dolterabend – that is the evening before the wedding (that is always celebrated in Germany with funny poems and plays), then the wedding. We had a few wonderful days. My future husband, Prickel did not get time off for his sisters wedding from the army, that way I did not meet him until sometime in the summer. Then he came to visit his sister in Jabkowo, where I was still helping as secretary. In my mothers diary I read later that she knew at that time already what would happen to me. I did not know it, I was quite interested in that Prickel, but that was it. But she was right with her prediction.

When summer was over I had not enough to do on Paul's farm, so I got a job as secretary in the neighborhood at Staviany on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November. The years in Staviany were very happy ones for me. I liked my bosses Eduard and Madeleine Maydell very much. Eduard's parents Natascha and Axel Maydell, a very fine old couple lived there too. Eduard and Madeleine had lots of kids. The two older boys Axel and Jurgen went to school in town, but they came quite often home. Both very nice fellows,

both got killed in the War. And then were there 3, later 4 younger children. In Staviany there were lots of beautiful horses, many mares with their colts. The mares were used as workhorses. They had to do all the fieldwork and had only some days off, when they got their foals. Fuel for the tractor was hard to get, most work had to be done by horses. The whole farm was a very nice and well kept place, in the contrary to Jabkowo which was a very run down place. Staviany was a big estate, lots of forests belonged to it too and there were plenty of hired helpers. It was anyway enough for me to do. But besides the work, there was still time for other things. Maydell's had lots of visitors, it was never lonesome. Also Rupprecht and I have visited me there. And then there was the neighborhood of Briesen, where Tante Madeleines brother Jurgen Rennenkampff and his wife Evi with their big family lived. It was a very warm atmosphere there. Quite often I rode there horseback or drove with the bike. Sometimes Evi's brother Konrad who was in the navy came with friends, then we all young and old had different games together. Now they are all dead, Jurgen died in a French Prison Camp, Konrad during the War, only Evi I have seen later to different family reunions in Hoehnscheid. She died in 1984; her children are still around.

For Christmas 1940, Prickel came again from France to visit Annemarie. I was not there anymore but came over for the holidays, and we spent some time together. It started to get interesting!! For New Years Annemarie did not allow him to stay there, he was supposed to go home to his mother, too bad. Later I got a chocolate box from Prickel, a rarity at that time. So I had to write and thank him and a correspondence started.

In June 1941 the War with Russia started. Before that the whole country was full of army people. Lots of officers were billeted on different farms. The neighborhood girls organized parties, and since they were short of girls I was always invited. Most of them were real nice fellows and quite often it got very late and sleep was little. I had always the key to the house along, but quite often it was not necessary anymore. A few serious relationships started there, even a wedding took place later. I do not know how many of these guys got through the War alive. On June 22<sup>nd</sup> the War with Russia started and they all disappeared very suddenly.

This year brother Paul moved away from Jabkowo. He had never liked that place and after lots of looking he finally found a place in the southern part of the Warthegau, close to Silesia in the county of Rawitsch. Schoenfeld was a farm with good soil; a well kept yard with good buildings, quite a nice park behind the house. But the countryside was not as pretty as in Staviany and around there, no forests only flat fields.

In the spring of 1942 Kurt was born (Arist had been born in Jabkowo a year earlier). In the fall of 1942 Kurt was baptized, I was there and Prickel was able to come too. And there we got engaged. My mother in law, Tante Annemarie was very surprised (her brother had always lots of girlfriends!). But all the others were not surprised. After a few days in Schoenfeld we went to East Prussia, because my future husband wanted to introduce me to his relations. It was a week of driving around there and then Prickel had to leave again for Russia. Around Christmas he was lucky, his bunch was pulled out from Russia and they came close to Berlin for regrouping. Later they were shipped to France. I stayed in Staviany, they got a successor girl and I helped her to get acquainted with the job. My boss Uncle Eduard was drafted too and gone.

In March suddenly Prickel got 2 weeks I think it was off. And in a hurry the wedding was organized for the 5<sup>th</sup> of March. I left Staviany the end of February, so Tante Annemarie prepared everything very good. Uncle Paul had been drafted shortly before and could not come to my wedding. But he had for quite awhile already tried to get wine and other alcohol (Vodka!!) for the occasion. It was all very nice. When I look now at the one and only picture that we have from that day (we had no more flashlights), there is hardly anybody alive. Tante Annemarie, Tante Renate, Uncle Arno and we both.

The next day we left together with Uncle Arno for East Prussia. In Tilsewischken we spent our honeymoon. The parents stayed for awhile at Tante Annemarie's. It was an early spring, seeding and all the fieldwork was done while Prickel was still there. Then he had to leave again and I stayed with his parents. I was the helper of "der Alte Herr" (the old man) like my father in law Emil was always called. He was a wonderful person with lots of humor. My mother in law was a very fine person too, but very different than her husband. She could not laugh very much. It all was hard for her. Her daughter Martha (Gerhard's mother) had died in 1942 and the other one, Annemarie, was so far away. She always worried so much.

In June 1943 my brother Rupprecht got killed near Serajewo, he had been only a few days there. I have his last letter written to my mother the day before he was killed. It was a big mix up there in Jugoslavia. Just like it is now. - I went right away to my mother in Schoenfeld. It was very hard for my mother, Rupprecht; the youngest was so much her son. I was glad that I could be at least for awhile with her. There I saw my brother Andreas for the last time. He was at that time teaching in a Herrenhuter

school in (some kind of a sekt) in Silesia. Then Prickel came too and together we went back to Tilsewischken. It was always only short days that we could spend together.

Tilsewischken was a very nice farm, 287,5 hectare big. The soil was good, we had wonderful pastures for the big milk cow herd (about 60 or 70) all milked by hand. The work on the fields was mostly done by horses. We did not get much fuel for the tractor during the war. The fuel was all saved for harvesting, for the binder. The horses were mostly from the East Prussian breed, the Trakehner, beautiful horses. As hired men, we had at that time some Russian prisoners of War, and some Poles. The Poles were not called prisoners anymore; they had no guard and were not locked up at night. But they were not supposed to move away. The German men were almost all in the War, only the older ones were at home, and of course all the families. Josef, the herdsman was also not drafted.

In the summer of 1944 the big problems started for East Prussia. For quite a while already the German army was retreating. Now the front came closer, we heard the shooting of the canons. Also refugees started to come from the Memel land (Now Lithuania). For a while one of our big sheds, where the unthreshed grain was kept, was full of these refugees with their horses and their belongings. But since all stayed quiet they left again for home, probably to leave in a hurry again 2 or 3 months later.

From our place we could see when the bombs hit Tilsit at night. That started end of July, again end of August and then in October. It was an awful sight. It was clear now that it was the beginning of the end. Talks about evacuation started. We were not supposed to leave on our own, only when the order was given. Some mothers with children left. Tante Lieselotte with Ekki, Rudi, Dieter and Volker went to relations in Saxonia. And Uncle Arno had organized for Gerhard and Helga to go to Thuringen. A sister of Ilse was with them. We started to fix up our big horse drawn wagons for trekking. Roofs were built for them, and we built a camper like thing for the parents. That had even a stove. My father in law was not very healthy, and that was more or less planned for him. Beginning of November we got the order to chase our cows on the meadows along the Inster River. From there they were supposed to be brought to West Germany. I do not think that this ever took place. These poor cows, most of them heavy milkers, were now running around there, of course they got sick not being milked and many died. Each of our hired families had a cow, most of them and a few from ours returned. It was bad. Lots of army was around at that time, some Doctors stayed with us. They waited for us to leave, so they could use our house as a hospital for the army.

Now our older men were drafted too to the so-called "Volkssturm". They were digging trenches, also on our fields. The trenches were supposed to keep the Russian tanks away. You could only laugh. Then we had to leave. With us came also Tante Ilse with Gisela and her mother (Uncle Arno was in the army), and of course all the horses and hired people from Mixen. In the beginning we even had some oxen and heifers pulling wagons along. But we had to leave them some place along the road; they could not walk so long on the road. We drove I think for 3 days until we came to the county of Bartenstein. That was organized, Tilsit county had to go to Bartenstein. I do not know, what it was supposed to help to be 150 or 200-km farther west. We came there on a farm named Losgehnen, got there 1 or 2 rooms in the attic. Ilse was on a farm in the neighborhood.

The women and children from Tilsewischken had a chance to go by train to Saxonia. All those whose husbands were in the army wanted to go. The others whose husbands were still some place in East Prussia decided to stay in Losgehnen. It was a very hard moment for "the Alte Herr" to say good bye to these people which had worked so long for him. I have forgotten so much what happened in these days but that moment I remember clearly. Together with my father in law we went along the loaded wagons, which brought them to the railway station and said good bye. I said "we will see you in Tilsewischken". I have never seen them again. They went to Saxonia, some of the men found them there. And like we all, they started a new life there.

Soon afterwards we got a phone call from Prickel. He had arrived in Tilsewischken; he got leave of absence to help us evacuate. But we were gone and the house an army hospital. But somehow he had managed to locate us. Since everything was quiet at that time and the trains were still going, I went back home together with my dog "Bella". One of the doctors picked me up at the station Szillen early in the morning. He brought me home where I found Prickel in one room, that his dad had asked to reserve for him. I do not know anymore how much time Prickel had, maybe a week or so. We moved to the teacher's house in Budkuhnen and had a very different week together. Food we got from the army, sometimes we went horseback riding with the army horses. A few days later Prickel's parents and Marusch arrived. That was a surprise for us. The doctor who lived also in the teacher's house knew about it, and wanted to surprise us. They came with horses, I think they wanted to get more feed for the horses. But then my father in law decided to stay. He hated the idea of going to West Germany; there we would starve to death anyway. And here he could start farming right away again when the War was over. Prickel wanted us all to go to Annemarie. Their place was close to the border to Silesia, where always an escape would be possible. He was scared that the Russians would go through to Danzig and we would be



in a mousetrap (that was the way it happened later). But his father had made up his mind and wanted to stay. Mother Luise would have loved to go, but she did not want to leave her husband. There were lots of cows roaming around. Father rounded them up, put them in the barn. There were still some of our Poles around. So they started milking again and made butter for the army. I think later on he even started threshing.

But I promised to leave and take our valuable mares out. Then Prickel had to leave again. I brought him to the train, a very sad goodbye. And a few days later I had to go. It was very sad to leave my father and mother in law there. I still see "the Alte Herr" standing in front of the house when I drove away.

In Bartenstein I heard that it was possible to get train cars to move brood mares out of the danger zone. I ordered 2 cars. There was also a possibility to get colts out to Pommern. I notified my father in law and he managed to load a bunch of colts. Was not of much use, they are gone too.

In between Ilse (Gerhardt's step mom), and her daughter Gisela had moved to Losgehn and I stayed together with them.

It took a long time to get the cars. I had already decided that I would leave with horses and wagons if they would not come until X-mas. But I was not looking forward to that. Nobody of the other women wanted to come along. So I had to go alone with 2 Russian Prisoners of War. Not a nice idea. But on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December the cars finally came. I got 8 mares, feed for them and lots of household goods loaded and left together again with Bella, who helped to keep me warm and was my watchdog. Over X-mas I was on the road. I think on the 25<sup>th</sup> I stood a long time in Posen, some place outside the station. The main job was always to get water for the horses.

After about 3 or 4 days I arrived at Tante Annemarie in Schonfeld, county of Rawitsch. On the farm there were already quite a few people from East Prussia. Tante Annemarie's girlfriend Christel Wiesemann, (she was called Mopschen) was there already for quite a while as secretary and helper everywhere. Mopschen's mother, her sister with 1 kid, her sister in law with 2 kids stayed as refugees from East Prussia in the house, my cousin Stella was there also. Besides that there was a woman from Berlin and one from Lodz with their children living on the yard. These families were evacuated from the big cities, where so many bombs fell. At that time my sister Renate lived in Rawitsch. She had been back in Estonia, where her husband Olaf as lawyer did some completing of the Umsiedlung business.

When it got too dangerous in Estonia she came back to the Warthegau, stayed first in Schonfeld and then she got herself an apartment in Rawitsch. That was about in fall 1944.

For a while, a short while it was fairly peaceful. My father in law wrote quite often, he started to make plans how I could get back there. But in the last letter I got from him he wrote, that it would be better for me to stay.

For a few days I went to Staviany. Tante Madeleine was pregnant and horrified by the idea of trekking.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of January, Tante Annemarie wanted to drive to East Prussia. Onkel Paul was supposed to go to the front line, and she wanted to see him before that. She stopped in Rawitsch and went to the Department of Agriculture to give them heck that she did not get enough coupons for oil for the farm. When she thinks back now, these few litres of oil saved her from going to East Prussia. The people in the Department of Agriculture stared at her "you want to go to East Prussia!!! We just want to hold a meeting about evacuation." She stayed and went to that meeting. The situation was very bad, the Russians advancing in a hurry. After the meeting she went to Tante Renate and told her to start packing immediately. She would send horses and a wagon to load everything. It was already late when she came home. I do not think we slept very much that night. Next day everybody got busy packing, bread was baked, clothes washed.

My stuff was still mostly in boxes and suitcases. It was only difficult to decide what to take and what to leave. Lots of the things belonged to the Preugschas parents, what was important to them. A day before I had sent a big wooden box, besides other things, there were all our photo albums in. At that time I did not know that it was actually the last day and I thought later that I would never see these things again. But the box arrived and this way I am the only one who has pictures from Tilsewischken and the Preugschas Family.

There was a railway station close to the farm, and Renata's kids came with the train from Rawitsch. Renata wanted to follow with the next train, that did not go anymore I think. She came then with the bike.

We left at night in the dark on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 1945. Our trek consisted of 8 wagons, seven with 2 and one with 3 horses. One wagon was covered with a tarp (like a chuckwagon). There the grandmothers (Goti and Mrs. Wiesemann), all the children, T. Stella and

T. Renate, who was driving, were in. The Berlin and Lodz families got a wagon too. They had never driven a horse, but somehow they managed. I think there was one boy of 14 years who drove. Tante Annemarie had given them heavier horses; they were quieter than our East Prussian mares.

In Rawitsch Tante Annemarie had talked with a neighbor Mr. Stahl and they had decided to trek together. We were only women and children and there was the man of the house at home and could maybe help us. Two young Poles, hired men from Schonfeld came along for the beginning of our journey. They wanted to return home after meeting with Mr. Stahl. But we never found him. I think he had left already earlier without notifying us. Besides that the roads were full, it was almost impossible to find somebody. Very soon after we left something at a harness broke. Luckily the men were there and fixed it. After that happened my mother came to Tante Annemarie and urged her to try to persuade the 2 men to come along, we would never make it without them. So Tante Annemarie talked with Janek for a while and finally they promised to come along if the other one came along too.

They had no papers along and no warm clothing. Papers we could not supply but we could give them some warm things to put on. One of the men was Janek Rossa, a very nice fellow; little Arist was his special friend. For him it was an exciting experience to come along. The other one, Stanislaus, was not so trustworthy. Already very soon we found out how good it was to have the Poles along. The roads were very icy and the horses slipped constantly. We had "Stollen" along. These are sharp things you screw on to the horseshoes to keep them from slipping. But we had not the key to put them on. Through the Poles we got help from a blacksmith while lots of other refugees with similar problems did not get the service. It was sure good to have them as helpers, we had 17 horses to look after, and that was quite a job.

Our main concern was to get over the river "Oder" as soon as possible, before anything happened to the bridges. The first night we drove through, was daylight when we came to Lissa (NW of Rawjtsch). First there we wanted to go west to Glogau, where there was a bridge over the river. But that was not allowed any more. So we went a little more NW to the town of Beuthen. There were a few of these moments; we had to wait until we got to the bridge. The traffic was huge, in the sky some airplanes were flying around. We were not sure if Germans or Russians. Janek got quite excited and showed Tante Annemarie the airplanes. She tried to calm him down, "that is only exercise," she said to him. The bridge was not bombed or blown up and we drove over the river.

From Beuthen we drove in direction west over Saga, Sorau, Forst, close to Cottbus, Kalau. There the people from the Ravitsch County were supposed to go.

The first days we drove through empty land, everybody had left already. Only the roads were full, very full. On the right side of the road was the endless row of refugees with their horse drawn wagons. Passing us in a big hurry were military trucks. Quite often they had refugees along which were standing on the trucks. And the 3rd row, that was actually on the fields, were Russian Cossacks. They sat on their little horses and went in full gallop to the west. They had fought for the Germans, and did not want to be caught by the Russians.

We always tried to stay together so that nobody got lost. Once some other wagons had managed to come in front of me. I tried to pull out to pass them. There was suddenly an official man in the so much hated brown uniform (SA probably), he did not want to allow me to do that. I got so mad that I took my whip, gave him a lash, gave the horses one and galloped after the others to join them. Janek told me later that he got quite scared, because the man pulled out his handgun and aimed at me. But he did not, so the incident was soon forgotten.

One of the first nights we stayed in a little farmhouse. The people were gone, only the animals in the barn were left. We stayed there for a day to give the horses a rest, and we could wash ourselves, which was nice. I went in the barn; fed and milked the cows and we filled up our 20 milk cans again, that we always tried to keep full. We filled up our hay supplies and other feed for the horses. I left the poor geese and the cows out of the barns and then we headed farther west. In the late afternoon always the question came up where to stay over night, we were over 20 people, it was not so easy. Usually Mopschen went ahead to look for something. We had very different experiences. Usually the people on the smaller places were lots nicer to us; they tried to help in every way. It was quite different on some bigger estates. One, I remember banged the door shut right away, we found then a place in a school. There was another big farm; it belonged to a Mr. Fletcher. He had fought in the first war in Tilsit and also in the Baltic States. (In Tilsit he had prevented the big bridge from being blown up, he was a hero and a square was called after him.) It was very cold, about -20 and an ice-cold wind. We were looking for a shelter for our horses, a shed or something. When Tante Mopschen could not achieve anything, Tante Annemarie went to talk with the boss. But no, - maybe he was scared that our horses would eat some of his hay. He allowed us to stay in his yard; there were buildings and some shelter from the wind. The irony was, that Fletchers had packed their wagons already and had probably to leave a day or two later. My mother was usually the night watchman. She said, she could not help much otherwise

but she could do that and sleep during the day. That particular night she walked around our wagons, and the daughter of the house watched their belongings which were loaded already. The wife of the manager of the estate had given us people a room in her house. She was very friendly; we could cook on her stove. After eating I gave the rest to Bella my dog, nothing thinking on a plate. There the lady was excited "oh, we have a dog dish". It was days when I sure did not worry about dog dishes. But the expression "Hundenapf" stayed for a long time in our bunch. In the morning Mopschen and I went with our milk can into the cow barn, where they were just milking. The herdsman filled the can. He and the wife of the manager were not like the boss. But we were happy to leave that place. At night we usually tried to cook us something whenever possible. Otherwise we had bread. We had enough to eat. Once there were ladies, I guess from a Nazi women group, with a huge kettle full of hot soup. Everybody got a plate full, that was nice.

One night we had found a very good barn for the horses, so far I remember there were steers in it, there was lots of straw and nice and warm. That night somebody had an argument with our Poles and Stanislaus got a slap in the face. So they came to Tante Annemarie and said they are leaving us now, they don't want such a treatment. She had a hard time to get them to stay with us. We promised to stay with the horses over night. I cannot remember where the 2 men slept. We, Tante Annemarie, Tante Mopschen and I and of course my dog, who always kept me warm, were very happy and comfortable in the barn. The people were in the big house that was not so wonderful, full of refugees, plugged up toilets a.s.o. We were resting peacefully; when suddenly in the middle of the night we were chased out "the Russians are coming, hurry, hurry." We were not very happy, but we hitched up our horses and went. And then we stood on the road, for hours and hours, it was cold and miserable and we got nervous. But you could not do a thing; the roads were completely plugged up. Luckily no Russians came. I had the feeling that somebody wanted our good sleeping quarters and chased us out.

One night we found a big shed, I suppose it was a hay shed. There we all, people and horses stayed over night. Suddenly somebody came with a flashlight and looked in our faces. Those were men with slanted eyes, must have been some of the Cossacks. But they left us in peace.

Another night we slept in a weaving mitt, between looms. There was no straw, nothing, not very comfortable.

Tante Annemarie had to give one team of horses to the village near Schonfeld. The woman who drove these horses owned there a store and had lots of that stuff from the store along. (material, wool,

etc..) Someplace she picked up some soldiers, which were on foot. They drove with her, that whole load tipped over and all her possessions rolled around in the ditch. But somehow the soldiers helped her to pick up everything and they drove ahead.

That way we slowly arrived at our first destination at Calau, close to Cottbus. After lots of arguing, we got in a little place called Peterhagin or something like that a kindergarten for us to stay. We slept under and between toys.

From there, trains were going again, and the grandmothers and children a.s.o drove away by train. Goti (my mother) Renata with her 3 kids and Stella with Tante Annemarie's boys (Arist and Kurt) went to Blankenburg close to the Harz Mountains. There, Tante Esther with her children were staying at her mother in laws place. They were living in Blankenburg for quite a while already. When the bombing got too bad in Berlin, they moved there. Soon after they had moved the Muhlendahls were bombed out. Onkel Ernst was home alone and very tired from sleepless nights (there were air raids every night) had not heard the alarm sirens. He woke up when the bombs fell. He grabbed some clothes and somehow managed to get out. He had to go through basements and different yards. The apartment was destroyed. The only thing that they got out later was their fridge. Luckily the bedroom or at least the bed was not hit and Onkel Ernst alive.

Goti and the others had to go over Dresden. Tante Stella knew the city, because she had worked there as a nurse years ago. Somehow they found a place where to stay over night. A few days later Dresden was almost completely destroyed from British bombs. The city was full of refugees and thousands of people were killed that night. It was a senseless killing, the war was almost over. Nobody will ever know how many people were killed. They are talking now about 30 000, but could be more.

The Wiesemann Gang had some friends and relations in the west too where they went. The Berlin family went to Berlin. The other family had left already earlier, but I cannot remember where they went.

Once in awhile we heard news, when we got hold of a newspaper or a radio. The news was terrible. In East Prussia the Russians had gone through to Elbing, lots of people were trapped. Quite a few tried to go over the Haff (Tante Ilse, Uncle Arno's wife did that, she managed to get out.) but very many fell through the ice and drowned. We did not know anything about the Preugschas parents and nothing about Onkel Paul. In the Warthegau the people from the eastern part left almost at the same time

like us. That was too late. The Russians overtook them. The women were raped, many were killed. Lots later we heard from my cousin's family, Dolly and Arist Brummer. The Russians got hold of them. The children had to dig a grave and had to watch how their parents were shot. The teenage girl stayed with an officer later. That at least was better than being raped from dozens of soldiers. The boys had to work. They are now in Canada, Quebec, one of them, Friedel, is a famous photographer in Canada, has published different books about northern animals and the Eskimos. He is called Fred Brummer.

This passage actually does not belong here, but it tells how and what happened. We were sure lucky that we went early enough and that the Russians did not get us.

Here in Calau Tante Annemarie met Mr. Stahl, who was supposed to be our helper. "How good to see you" he said. Only probably he felt a bit guilty.

Now we 3, Tante Annemarie, Mopschen and I with the 2 Poles were in Peterhagen and had to make arrangements to go farther. In summer, Tante Benita Degener from Heiningen had visited in Schonfeld. At that time she said, "if it gets very bad, come to us". Tante Annemarie was able to get hold of her on the phone and told her that we are coming. The big farm Heiningen was our destination. From now on our journey was easy. Since we had not enough drivers, we left some of the wagons and 2 horses behind. Now we drove through country where so far no refugees had been. The people were extremely nice to us and we had no problems to find a place where to stay over night. Some days we drove through fairly hilly country. We as people from the flat land had no brakes on our wagons; it was sometimes quite hard for the horses to go downhill. Somebody gave us a log that we put between the spokes and that way we got one wagon after the other down the hills. The trek was an endurance test for our East Prussian horses and I must say, they did very good. A few got sick, but we got them all to Heiningen. My four mares, which I had along, were all pregnant, and they all got their foals later. Most of Tante Annemarie's horses came from East Prussia too, 2 were from a heavier breed and 3 were the so-called "Panjepferde". These were horses from Germans from the Black Sea, which were also resettled in the Warthegau. Uncle Paul had bought some of them. These 3 small animals were very tough. They looked happy and shiny on the last day just as they had looked in the beginning.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of February we arrived in Heiningen. Tante Benita had everything prepared for us: 2 rooms, a cook stove in the hallway. The horses were looked after too. They came in the barn and worked later on the farm.

Pretty soon I went to Blankenburg to see what the other families were doing. I took a suitcase along, to spread my belongings a bit. The silverware was in that too. In Halberstadt I had to change trains. The train to Blankenburg stood quite far at the end of the station. When I and others were waiting for the train to leave, suddenly the alarm sirens went off. The alarm was apparently very late, because we saw the planes coming already. We did not know what to do, where to go. Some ran back to the station where an underpass was. I and a few other women crawled under the train to have shelter from flying glass. We saw the bombs falling. There were only a few planes and only a few bombs were dropped. The underpass was hit; there were some 70 dead. On our end were only broken windows; sometimes there are guardian angels!

We were waiting for a while, and suddenly the train left, these tracks were not hit. We made the trip, about 30-km to Blankenburg. With still shaky knees I climbed out of the train and walked with my heavy suitcase to the Muehlendahl house on the other end of the town. This was my only close experience with bombs. I did not envy the poor people in the big cities, who had that constantly.

A few days later I went back to Heiningen. My mother came along. Since the station was shattered we had to walk through the town to catch a train. On the main square there were lots of coffins, covered with the red nazi flags. The victims of that air raid were buried. My mother said, "how easy you could have been in one of these coffins and nobody would have known."

Sometime, Tante Stella had brought Arist and Kurt to Tante Annemarie. They were happy to be back to their mother.

During that spring I went quite often to Blankenburg. I brought them always something to eat; Tante Esther had a big family to feed. Once when I was there, 2 girls came walking from Bavaria. They brought a letter from Tante Birgit, my mother was so happy, but not after she read the letter. My brother Andreas' family had left from Niski in unheated railway cars. The children (there were 5) for sure the smaller ones, got sick. They arrived in Hof, Bavaria. Andreas got sick too (Darmverschlingung) he needed an operation. The kids had pneumonia. Andreas died during the operation, and during two weeks, the 3 younger children died too. Only 2 older ones, Jurgen and Ingetraud survived. "My third son!" my mother said, and from the fourth one, Paul, we did not know anything.



Once when I was in Blankenburg, Halberstadt got bombed again, but this time completely. We felt and heard it, the ground was shaking. It must have been during the day, because the kids held their hands against the windows and found it interesting that everything was vibrating. The next day Uncle Ernst, who had some work in Hannover, had to leave, I went along. Some place we had to leave the train, the tracks were gone. A while we walked together, then we parted; Ernst had to find a train to Hannover and I in the Braunschweig direction. It was awful to walk through that burning city. Hardly any buildings were standing anymore. Everywhere people were digging for survivors or for their belongings. Eventually I found a train quite a ways out of town. It started some place on a field.

Sometime in April, I do not remember the exact date, the Americans came to Heiningen. It was a peaceful event. There was no resistance any more. Quite a few Americans stayed in the Degener house. In one of the big hallways they were laying and watching movies. When we had to go to our rooms we had to walk through that hallway. In that dark place we had to step over the men. When I think about it now, I get the shivers. We were 3 young women. But at that time I never gave it a thought that it could have been dangerous. I had always my dog along. She probably would have helped me!

One day we heard through the radio that Blankenburg was bombed. We had no idea what had happened there, Telephone, mail, nothing worked. Also it was not allowed that the civilians went away from where they lived. Finally Ine (Ernst's sister) somehow got a slip of paper from the Americans, that we were allowed to go to Blankenburg. Ine and I borrowed ourselves some bikes and drove there to find out if our people were o.k. We had no big problems driving there. Blankenburg did not look so good. One or two blocks in the center of the town were gone. We drove up to the Muehlendahl house, which lay at the outskirts of the town. Behind it the forests and the hills started. Everything in that area seemed to be O.K., but it was not quite o.k. One lonely bomb had hit a corner of the Muehlendahl house. One wall was gone and the kitchen was not in a very good shape. Tante Esther moved her cook stove outside and called it her "Luftkueche", "Air Kitchen". When the alarm sounded, Tante Esther had luckily taken some kids out of their beds. Afterwards rocks were laying in these beds. (Guardian angels again!) We were all happy that nobody was hurt, all alive and well.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of May the war was over. There were quite a few foreigners in the country, mostly prisoners of war. They looted and emptied the warehouses now. Food was always on coupons during the war, now it got real short. Janek came one day in a fancy suit and brought chocolates for the children, he

sometimes came with some goodies to Tante Annemarie. Later, when our men were back, he supplied them with cigars.

In the vicinity of Heiningen used to work quite a few girls mostly from Berlin. They worked as secretaries or in ammunition factories. They were now out of job, out of money and food. And they could not get home. Quite a few started to work in Heiningen on the farm. There was always help necessary because they grew lots of vegetables what needed manual work. And I think they got paid partly at least with food. I worked with these girls as kind of foreman. We planted cabbage (there was a machine for that), and lots of gladiola bulbs a.s.o. Later there was plenty of hoeing to do. Mopschen worked with the gardener in the big garden. Our pay was milk and other food. We always had enough to eat.

Once Tante Rothraud, her brother Dieter and the mother Tante Frieda came walking from Saxonia, where Rothraud had worked as a gardener. Tante Annemarie fed them and they enjoyed the good food very much. The next day they went farther north to some relations.

Carl Degener, the boss of the farm was for a while put into prison from the Americans. One American soldier was shot on his field and he was made responsible for that. I think he was not gone very long. He had always been against the Nazis and everyone knew that. While he was gone, his daughter Sigrid took over the management of the farm, not an easy task for the young girl.

Sometimes in the second half of June the wonderful day came when Prickel arrived. All the people from the agriculture sector were released from prison camp; he was released on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June. He came from the prison camp in Mannheim Ludwogshafen, where he had spent some weeks under the open sky with little to eat and very little water to drink. But he was healthy and happy to be with us. I was in that moment in Blankenburg and Tante Annemarie was happy to have her brother for herself for a day. I arrived a day later, and suddenly between the train station and Heiningen a lean suntanned man with a beard took me in his arms, was I ever happy.

In Heiningen they had troubles with hired help. The prisoners of war, which had done the work during the war, quit. The men were not back yet. But there were lots of released soldiers around. They did not know what to do; everything was so mixed up. Lots of them did not know, where their families were, all had to be sorted out. Of course they were hungry and started to work on the farms, where they at

least got something to eat. Prickel started to work with these soldiers on the farm; he had to supervise them. During the nights they had to watch the cattle on the pastures, because lots of cattle rustling went on, and the meat was sold on the black market.

In July the occupation Zones in Germany were changing. In Heiningen the Americans left and the English took over. That was not so much different. But Blankenburg was supposed to get Russian Zone. Lots of people from that area hitched up. That did not make much difference. But Blankenburg was supposed to get Russian occupied zone. Lots of the refugees who stayed in that area hitched up their horses again and went more west. Quite a few from "the Balten" came to Heiningen and the big house (it was an old monastery) filled up. Prickel and I went to Blankenburg to see my family. We wanted to persuade them to come to the west. The trains were not going, we had to go somehow through the Harz Mountains, partly hitchhiking. But the Muhlendahls and all the others did not want to come.

In August a card from Paul arrived. He had been wounded in East Prussia. Without medical attention and with high fever he managed to get on a boat, came to Denmark and then to an army hospital in Schleswig Holstein. (He was shot through the lung) From there he was released and recuperated on a big farm close to Osnabruck (Boselager were the peoples name) Of course Tante Annemarie was very happy, I remember her jumping around and showing everybody the card from Uncle Paul. I think it was only a few days later that he arrived in Heiningen.

One day Alexander Harpe (Alenchens dad) showed up. He was looking for his family and had heard that there were lots of people from Estonia in Heiningen. That was true, but the Harpes were not there, so he went farther to search for them.

Sometimes in August Tante Annemarie's Pole, Stanislaus (the not so nice one) had reported that there were Polish horses in Heiningen and there was already an investigation. Prickel and Paul went to the English headquarters to talk about that. Actually almost all the horses were from East Prussia but it is hard to argue with people who have the power. When the men were there they noticed that the English men got interested "that are good riding horses", they said.

We did not want to risk that they take our horses away. So we decided to pack up and leave with the Schonfeld horses. Tante Annemarie and the boys with our horses stayed in Heiningen. We wanted to find something where we and our horses could stay and where we would have work for the horses. We

had heard that in the west (Rheinland) were lots of empty places, we wanted to try there. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of August Prickel, Paul and I left for the west. But now I was together with Prickel and he has written about our life in Alpen, Ritterhude and then the immigration to Canada.

From our first 2 years in Canada there are copies of letters which I wrote to Goti, my mother. It is almost like a diary, because I wrote quite regularly, but in German. When I read it now I sometimes have to laugh. To lots of things which are so different in Canada, we are used to now. And then – quite a bit has changed in the last 40 years in this country.

We love Canada. Western Germany was never my home country (Heimat). Estonia and East Prussia were not available anymore so we put our hearts and our work into this land and built up our farm. I hope it will stay for a while in the hands of the Preugschas Family.

### **Short history about my brothers and sister.**

### Gertrud – 1904

After the first war Gertrud finished her schooling in Germany. She became a teacher. In 1928 she married August Henhing, who owned a bookstore in Nuernberg Bavaria. When Hitler came to power, they left Germany, and came first to Wack. Then they moved to Helsingoer Denmark. Both were teaching at an international college for adults. August died in 1969 and Gertrud in 1985. Their only son *PETER* married a Danish girl Nete. Peter got to be a teacher, Nete died in 1982 (Skin Cancer)

Their Children: Pelle, Lasse Ditte, Timme

### Esther – 1905

Esther also had her education in Germany. In 1935 she was in Estonia too. Before that she had a job in Germany as a social worker. But she had said something against the Nazis that was reported and she was fired. She spent the winter in Deval and helped in the household of a friend from my mother. Mrs. Schilling had besides her own children, always lots of kids from the country in room and board. In 1936 Esther went back to Germany, where she met Ernst Muhlendahl. She knew him already from a few years back, when Ernst had proposed to her. At that time she did not want to marry. Now when they met again they got engaged and married soon after. In 1936 she married Ernst von Muehlendahl, they lived in Berlin. Nobody from us was at their wedding, but my mother went later in the fall to Berlin and stayed with them for quite a while. Then Esther, with the children lived already before in Blankenburg when the bombing in Berlin was. My mother, Tante Renata and other relations came there as refugees. Blankenburg got Russian occupied zone, and it was hard for her to find enough food to feed the family. On the fields she picked grain after harvesting, and potato fields were dug thoroughly (that happened in West Germany too). The two older boys were in the west, Karl Ernst in Heiningen, Alexander on a different place. Quite often she crossed the border, somewhere in the Harz to get food from Heiningen. End of 1952 she came also to the West with her daughters. Was first with Paul together in the Linslerhof (Tante Annemarie was still in Alpen). Then Onkel Ernst got a job in Frankfurt. Finally the family could move together, and there they lived until Onkel Ernst died in 1977. From then on she lived with Tinchen and Reinhard in Mitterteich. She died December 1994.

Their Children:

*Karl Ernst* married with Maja v. Cube -- he is a medical doctor.

Their Children: Alexander, Paul, Peter

*Alexander* married to Anette Kraemer -- he is a lawyer.

Their Children: Anna, Paul

*Ulrike* married to Fritz Bangerth -- he is an agriculture prof.

Their Children: Wolfgang, Sigrid

*Anna Christine (Tinchen)* married to Reinhard Etzold -- he is a medical doctor.

Their Children: Sabine, Ulrike

### Andreas – 1906

Andreas had polio as a 3-year-old, was paralyzed, and could only walk with braces. He always had to go to Germany where the braces were made. He had teachers at home. He went then to university in Dorpat (Tartu), where he took math. He had always lots of friends which helped him around. In 1935 he married Birgit Welding. They lived in Reval, where he gave privately math lessons. Ingetraud and Jurgen were born. After the Umsiedlung in 1939, he got a job as a schoolteacher in Niesky, Silesia. 3 more kids were born. In January 1945 they ran away from the Russians, came to Hof, Bavaria. Within 2 weeks, Andreas and the 3 small kids died. Birgit got later on

(She lived then in Buckeburg) care parcels from 3 families from Madison, Wisconsin. These people arranged for her to come over there and they immigrated in 1951. Birgit is still living close to Madison, where she bought an acreage and built a house.

Their Children:

*Ingetraud* married to Gottfrid Brieger -- he is a chemistry Prof.

Their Children: Kirsten, Michael

*Jurgen* married Sybil Bjorkston (she died in 1966 in Zurich)

Their Children: Julia

2<sup>nd</sup> marriage with Kaja (Arist's former wife)

after 4 years they divorced.

*Ulvhild, Gudrun, Andreas* - died in 1945

### Renata – 1909

Renata finished her high school in Reval, one year, England then Hohenheim, horticulture. One winter she was teaching us in Wack. She got married to Olaf v. Stackelberg in 1932. They lived in Pernau. (Olaf as lawyer) Jochen and Heiner were born in Estonia. 1939 the "Umsiedlung". Olaf worked

for the Umsiedlung in Reval and Renata went back there for a while until it got too dangerous. Gerda Marie was born in the Warthegau in 1942. Then Renata went back again to Estonia where Olaf worked and stayed there till the summer of 1944. Lived in Rawitsh, trekked with us and stayed in Blankenburg until Olaf came back from the war. He got a translating job (Russian) in Halle. He got sick, had picked up TB. He had to have an operation, Renata took his job, and my mother went to help. Soon, after he came back from the hospital, he was asked to spy. That he did not want to do. The next day he left by train to Berlin, at that time it still was possible to get out over Berlin. Mother, Renata and the kids packed up and followed. Luckily they were not bothered. They went close to Bueckeberg, where quite a few of the Stackelberg family were. Renata got a job with the English Occupation people. Olaf who had recuperated fairly good after part of his lung was removed, got suddenly sick again and died in 1951. In 1952 Renata married again, the architect Fritz v. Kotzebue. She hoped to give the children a good new home, but they did not like their stepfather, he was completely different than Olaf. It was not easy for Renata. Fritz had 4 children, she had 3, and there was still Fr. Mother. A big household. Together they had one son.

Their Children: (with Olaf)

*Jochen* married Karen v. Dolgow -- he is a minister.

Their Children: Andreas, Jurgen, Gert Olaf

*Heiner* -- died in 1962

*Gerda Marie* married to Knut Liese -- he is a photographer.

No Children

(with Fritz)

*Franz Jakob* married Judith Brauner -- he is a

Their Children: Justin, Philip

**Johann Diederich (Hans Dieter)** – 1912

He died in 1918 in Riga.