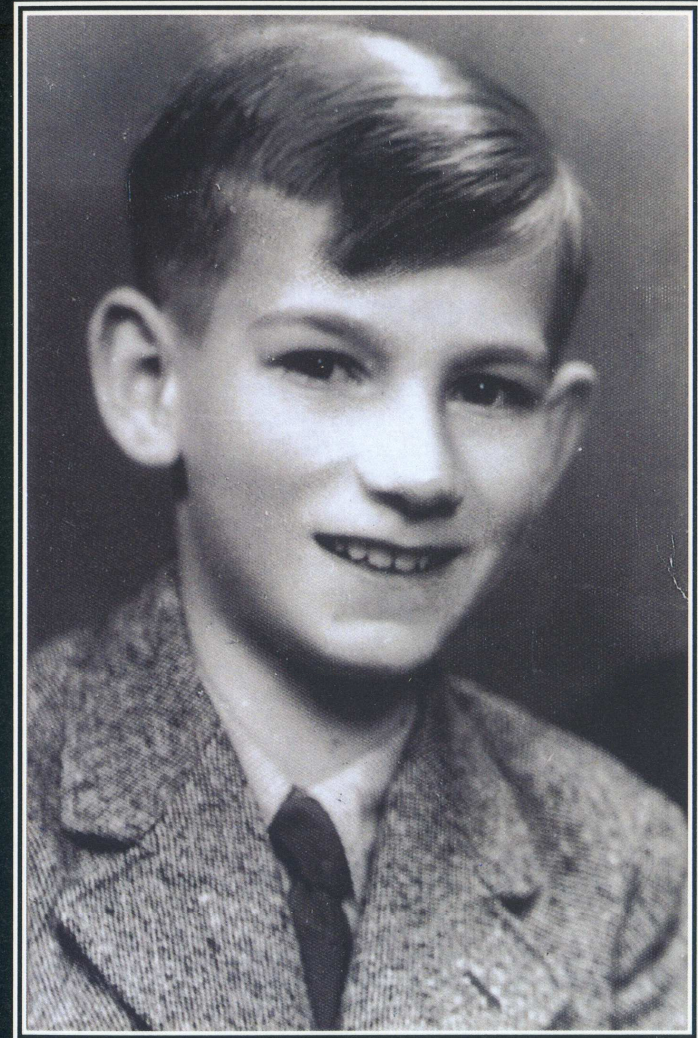


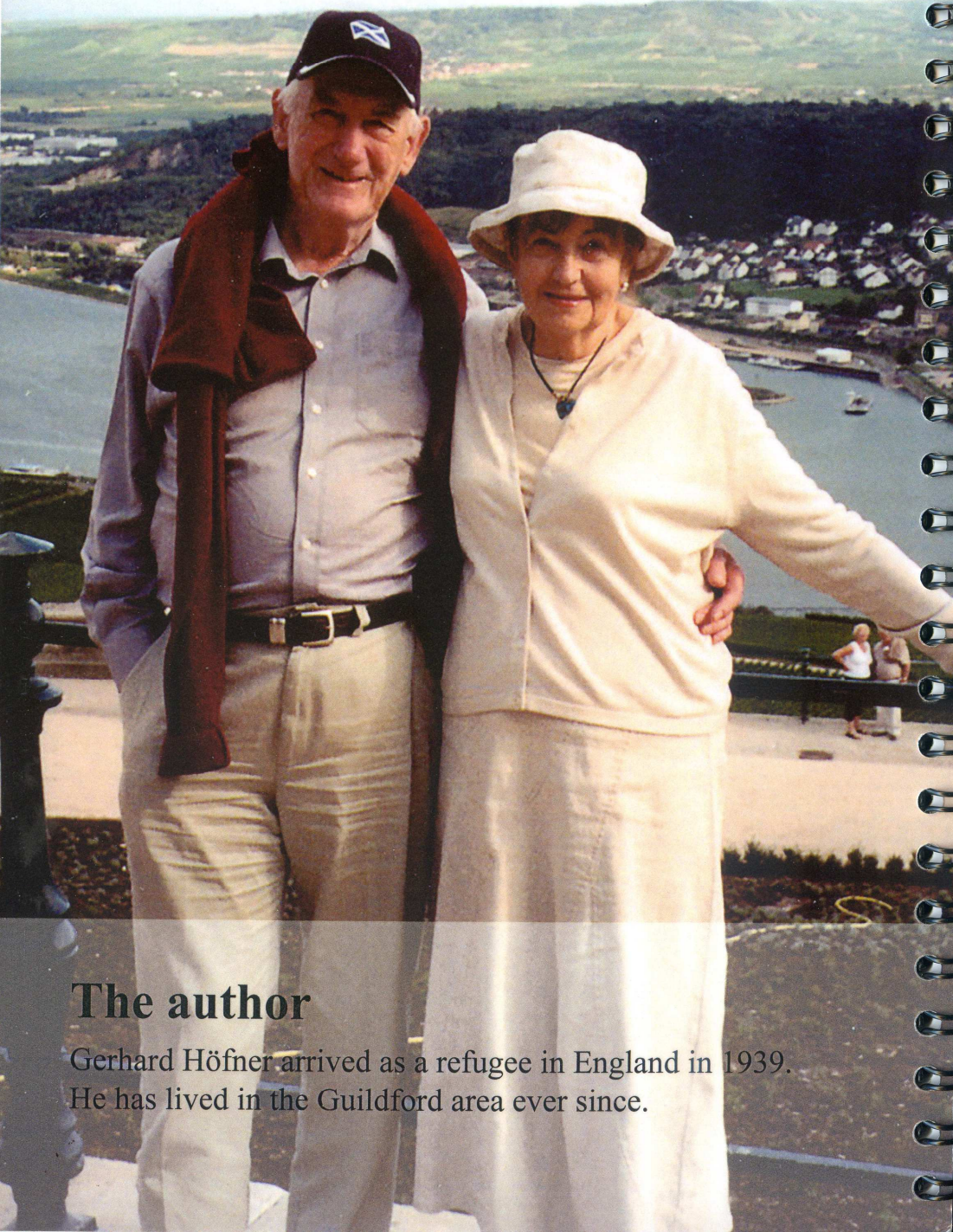
# One of the Lucky Ones



Gerhard Höfner

## The author

Gerhard Höfner arrived as a refugee in England in 1939.  
He has lived in the Guildford area ever since.





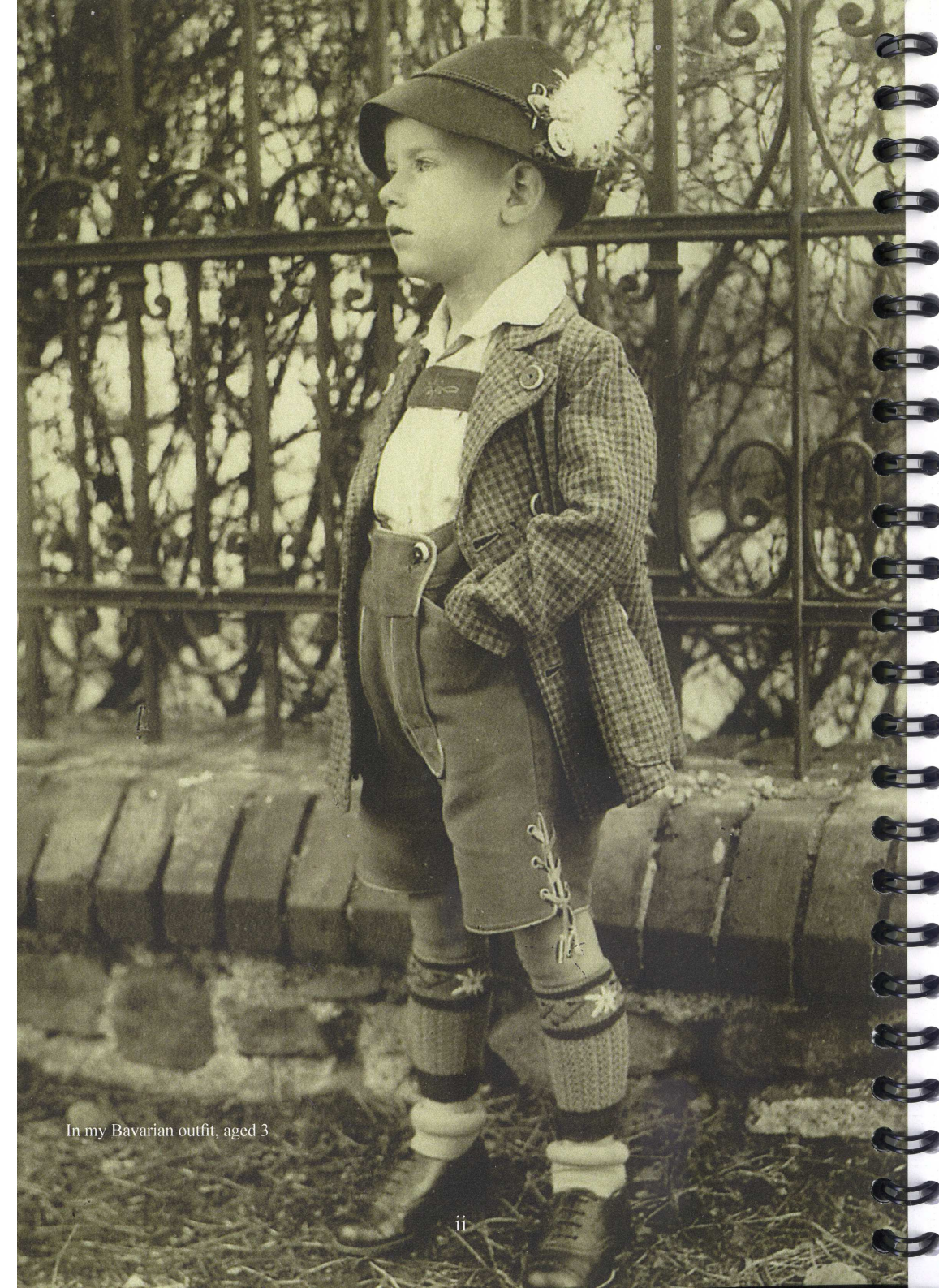
WITH BEST WISHES

Cery

Acknowledgements:

To Isaura Dolling, who helped in compiling this book.





In my Bavarian outfit, aged 3

## Chapter One Early Life

I would like to tell you a bit about my early life in the German speaking part of Bohemia. I was an only child. My mother, father and I lived in a large apartment house in the village of Pyhankem, about 6 miles from the German border at the foot of the Ore Mountains.

I was born on the 27th of May 1927. On the same day that Charles Lindberg flew solo across the Atlantic. It was also the birthday of the Czechoslovakian president, Thomas Masaryk.

On the ground floor of the house lived the Prokop family with 3 children, the father was a musician. They had 2 large and one small room. On the first floor lived our landlords, the owners of the house. We lived on the second floor and had one large kitchen/living room and a bedroom with a double and a single bed where my parents and I slept. The bedroom had a sloping ceiling and a dormer window looking out over the street and the school opposite. A single man had a room across the hall. The living room had a coal fired range for cooking and heating. We had a cold water tap and electric light. Of course the coal had to be carried up from the yard. The toilets were earth closets in a triple block in the yard consisting of a wooden top with a hole cut in it and a lid. Newspaper was used for toilet paper. The toilets were emptied from the back and put on the neighbouring farmer's dung heap.

As we had snow on the ground for 2 months a year, a trip to the toilet at night could be quite daunting, so of course we used a chamber pot in the bedroom which then had to be carried downstairs and emptied in the morning. When I was about 8 years old, we had water closets installed, one in the stairwell between the ground and first floor and one between the first and second floor. We only had to go down one flight of stairs to get to the toilet and of course it was inside the house!

To have a bath we first had to heat the water up on the range. The bathtub was rectangular with carrying handles at each end and was made of wood with a wooden bung in the bottom. This was stored in the hall and had to be carried in and put on trestles. After bathing, the bung was pulled out and the water drained into a bucket and poured down the sink. So you can see, we only had a bath once a week! The bathtub was then stored back in the hall.

The laundry was in a building in the yard and was used by all the residents. It had a cauldron with a coal fire beneath to boil the clothes also Zinc tubs on trestles, washboards and scrubbing brushes. Washboards were wooden framed with a



corrugated metal face. Clothes were rubbed up and down and sometimes a scrubbing brush was used. Soap came in large green blocks. Washing was done once a week.

For breakfast we had rolls and coffee. An old lady would come round early carrying a large wicker basket on her back with rolls from our local baker. Because coffee was expensive, we made coffee using one third coffee beans, and two thirds roasted barley with a little bit of chicory added for flavour. My father took slices of bread and margarine with him to work together with a metal can full of coffee which he could heat up at work for his lunch. My father worked as a maintenance engineer at a glass factory 2 miles away.

My mother also worked full time and had to cycle about 2 miles to work. She stood up all day as a cutting machine operator at a tin can factory. I believe the factory had a canteen where she could get lunch.

When I was 2 years old I was quite fast on my feet and used to run on tiptoe. I decided to run away from home. I set out one morning from our house and kept running. I did about 3 miles passing through our village, through the next one and on to the third and finished up in a playground. I played with some children who were there with their mothers. By the afternoon they must have realised that I was on my own and called the police. In the meantime my mother and neighbours were frantically searching for me back home, probing cesspits etc but I had vanished!

I told the police that I lived opposite the school and that my name was Adadi, the nickname my parents gave me (I could not say Gerhard). The police went to the local school and of course drew a blank. Our local police eventually widened their search and I was found. Nobody could believe that a 2 year old could run that far. I repeated the route on a visit back home in 1988 by car and was amazed by the distance!

I shall never forget my first experience of Christmas Eve. We were living in a downstairs flat at the time. I was not allowed to see the Christmas tree and had to stay in the bedroom. Then I heard the sound of sleigh bells! The sleigh stopped outside for a few moments then the bells started again as the sleigh moved off. I was then told the Christ Child (Das Kristkind) had been and "you can come in now". There was the Christmas Tree with all the candles lit and the presents beneath! A magic sight, which I have never forgotten.

In Bohemĭa, St Nicholas Day was celebrated on December 6th. In our village the houses were large, divided into flats with 3 or 4 families to each house. On December 6th three local men would dress up, one as St Nicholas with a cape, Bishop's Mitre and carrying a sack, two others dressed as devils, wearing furs and chains and carrying besoms. They would tour the houses and all the parents and

children would gather in one of the downstairs rooms. St Nicholas would ask the parents "has this child been good?" if the answer was yes, St Nicholas would give them a present from his sack, such as an orange. If however, the child had been bad, one of the devils would give him or her a whack with his besom.

In Britain and America St Nicholas was changed into Santa Claus or Santa. He no longer wears a Bishop's Mitre but still carries a sack and arrives on December 25th. He is no longer accompanied by Devils so I suppose all British and American children must be good!

We used to have snow for at least 2 months every year. The snow in the mountains above our village used to be quite deep so that if you went off the road, you had to have skis. The roads were not cleared as they are here, but snow ploughed to remove drifts but otherwise just compacted. Mind you, there was very little motor traffic, most of it was horse or ox drawn. All farmers had a horse drawn sledge for winter transport. We used to be able to toboggan or ski all the way from the mountains to our village along the road, about 6 miles.

I had my first skis when I was 5 years old. The skis were of the cross country type with bindings which allowed you to lift the heel of the boot off the skis. It was more difficult to ski downhill with them as turning at speed was difficult and we used "telemark" turns. There used to be a ski jump at our neighbouring village of Eichwald.

My parents were in the "Nature Friends" club, a national organisation to promote walking, a bit like the YHA, with hostels in the mountains. My parents were founder members of our local hostel in the mountains at Vorder Zinnwald, right on the German Border and we used to spend quite a lot of time there at weekends. There must have been about 50 members in our local branch so that there was a lot of social activity. This is how I got my interest in walking, nature and woodcraft.

I used to go to my grandparents for lunch about 400 yards away. After school, I was locked out until about 5.30 in the afternoon when my dad came home. We then had to light the fire in the flat for heat and cooking. My mother then came home and did the cooking. We never used to eat butter, it was too expensive, and very little meat. On Saturdays our local butcher used to kill a pig and on Saturday evening we used to take a small enamel bucket and go to the butcher for blood soup. A quite tasty soup made from pigs blood and blood sausage (black pudding) and liver sausage (about an inch in diameter and 12 inches long). Fish was seldom eaten, only at Christmas-time when we had stockfisch, Norwegian dried cod, which had to be soaked for a few hours. We also had fresh carp as our local co-op used to have a tank with carp and you could choose which one you wanted. Chicken was only eaten on special occasions. We used to eat a lot of sausage, and of course there is



a vast variety of German sausage, rather than meat. There used to be a grocer shop about 100 yards from our house. The owner's name was Karasek. Very few of the groceries were packaged; most things were sold loose, weighed and put into paper bags. With sweets, the shopkeeper would take a square sheet of paper, twist it into a cone, put sweets in and close the top of the bag. I remember seeing a sugar loaf (a cone of sugar about 2 feet tall) sugar was chopped off with a hammer.

I remember being sent to get a penny worth of mustard. The shopkeeper would put a blob of mustard on a bit of paper, fold it and I would take it home.

My mother was a very good cook and in later life in England ran her own dressmaking business in Guildford employing four people.

Most of the people in our village worked in industry. Coalmines were all around (brown coal or lignite) and also engineering factories and glassworks. Just past my grandfather's house in the village was a stove factory making "Kachelofen" large tile stoves for space heating. My parents were always lucky enough to have a job but there was a lot of unemployment. Unemployment was the worst thing that could happen to you and even now the most terrible word in the German language and one that still makes me shiver is the word "Arbeitslos". The coalmines were not very deep and because of the rapacious extraction of coal without backfilling the spoil, caused subsidence and a village, Dreihunken, where my uncle lived about half a mile from us has now disappeared.

As both my parents were working and being an only child, I had a lot of spare time and used to play by myself a lot although there were a gang of my classmates from school I used to play with. I was a bit of a loner. When I was about 8 years old, my parents thought it would be a good idea for me to learn a musical instrument and they decided on the violin. I got a  $\frac{3}{4}$  size violin in a case and I would walk off to my lesson to the neighbouring village of Zuckmantel, about a mile away twice a week. The music teacher also taught piano. I thought I was doing quite well but of course I had to practice playing scales and early on it sounded a bit raucous but after about 6 months I had progressed to actually playing tunes but then my father stopped my lessons because he said he could not stand the noise! I was very disappointed because I was quite keen. I have always regretted my dad's action because at that age it would not have taken me long to play properly.

I have always been fond of music which I heard on the radio, all classical. There was a lot of folk music and songs. The Germans have always had a tradition of folk songs and music. Even Mozart composed folk songs. When we used to go wandering at weekends with our Nature Friends Club we always used to sing, accompanied by a guitar. In contrast in England all we used to hear were music hall

songs. I remember when our group of Nature Friends, about half a dozen or so, used to go out at weekends we used to have a brew up using a spirit stove to make our meal in the open air, sit around, sing and play the guitar. That is why I have such a great interest in folk music and why I like walking in the countryside now. I had hoped to have passed this interest to my children, but unfortunately not, it seems in the matter of folk music.

When I was seven in 1934 my parents sent me to stay with my uncle Karl (my mother's brother) who had a smallholding in the small village of Skylrl near Komotau. My grandfather took me to Teplitz and put me on a train to Dux and Komotau. I still remember the train because it was a two coach railcar and the driver sat in a glass dome projecting from the roof. My uncle met me in Komotau station. That was the first time I had met my uncle. He took me to his home in Skylrl in a horse drawn cart. I remember Skylrl as a very primitive farming village with dirt roads. I did not like the place but I was there for the duration of the summer holiday. My uncle and aunt had 3 children, Alois, one year younger, Helga about 3 and baby Inge. My aunt Marie was a big kind hearted Czech woman. All I remember of my stay there were the cucumber fields and picking cucumbers. These were for pickling and are eaten a lot in Bohemia "Saure Gurken".

The following year when I was 8 my parents sent me for the summer holiday to total strangers. They both took me there and then left me. I do not think my mother was too keen. The place was a great improvement on Skylrl, being a large village but the name escapes me. It had a mostly German population and a castle where the local Graf (Count) lived. The family I stayed with, husband, wife, son and daughter were very nice. The son was about my age.

The farmers lived in small houses in the village, with their fields surrounding the village. In the centre on a slight hill was the mansion of the local count. Most of the farmers were quite poor. The family I stayed with had a goat, which supplied milk, and a cow, whose milk was turned into butter by the farmer's wife, who would take the butter to the mansion to sell. The buttermilk was drunk or fed to the pig. The farmer could not afford a horse, so the cow was used to pull their wagon.

At harvest time, several farming families joined together to share the work. The rye was cut with a scythe. A hoop of wood was attached to the shaft of the scythe and canvas stretched across, so when cut, the corn would be swept to the left. The first scytheman would start in the field and cut a swathe. After he had gone a couple of yards into the field, a second scytheman would start on his right, and then a third, and so on. A step, swish, a step, swish, and they would go like that right through the field. Every minute or so, the scythe would need sharpening with a couple of strokes of a whetstone, which was carried in a cow's horn, filled with water, strapped to the scytheman's waist.



The women and children would follow the scythemen. They would gather an armful of corn, and the children would be ready with a few stalks to tie around the sheaf. The sheaves were then placed into stooks of about ten sheaves, with the ears uppermost, to dry and ripen. The corn had, of course, to be cut before it was ripe, to stop the seeds falling out.

The harvest was a family affair, with the wives providing food and drink. When one farmer's field had been cut, they would progress to the next farmer's field. When the rye had ripened in the stooks, the farmers would band together and hire a threshing machine, powered by a steam-driven traction engine. They only had the machine for one very busy day. The sheaves were loaded on to wagons, driven to the thresher, then handed up with a pitchfork to the men atop the thresher, who fed the sheaves in. The corn was collected in sacks at the bottom.

Chaff was blowing about everywhere, and the straw came out in bales to be built up into a rick.

In England at this time, I suppose a farmer would have had a horse-drawn cutting machine instead of a scythe, and nowadays the whole process can be done by one man in a combine harvester. How efficient. How dull!

When I was 9 in 1936, my mother and I went on holiday to a hill resort not too far from home. We went there on our bicycles. My father must have stayed home.

Whilst there, my mother met a German refugee, an active anti-Nazi who was forced to flee from his home in Saxony in 1933. He worked as an agent on the border helping anti-Nazis to escape. His name was Ernst Graf, a tall athletic man, 45 years old. He and my mother fell in love. We had a nice time on holiday and I learned to swim in the Gasthaus pond. I did not say anything to my father about Ernst.

The following year my mother and I went out again on our bikes and again met up with Ernst.



With our dog, Sonia in 1937

I started at the German school opposite our house at the age of 6 in 1933. I attended 4 years of German school and then my father thought it would be a good idea to send me to a Czech school. His thought was that in Czechoslovakia you could not get on unless you could speak Czech. My father had learnt a bit of Czech whilst doing his national service in the Army. Anyway, in 1937 I joined our local Czech school. I could not speak a word of Czech but I learned to read, write and speak Czech in one year at this primary school, but of course, I did not learn much else such as arithmetic etc. In the January term in 1938 I then went to the Czech secondary school at a nearby village.

## Chapter Two Prague

In June 1938 we knew that the Sudetenland would be occupied any day. My father had already been called up as a reservist into the Czechoslovak army. My mother and I both had a small sized suitcase and left home to go to Prague. I think my mother foresaw this and arranged to meet Ernst there. We must have walked with our cases about a mile to the nearest tram stop. We did not tell our relatives that we were going. We caught a tram to Teplitz and a train to Prague. We met Ernst in Prague and rented a room. The trouble was Ernst being a German national could not give his proper nationality when signing the register at hotels. He would have been picked up by the police and possibly deported. A lot of the Czech police were pro Nazi. "Wanted" German nationals had to be very careful, some had already been kidnapped by Gestapo agents working in Prague. Victims were bundled into a car and taken across the border and it must have been with the help of the Czech police.

There were of course masses of social democrat and communist refugees in Prague and the Party helped us out with food. I remember walking from where we stayed about 1 ½ miles outside the centre of Prague to a hall run by the Party near Wenceslas Square. You went down a flight of stairs and there was a large hall where we could get free meals. We had to keep moving from place to place so that the police would not catch up with us. I think the longest we stayed at any one place was 6 weeks. Walking into Prague I noticed that the parks were being dug up with trenches to provide cover in case of air raids. One thing I remember about Prague is the bananas. At every street corner in the city women in shawls and large wicker baskets carried on the shoulders, would sell bananas, something we seldom saw at home. We met a lot of our people in Prague including Richard Kretschmer, a German whom we would meet again later.

We knew, even if people in Britain did not, that it was only a question of time before Hitler would occupy the rest of the country and so we tried our hardest to get out. To get out you had to find a country willing to take you and you needed a Visa. Very few countries were willing to take refugees but Bolivia in South America wanted



immigrants. We would go to the embassy, into the hall, knock at a little window like a railway ticket office and ask "have our Visas arrived yet"? The answer was "no, come again tomorrow". We called again and again "come tomorrow" (Manana).

We were fairly confident at first that we would get there and I started to learn Spanish. I found it fairly easy because it was my third language but as time went on and manana followed manana we got very depressed and tried other countries. Canada took settlers but to get there you had to go to England first. In early December my father, who had been demobilised from the Czech army, somehow found out where we were staying. I do not know how he found out, somebody must have tipped him off. Anyway, he got permission from the Nazi authorities to bring me back. I do not think he wanted my mother back as he was already living with Berta Fuchs whom he had known for about a year. Anyway he confronted me, my mother and Ernst in our hotel bedroom and there was a nasty scene. Ernst was quite calm but my father was excited. As far as I was concerned he might have had the law on his side, and to placate him, it was agreed that I should go back with him, which is not what I wanted. Just as I was leaving my mother slipped some money into my pocket and whispered the name of a place where we had stayed previously. When my father and I got to Masaryk Station, a large terminal station to catch the train home, I said I wanted to go to the toilet, went in the front and out through a back exit. My father was still watching the front. I ran to Wenceslas Square to catch the tram to where we had been living. I hid in the bushes behind the tram stop so that I could see who got off without being seen. After waiting about an hour, my mother turned up and we went to a new place in the Old Quarter below the castle.

Looking back and having had children of my own it must have been a pretty traumatic experience for my mother and my father. Neither knowing whether they would ever see me again. As for me, as it happened I did not see my father again for 10 years.

I wanted to stay with my mother and it was all a big adventure. What happened that evening changed my life. Had I gone back I would not have come to England. I would have gone back to school, the Hitler Youth, perhaps an apprenticeship but towards the end of the war in 1944 when 17 year olds were called up, I would probably have gone into the Waffen SS being 6' tall and might have been killed in those final battles as several of my former schoolmates did.

Prague is a very interesting and beautiful city and I spent a lot of time wandering around as I did not go to school for almost six months.

In December we had reached a very low point as we seemed to have no luck about

getting out as a family. In the end we decided to split up if necessary and go out separately. About this time we heard from a Mrs Warinner, the Prague representative of the British Labour Party, who took an interest in us. At this time the "Barbican Mission to the Jews" was organising the transportation of Jewish refugee children to England. The first flight was 12 January 1939. Mrs Warinner whom we visited in the posh Adlon Hotel in Wenceslas Square, found out that there was a vacancy on this first flight and contacted the Barbican Mission representative and asked if I could go on it. At first the representative refused but with a bit of arm twisting from Mrs Warinner, who said in effect "we have done you favours in the past, do one for us now". I therefore got the last seat on the plane. Perhaps one of the Jewish parents could not bear to see their child go.

We got to the airport and it was a big adventure for me being keen on planes to see these beautiful shiny silver DC-3s wheeling in the sky. It was a big adventure for me but it must have been hell for my mother and Ernst, neither of whom had yet obtained a Visa. The theory was we should all try to get to England and from there to Canada as settlers. The Canadian government at the time had a settlement scheme where they gave you a house, a horse, a cow and some land which had to be cleared. If you could grow crops within a year you kept it all. If not you gave it back. Quite a number of Sudeten German families did this and have settled in the Peace River area of Alberta.



Map showing the area ceded to Germany in 1938



## Chapter Three

### England

We got to the airport in Prague to see a silver coloured airliner, a Douglas DC-3, coming in to land. As it taxied in to the airport building, two flags appeared above the cockpit, a Czech and a Dutch flag, just like flags flown on ships as they enter harbour. Written on the side was "Koninklijke Luchtvaart Matschapij" (Royal Dutch Airlines) KLM. At that time the Douglas DC-3 was the world's most modern airliner with 2 Pratt & Whitney 14 cylinder radial engines and 24 passenger seats. As it had a tailwheel, as you entered you had to walk uphill to your seat. Inside were 8 rows of seats, 2 on one side of the gangway and one on the other.

The stewardess showed us to our seats. There were 24 of us, 12 girls and 12 boys. A whining noise from one engine, the propeller turned slowly, then the engine fired, clouds of smoke before it settled down to a purr. I waved goodbye to my mother and Ernst and then we were off to England. I did not know where England was, it might just as well have been America or China. We climbed to about 10,000 feet and flew through the clouds, not over the top of them as you do now in an airliner. Besides the stewardess, at the back, there was a crew of three in the cockpit. The pilot, co-pilot and the navigator/engineer sitting behind the pilots and at right angles to them.

We were very privileged to be flying in a plane as very few people in those days travelled by air and the cost with only 24 passers and a crew of 4 must have been quite high. I presume the Barbican Mission paid for our flight. We flew over our old home, then crossed Germany and after about 3 hours landed in Rotterdam, Holland to refuel. Then took off again for London. By the time we reached London it was dark and the plane did a steep banking turn over Central London and we could see all the lights. We landed at Croydon Airport which at that time was London Airport. The term airport is a bit misleading because then, airports were just large grassy fields, not concrete runways as they are now. This meant that the aircraft could always land into the wind, whichever the wind direction. There were a lot of photographers waiting for our plane as we were the first flight of Jewish refugee children and all the newspapers covered the story. The airport had just one large building of two storeys with the control tower on top. I remember the washroom had liquid soap containers like a ball with a spout that you tipped up, something I had not seen before.

Our group was more or less the same age, between 10 and 13 years old. I suppose they did not want to part younger children from their parents. We were then separated, the girls went off in one bus, and we boys went off in another. We never saw them again. We boys went to a church hall in Chislehurst, Kent, a suburb

of London. The church hall was single storey with a flat on the side, where the Swiss couple who would look after us lived. The couple were very nice and in their thirties. They could speak German. None of us spoke English. I could speak German, Czech and a bit of Spanish but no English. We slept on camp beds on the floor of the hall and also had our meals there. The church hall was right next to the church and separated from it by driveway. Above the stage in the hall was a picture of Jesus with the words "God is in our midst". As the German word mist means manure, in my ignorance, I wondered what Jesus was doing.

Local ladies came round and gave us some toys because all we had were the clothes we wore and a small suitcase each. Some of the boys had money sent to them by their parents but I never got any and that made me a bit weepy. The Swiss lady very kindly gave me sixpence. We used to go to church services every Sunday. We could not understand what the vicar was saying but we hummed along to the hymns.

By law every child had to go to school, we had to go to the local Chislehurst Secondary School. Of course we could not speak English and no attempt was made to teach us English so we just sat at the back of the classroom and looked at magazines. This went on for the whole of the four months that I was in Chislehurst. The school was about a mile from the church hall and we used to have to cross a golf course. We did pick up a few English words from the children, lavatory being one. There were some nice girls in our class, Yvonne had blonde curls and Marjorie had dark hair. I had a crush on Marjorie but the lack of language made things a bit difficult. The girls used to walk part of the way back with us most days.

In March 1939 after I had been there for two months my mother suddenly turned up. She had managed to get a Visa to England as a domestic and got out just in time before the Nazis moved into Prague. She went by train across Poland to Gdynia and then on a Polish ship to the Port of London. She was staying in a refugee hostel in London. Some English people befriended her and after she somehow told them how we were separated, they drove her to see me. It was quite a pleasant surprise because up to that time I had not heard from her.

Every few weeks another children's flight arrived from Prague and the church hall was getting overcrowded so we all moved into a large three storey house on the other side of the church.

In March we heard on the radio that Czechoslovakia had been occupied. I was lucky, my mother had got out but most of the parents of the other boys there had not got out. That was one of the saddest experiences of my life. Being Jewish, I doubt if any of their parents survived and the boys probably realised that they might not see them again.



With the fall of Czechoslovakia no more children arrived. Ernst had managed to get a Visa to Belgium and he was safe as well. I think there were about five children's flights so there must have been between 50 and 60 boys living in the house. I often wondered what happened to all those boys, where did they go? I have never met any of them again.

In early May, my mother got a job as a cook in Wonersh and I was moved to a Sudeten German Social Democrat Refugee hostel at Brook Lodge at Albury run by the Czech Refugee Trust Fund. I remember a lady taking me on a train to London and meeting a Mr Bedford at Waterloo Station. She handed me over to him and we went by train to Guildford and then took the Tillingbourne Valley bus to Albury Heath.

## Chapter Four

### Brook Lodge

I arrived at the Czech Refugee Trust Fund hostel at Brook Lodge carrying the small suitcase I had in Prague except there was very little in it. Most of my clothes had been lost at the home in Chislehurst. I was met at Brook Lodge by my mother who was staying there for a day or so to settle me in. She of course was working as a cook at Wonersh Chase, Wonersh.

Brook Lodge was a large Victorian four storey house and was built as a large family house but might have been used latterly as a guest house. The wardens who were not the owners were a Mr and Mrs Bedford, a middle class couple and their two young children, a boy of 10 and a girl of 8. Mr Bedford who seemed to drink was a reserve officer who was called up when the war started. The house had two huge lounges and a kitchen downstairs. The lounges had large connecting doors and one was used as the dining room. It must have had at least twenty bedrooms on all floors. About fifty people must have stayed there. We met a family called Furch who my mother had met on the boat. I slept in a summerhouse in the grounds which I shared with a man called Josef Hein. There were only about two girls there and nine boys. Soon after I got there a school was formed for the boys in a cottage about 20 yards from the main house, which must have been for servants originally.

There was a large school room upstairs together with four bedrooms. Downstairs was a smaller schoolroom used for music lessons and a bedroom occupied by our "House Master", a refugee who taught us maths. The Headmaster was an Englishman who was a retired public school master, who taught us English and several other subjects. The school was run on boarding school lines, with prep and homework. Meals were taken in the large classroom and were prepared in the main kitchen. The pupils were two older boys of about 15, Turk about 14. Sommer, Storch, Beck, Luft and myself about 12 and a younger lad of about 10 called Schor who left soon to emigrate to Bolivia. We 9 were taught intensively and very successfully and we very soon learnt English. The adults were taught English in a large summerhouse next to the main house by an Englishwoman, a Miss Hyde, a Quaker and did not make a lot of progress. My maths was in a deplorable state and I never really caught up. This was because I had only 4 years in a German school, then 2 years at a Czech school, where I learnt very little except the language, 6 months of no school in Prague and 5 months of no real school in England. I was 12 years old and could just do adding, subtracting and very simple multiplication. English children of my age were doing algebra etc. As I said I never caught up in maths and always struggled, even at technical college later. On the other hand English subjects were a doddle, English being my 4th language.



We even had our own Boy Scout Troop, being a sub-section of the 9th Guildford. We had a Scoutmaster and an assistant scoutmaster, were taught all about scouting and given uniforms with Mountie type large brim hats. In the summer of 1939 we went to summer camp with the 9th Guildford twice. Once at Selsey Bill and once at East Shalford Lane, Chilworth. We went on parades in Guildford and we had our own "Brook Lodge" banner. I remember going on a parade marching down North Street with the "Boys Brigade" in their blue and grey uniforms and a band. We all went to the church on the corner of North Street on Woodbridge Road (since pulled down) and then to the bandstand in the castle grounds. I forgot how we got to Guildford but probably by lorry. Our scoutmaster was a small thin middle aged man with glasses and a moustache. He invited us to tea once at his home in Stoke Road (now pulled down). The assistant scoutmaster was a tall good looking young man who I remember was flirting with the Lyons Tea shop "nippies" in their black dresses, white aprons and little white hats.

The 9th Guildford chief scout was Mr Jeffery who owned the sports shop in the High Street and the scout hall was the centenary hall in Chapel Street. When we went camping we had a large bell tent. The Scoutmasters did a lot for us. We worked for several badges and I got my swimming badge in the pool in Mr Jeffery's garden. Some of the boys had both their parents staying in the hostel but myself, Turk, Sommer and Beck were on our own.

We had a lady music teacher who lived on Albury Heath and I remember us being taken by her to see the "Bertram Mills" circus in Woodbridge Meadows. Another time the vicar of Albury took us in his Austin car to see "Merry England" at Farnham Castle. Our private school was in being from May 1939 to December 1939 when it was thought we had learnt enough English to be able to go to the local Church of England school on Albury Heath.

My mother all this time worked at Wonersh and I used to visit her at weekends by catching the bus to Albury, change to the Green Line bus to Rices Corner Chilworth and then walk to Wonersh, buying my Dandy comic at a shop on Wonersh Green. Sometimes my mother walked over to see me via Blackheath. There was a shop down the hill from Brook Lodge where I used to buy biscuits with my pocket money.

The residents at Brook Lodge who came over as refugees were given pocket money by the Trust Fund and were not expected to do any work. When the war started some of the men did war work but most of them did not and behaved like country gentlemen, going for walks, and generally lazing about. The women at least helped with the cooking. My mother in the meantime on her domestic Visa had to work hard. There was one family with 2 boys where the husband was a "crawler" who

ingratiated himself with anyone in authority who could benefit him. If there was anything going he was first in the queue. He eventually managed to get both his sons sent to public school, paid for by the Czech Refugee Trust Fund. One time he found out about a scheme to send orphan boys to Santo Domingo in the Caribbean. As I was on my own he put my name forward to the authorities. My mother was furious when she found out. Of course he did not volunteer to put his sons' names down.

There was another refugee hostel nearby at Surrey Hills, a sort of holiday camp with chalets and a main building. It was just outside Albury on the lake near Postford House.

Brook Lodge as a hostel finally closed in 1947. In its heyday in 1939 to 1941 it was fully occupied as was the hostel in Albury but in time, people, especially those who were tradesmen, got themselves jobs and moved out. Some went to houses where the rent was paid by the Trust Fund, ie the Schmidt family went to a cottage in Peaslake, others to a large house in York Road, Guildford. The hostel in Albury closed earlier. Eventually in 1946 only a couple of families were left in this huge house, the Hieke family being one. The Bedfords has moved out early in the war.

In the 1950's the house had gone, only a few foundations remain to show it had existed. I do not know whether it had burnt down or was demolished. All that is left is the cottage where we went to school and where I lived until I moved to Wonersh in March 1941.

The private school closed in December 1939. The two oldest boys I suppose found jobs. By this time the war had started. I was still living in the summerhouse at Brook Lodge with Joe Hein.

The school at Albury Heath was a Church of England School built in 1880 and situated in the Heath about a mile up the hill from Albury. It was a building which had a large classroom and a smaller classroom. There was an adjoining house for the headmaster. It catered for children from Albury, Albury Heath and Farley Green, two miles in either direction. All had to walk to school. It covered all ages from infants of 5 years (who had the smaller classroom) to school leaving age at 14. The 8 to 14 year olds had the large classroom. There were several streams in the one room taught by one teacher. That was the situation in those days. In rural villages, the primary school covered all ages. In Guildford there was a state secondary school in Sydenham road called the Central School for children living in Guildford. There were also private fee paying primary and secondary schools like the Grammar School (Boys). The County School and the High School (Girls) and the Junior Technical School (Boys). All the latter were fee paying and required entrance exams to join.



Not all the boys from our private school went to the Albury Heath School. Turk and Luft went somewhere, Beck went to Guildford so that only Sommer and Storch went to Albury Heath. However we were joined by Walter Wunderich and Emil and Elsie Schmidt from the Albury Hostel. The winter of 1939/1940 was cold and I remember walking to school through deep snowdrifts on the Heath. There was a level crossing on the road just above Brook Lodge with a signal box and a small bungalow for the crossing keeper and his family beside the crossing. (The signal box and the bungalow have now gone). I was quite friendly with the keeper's son who had the nickname Bubbles Hancock, quite an enterprising lad. We used to go around quite a lot on the Heath, digging caves etc and I remember going carol singing with him in 1939 all the way up to the end of Farley Green to all the posh houses. There was a grassy area just above the school where we used to do long jumps. We had paper chases which went for miles. We used the playing field on the Heath about ¼ mile away as our football and cricket pitches. There was also a garden at the back of the school where we learnt gardening and grew vegetables.

In the spring of 1940 for a short while there were some soldiers camped in the woods near the school. They had light Vickers tanks, armed with a Vickers .303 inch machine gun and wheeled armoured cars with a heavy machine gun of .5 inch calibre. There was a sandpit a few yards up from the level crossing and they practised firing their guns into the sand. They left and I suppose they went to the Middle East.

When the Battle of Britain was being fought in the sky over England I was at the village school on Albury Heath. We often used to see Hurricanes and Spitfires flying quite low over the Heath. I remember that the Spitfires used to whistle as they flew.

I remember standing in our playground one morning in September and watching a Heinkel Bomber flying over. It was being chased by two British fighters who each made a firing pass at it. This appeared to have no effect on the bomber which kept on flying south. The British fighters gave up and flew away. Perhaps they were out of ammunition. When you see films of the Battle of Britain, you usually see a British fighter chasing a German plane, then a rat-tat-tat sound and the German plane goes down. In fact when a fighter fired its machine guns, the sound it made was like a piece of cloth being torn, with 160 bullets fired every second. 160 bullets fired per second also meant 160 cartridge cases falling from the wings of the plane per second on to the people below and in one case, me! I was walking in the road near Brook Lodge and a Battle was being fought above the clouds as I could hear the "tearing cloth" noises. Suddenly there was a tinkling sound and cartridge casings were bouncing off the road all around me. Luckily none of them hit me as I would not be here to tell this tale.

I did quite well at Albury School especially in English subjects and at the end of 1940, after one year, I was second in the class. I am sure my progress in English was due to my avid reading of comics like Dandy and Beano. In the autumn of 1940 I left the summerhouse at Brook Lodge and moved into the school cottage and shared a room with Sommer.

There was a searchlight battery on the opposite hill at Farley Green about 600 yards away and one night in the summer of 1940 the air raid sirens went and a single bomber flew over. I was still living in the summerhouse at this time, which had large windows at the front. You could tell the German bombers by their unsynchronised engines which made a pulsating throbbing noise. The bomber must have had a spare bomb and decided to drop it on the searchlight. The bomb seemed to whistle down for ages and I ducked under the bedclothes, not that it would have done me any good with all the glass. There was a very loud crash as the bomb exploded. I later went up to the searchlight battery and found that the bomb had missed its target by only 30 yards making a crater about 5 yards across. I used to have a ladies bicycle, a "James" which my mother bought me and I used to ride it around locally. We used to play football and cricket on the playing field but I was never any good at it. I was scared stiff of that hard cricket ball and was usually bowled out fairly quickly. We had a very good grounding in cricket at our private school and knew all the positions, like "slips" and "silly mid on".

My mother was keen that I should go to a secondary school and I had started at a secondary school in Czechoslovakia in 1938, two and a half years before. The only options were the State school in Guildford, which only took Guildford residents, or the fee paying Grammar school or Junior Technical school. The fees of the Grammar school were too high and the entrance exam too tough, so my mother was advised to enter me for the Junior Tech, starting January 1941. I took the entrance exam in September at Albury School together with a boy called Betts who was easily top of the class. Later that month Betts had an accident with a shotgun, shot himself in the stomach and tragically died. Each intake at the Junior Tech had 24 pupils three times a year. I passed the entrance exam in 24th place. If Betts had lived, I am sure he would have got in and I would have failed. I passed on my English subjects, my maths was still terrible. I think I was the first boy from Albury School to ever go to a secondary school and must have led the way, later others at the school applied and passed in subsequent terms. My mother must have found it quite difficult to pay the fees out of her earnings as a cook.

I started at the Junior Technical School in January 1941. The school had the previous year moved from Park Street in the centre of Guildford to the Technical College in Stoke Park. At that time the college had a large playing field which stretched from the college to Nightingale Road. This has all now disappeared with buildings, car



parks and children's playground. The main building itself has had another storey added to it. We shared the building with the Wandsworth Girls School, which had been evacuated from London.

I used to have to catch the Tillingbourne Valley bus at Brook which took me to Park Street. I then had to catch an Aldershot and District bus from Park Street to Woking which passed the college. I used to be given free bus tickets. The only uniform that I remember we had was our peaked cap in navy blue with the front panel in our respective "House" colours, Shakespeare red, Stephenson yellow, Newton green and Kelvin, my house, purple. A metal badge with the Guildford Arms was pinned to the front panel. In February 1941 I left Brook Lodge and joined my mother in Wonersh. My stepfather Ernst Graf had also been released from internment on the Isle of Man and for the first time since Prague, we were a united family once more. We lived in the servants wing of Wonersh Chase, a large house built in the Italian style in 1937. My mother and Ernst had one room. A German maid, Traudl, whom we had known from our days in Prague, had another and I shared a bedroom with three other evacuee boys. I used to catch a small "Dennis" bus from The Grantley Arms to Park Street,

## Chapter 5

### Wonersh 1940

My mother got the job of cook at Wonersh Chase in May 1939. Having come to England on a domestic visa, she first moved to the hostel at Brook Lodge then moved to Wonersh.

Wonersh Chase, now called Wonersh House, was built by Captain Dovetil in 1937 in the Italian style, in white with grounds of about 50 acres, including a lake, a pond and a river. Captain Dovetil had retired from the Indian Army where, I believe, he had been in the cavalry. Unfortunately, he did not have time to enjoy his new house, as he died in his car in Bramley of a heart attack in early 1939. His wife whom we called Madam was about 40 years of age in 1939 and they had three children, Barry 18, Paula 16 and Peter 13.

There was a large garage with a flat above, occupied by the chauffeur, Mr Phillips, and his wife. There was a head gardener, Mr Taylor, and an assistant gardener. There were two chambermaids from Wales, Cicely aged 19 and her sister Hilda, about 17. They had taken the maids jobs to escape poverty in Wales. Hilda was very pretty. Mrs Taylor showed my mother the basics of the kitchen and after two weeks left her to manage on her own. My mother of course could not speak any English and in the early days had to use sign language. Madam would come to the kitchen in the morning, decide the menu and tell my mother how many guests were expected. In those days tradesmen would call, be given the order, and then deliver.

Every month or so, the chauffeur would take Madam in the Humber Super Snipe to London to shop at Harrods.

Every morning Madam would take a stroll around the estate with the dogs. There were many mature trees in the grounds because Lord Grantley had a mansion about 100 yards from the new house. This had been pulled down. The new house had a servant's wing with a kitchen, large larder, pantry and sitting room downstairs, with four bedrooms upstairs. The main house had an entrance lobby, a large open hall with staircase in three flights, with a veranda beyond. To the right was the smoking room, which led into the sitting room. To the left was an enormous lounge with double aspect windows and a schoolroom (games room and children's books). Upstairs on the right were four bedrooms, i.e. green room, pink room, etc. and bathrooms. On the left was an enormous en-suite master bedroom overlooking the park and two more bedrooms. Doors connected into the servant's wing. The house was built to a very high quality.



The grounds comprised of an inner park with lawns and a kitchen garden with outbuildings. The outer park consisted of a large meadow rising up to a hill with a large lake bordering the church beyond. On a lower level was a smaller lake and lower still, was a stream of the Wey and Arum Canal. There was a bridge over the stream and a further boundary almost to Limersh Wood in Bramley. It must have been at least a mile to walk around the estate.

In the early years, 1939-40-41, Madam could run the whole estate; wages, food, fuel, rates, etc. for £15 per week. Wages were very low and food and lodgings were free. You were at the call of Madam 24 hours per day with one day off per week.

In 1939 children were evacuated from London and the Chase, being a large house, took three boys; Richard aged 10 the "baby", Ron and Bill Taaffe aged about 12, all Cockney and we all shared the same bedroom. They were always telling stories and one story that always had us in fits of laughter, was about this foreign gent who goes into a large store and asks: "I want a sheet", the assistant mistaking the words, tries to direct him to the toilet. They all went to the village school. "Rabbit" Jenkins left us in 1940, his father, a stocky man in a bowler hat, waistcoat and watch and chain, arrived to take him home.

As the maids were Welsh and spoke with a Welsh dialect, my mother, learning English, copied their dialect so she always in future spoke English with a German/Welsh accent. Around the time I arrived in Wonerh, the maid Cecily had gone back to Wales. The two sisters had a great time in the evenings as there were lots of soldiers around. Cecily was replaced by Traudl, a Sudeten German woman in her mid twenties. We had met her while on holidays in 1937, and at that time she was the girlfriend of a German émigré, a friend of Ernst and we met them again in Prague. I don't know what happened to her boyfriend, whether they broke up or whether he didn't make it to England. She must have come on a domestic visa like my mother; she turned out to be a right "bitch".

There were some soldiers billeted next door who used to come and use our servants quarters' bathroom. I presume the officers were allowed to use the three bathrooms in the main house. They used to wait in our sitting room to wait their turn to bathe. Traudl would sit opposite them, with her knees up and no knickers on to embarrass the soldiers. She would always speak loudly about how superior the German officers were, they had swords whereas English officers had little sticks. After about six months she met a Scots Guardsman, we used to see him marching up the drive swinging his arms, and she married him.

The chauffeur, Mr Phillips, was called up early in the war and became an air gunner. The Humber was laid up and, after a while, his wife left the flat. I do not know what

happened to Mr Phillips, but at that time air gunners did not last long.

Barry, Mr Dovetil's elder son, joined the Air force in 1939 and became a pilot. We saw him once circling the house in a Tiger Moth (from Chobham) and later beating up the house in a Blenheim Bomber. He was a pilot officer when he first came on leave and a flight lieutenant when we left. He eventually became a wing commander flying bombers, when he got shot down and made a P.O.W.

Ernst was released from the Isle of Man in March 1941, having been able to prove that he was anti-nazi, and we were all together as a family for the first time since Prague. When Ernst was released, he was still wearing the clothes he had in Czechoslovakia, greenish corduroy plus fours with a matching waist length jacket and a khaki shoulder bag. Walking round Guildford and speaking German, patriotic members of the public called the police and he was arrested, suspected of being a German paratrooper. Mind you, you could forgive them for thinking that way, he certainly looked the part and there was an invasion scare on.

Although he was a bricklayer by trade, he got a job doing war work at the Guildford Glass and Metalworks as a fitter. The work was mainly for parts of warships. To pay for his keep at Wonerh, he helped out with odd jobs like mowing the lawn. We had a large "Dennis 24" motor mower with a roller trailer with a seat. I remember a large chestnut tree in the park which was unsafe, and had to be felled and Ernst and I splitting the trunk with wedges, sawing into lengths, using an axe to cut it to length for logs and stacking it in a huge pile.

We used to have about thirty chickens in a chicken house and run in a corner of the park 100 yards from the house. I was in charge of the chickens. We raised some from chicks. Every morning before school, I had to boil the chicken feed in the kitchen, a large bucket full of mash, feed the chickens and collect the eggs. There were Leghorn Rhode Island reds and light Sussex chickens. The male chickens were raised and then eaten. We used to kill them by wringing their necks, a quick stretch and twist. There was a huge cockerel, a light Sussex, whom I called Donald and was kept to keep the hens in order. Eventually he too had to go one Christmas. I could not bear to eat him.

There were also five ducks, brown speckled ones, which were kept in a house near the chickens overnight and let out in the morning. They would then march in a single file the 150 yards or so to the lake where they spent the day and march back again in the evening. They were kept for their eggs.

In 1941 Hilda, the remaining Welsh maid left to go back to Wales. We heard later that she died of a heart attack in her late teens.



There was a 1932 model Ford pickup truck parked under cover in the kitchen garden, probably laid up for lack of petrol, just like the large Humber in the garage. There was supposed to be an underground passage which linked the old mansion of Lord Grantley with the Grantley Arms in the village. We could never check this as it would have meant draining the lake.

Despite the war shortages and rationing, my mother was always expected to cook for Madam's guests, sometimes as many as six, but she always managed to cook these meals, and ours, on the Aga stove in the kitchen. There was a large Indian gong in the servants hall, a cylindrical thing 3 feet high, which was very loud, to summon guests to meals.

I mentioned the school room before, where I had access to all the books and I read lots, which also improved my English. There were lots of books on flying like the Ace series, which I read avidly, being keen on flying. All the flying was in biplanes and I suspect the authors were ex RAF. There were also adventure books like Biggles by W. E. Johns, all The Saint books by Leslie Charteris, the Tarzan books by Edgar Rice Burroughs, Jeeves by P.G. Woodhouse, the William books by Richmal Crompton, books by Rafael Sabatini, P.C. Wren, H.G. Wells, etc. There was no television to distract one from reading.

Ernst's heart was giving him trouble, probably angina. He saw the village doctor who recommended that he give up work. That was clearly impossible with our finances.

In my summer holidays in 1941 we went to Yorkshire to visit some people that my mother and I had befriended in Brook Lodge, the Fürch family. Mother, Ernst and I left early one morning and walked to Shalford via Chinthurst Lane, carrying our suitcase. It is about half a mile to Shalford station where we caught a train to Guildford, then a fast train to London. We crossed London by taxi to Kings Cross Station where we caught the train to Leeds in Yorkshire.

I was appalled when we got to Leeds as it was very depressing, all the buildings were black with grime. We took a bus to where the Fürchs lived in Heckmondwike, again I was put off by the lack of trees and sunshine. Mr Fürch, who was a glassmaker in bohemia, had got a job in charge of a bottle making factory. I was intrigued to see molten glass picked up on the end of the machine and finished milk bottles coming out at the other.

We met some more of our countrymen who had moved up north. Because of my shock at seeing Yorkshire, I was put off going there for many years. It is only in the past ten years that I have gone back. Now I love it and the sun does shine there sometimes. Because of smoke control the buildings are now clean. I still feel shock when I go to Leeds. The centre of the town is surrounded by vast acres of desert

where the factories used to be.

In September 1941 my mother had a row with Madam. Mother was not feeling well and asked for a little time off. Madam was quite rude, saying in effect "you are either well and work, or you are sick and go to the hospital". The ingratitude of it all upset my mother who had worked hard and and practically run the household. This kind of treatment might have worked with the English domestic class, but it did not work with mother, who never regarded herself as a servant but as an equal. She gave notice to leave and Madam realised she had made a mistake and backed down, but it did not work with mother as she was too upset. We moved in temporarily with Mr and Mrs Taylor, the gardener, until we found a place to rent. Madam was never able to replace mother as others did not turn out the same amount of work.

We looked at a house in Shamley Green but finally settled on renting 103 Grange Road in Stoughton, Guildford. Mrs Dovetil and mother never met again and we heard in 1983 that she had had a stroke and was in a home. Mr Taylor died in the 1950's and we visited Mrs Taylor a couple of times at Bramley. The last time we met was in 1983 when mother and I visited her in a flat in a home in Cranleigh. She was aged 93 then and her son had just died.

I still look back with pleasure at the time I spent in Wonersh and I wish we could have stayed longer and perhaps bought a house locally.

In the 1960's the Chase was sold to an English Lord who built a swimming pool in the grounds. After some scandal in which his wife run off with the chauffer, he sold the place. It was bought by a Kuwaiti business man who changed the name to Wonersh House, who is now Lord of the manor. Madam's youngest son Peter (Tubbs) Dovetil now owns Busbridge Lakes near Godalming.



At Wonersh Chase. Cecily, my Mother, Hilda and unknown



## Chapter 6

### Stoughton

We rented our new home at 103 Grange Road, Stoughton near Guildford in September 1942. The house was owned by Mr Puttick a retired police sergeant who had been widowed. He moved in with one of his children and let the house. The house was a semi-detached one, built in 1931. We rented it furnished so there was a lot of Victorian style furniture. It had an 80 foot rear garden and halfway along was an air raid shelter which was shared with No 101 and was flooded a lot of the time.

From the start, money was short because of the rent, we had to have lodgers. Ernst still worked at the glass works and mum had to find part time work doing cleaning. The lodger we had was a friend of Ernst's and ours, Richard Kretschmer, a German émigré, a Social Democrat like Ernst, who fled his home in 1933. I think he was the chairman of his local branch of the Party in Thuringia. We first met him with Ernst on the border on holiday. We met him again in Prague. Of medium height, dapper and always smartly dressed, he was a bit older than Ernst, born about 1890.

He was our first lodger. Our next lodgers were a Sudeten German, Mr Moc and his son aged about 18 whom we had met in Brook Lodge. They shared the back bedroom. There was no Mrs Moc, so I assume he was a widower. We got on fairly well with them but they tended to keep to themselves. I used to keep chickens in the back garden to get eggs.

When I left the Junior Technical School in December 1942, I was at a loss as to what to do. I was then aged 15 1/2, there was no job counselling at school like there is now and I was always near the bottom of the class. Good at English and Science but poor at Maths. My parents tried to get extra tuition for me and I remember going to a house in Onslow Village to see a teacher who could give me tuition. However that fell through and eventually I started evening classes at the Sandfield School to brush up my maths. After a few months I transferred back to the Technical College to do a three year City Guilds course in "Fitting & Turning".

As far as getting a job was concerned, it might have been better if I could have got an office job, being good at English and languages, but it was not to be. I started work as an apprentice toolmaker at the Guildford Glass & Metal works in Portsmouth Road. The site was formerly a brewery and the glass works had expanded from glass to making metal windows. They then went into war work, making hatches and ammunition storage containers for the Navy and any other work. There was a large machine shop, fitting shops and welding facilities, both gas and arc. My stepfather and Richard Kretschmer worked there and Joe Hein

from Brook Lodge days. I started there as a toolmaker apprentice at £1 per week on a three year apprenticeship. Mr Hewlett, the works manager, was in charge of my training. The works covered a large areas from Portsmouth Road to Bury Street as far as the Cannon pub. The area is now covered by the Generating Board building. At that time the brewery buildings were still in place with the old malting floor, now our canteen, and going up several stories higher into towers. It all looked a bit unsafe. Ernst, Richard and I would always have coffee for lunch using a tin of Lyons ground coffee. A few spoonfuls were put into a saucepan of boiling water, stirred to let the grounds settle and then drink it with our sandwiches.

The firm had about 100 employees, about half of them women. The men were either old or young with the middle age group skilled men in reserved occupation, not liable for call-up. There were about 10 foreign nations, Belgians and South Americans. The women were generally semi-skilled and working on machines or welding. The workers wore bib and brace overalls and the welders, boiler suits.

Three evenings a week I used to go to evening classes at the technical College for my City & Guilds Fitters & Turners Diploma.

In a part of the old brewery site there was the Hadleigh spectacle frame factory which employed about 30 girls. The air raid shelters were in brick vaulted cellars where the beer barrels used to be kept. We did not have many air raids whilst I was there, although once I heard a flying bomb go over with its distinctive staccato roar like an unsilenced motor bike. Everyone had to do their turn on fire watching duties which meant there were always 4 workers available to put out fires. A flat in Bury Street with 4 beds was used for the firewatchers who were expected to sleep in their clothes so that they could turn out immediately the air raid warning went. All factories and offices had firewatchers. We were all given a course on the various incendiary bombs and how to put them out, crawling through smoke filled rooms. There were no fire raids on Guildford although several times we watched raids on London with its intense anti aircraft barrage (which probably did more damage than the bombs). I used to have a spare time job as a "fire service messenger". This consisted of cycling from home in Stoughton whenever the air raid siren sounded and cycling as fast as possible to Onslow Street Fire HQ in Guildford. My job was to carry messages to various fire stations if we were bombed. Luckily we never were and usually the "all clear" siren sounded not long after I arrived. For every turnout, I was paid £2, twice my weekly wage!

I quite liked my time at the glassworks and I did most of the jobs and made simple tools like chisels. We used to work 5 1/2 days a week with one week holiday per year which was general with manual workers. Once we had a Mr Payne working in our office. He was a draughtsman working there for a few weeks. I chatted to him in

the office and he said "why don't you try to become a draughtsman", work in an office, clean job with a suit and tie. In later years I remembered Mr Payne and I did eventually become a draughtsman and I was one for 42 years.

We were friendly with a Sudeten German refugee family called Schmidt who after leaving the Surrey Hills Hostel moved to a cottage above Peaslake, rented for them by the Czech Refugee Trust Fund. It was a nice little cottage with a large garden, running water, but no electricity so that all lighting and cooking was with paraffin. The Schmidts had 3 children, Emil, about 2 years older than me, Elsie (Elisabeth) 2 years younger than me and Helga, born in England in 1939. I always had a crush on Elsie but I am afraid it was not reciprocated. I used to cycle out from Stoughton on my big upright bike on Sunday, spend the day with the Schmidts and then cycle home via Newlands Corner. For the last 2 years of the war, Emil was in the Home Guard. The end of the war came and we had a "VE Day" celebration in Grange Road.

In the autumn of 1945, I was visiting the Schmidts in Peaslake as I often did but this time Emil told me he had heard that the American military government in Germany was looking for German speaking "Allied" nationals to work in censorship in Germany. He had already applied and was about to have an interview. I was quite interested in maybe going to Germany with Emil and I also applied.

I got my interview and had to report to Dean Street in London, off Oxford Street. I knew how to get around London quite well by this time using the tube. The house in Dean Street was an office block and I was given various tests to prove my knowledge of German, verbal, written, reading, especially reading handwriting and hearing various dialects etc. Anyway, I passed this hurdle and then had several more interviews at the American Embassy. I also had to go to the Czech Embassy in Kensington because the Czechs had first claim on me as far as military service was concerned. I saw an official there and they allowed me to serve with the US Army. The next step was a medical and for this I had to report to the US Embassy again in February/March 1946. A group of us then went by Bedford Utility bus to an American military hospital near Stockbridge in Hampshire. All the other occupants on the bus, a few soldiers going for treatment at the hospital and a group of about ten who were young American citizens living in England, who were about to be drafted and first had to have a medical. The hospital on a hill near Stockbridge was quite large and we spent most of the day there having various tests and a few jabs. I was the odd one out being non American. We went home to London on the same bus together with a couple of pretty nurses, all First Lieutenants, from the hospital, having time off in London.

A couple of weeks later I heard I had been accepted and had to go to Dean Street

again, this time to get my uniform. There was a Quartermaster store there. I struggled home with a huge kitbag.

I left for Germany on the 1 April 1946 and had to report in uniform at Liverpool Street Station. I said goodbye to my parents, feeling quite self-conscious in my nice American uniform, lugged my kitbag and got into the taxi.

## Chapter 7 Germany

We all met up on a platform at Victoria Station. About twenty-four of us. About half were women. A couple in their twenties, most in their thirties or forties. The men were about in the same age group. About in their mid twenties. I was the only teenager. About 90% were Jewish. The man who was put in charge of us was called "Ellis". We travelled to Dieppe in the early hours. We spent hours sitting in the train in Dieppe, leaving at midday, getting to Paris after dark. The French rail network had been so damaged in the war that a journey, which should take two hours, took eight. We got to Paris and checked into the hotel "Bristol" near the Louvre. Most of the others went out on the town hoping to pick up some girls but I stayed in and went to bed! We had the whole of the following day in Paris and I made the most of it. My roommate at the hotel, named Perez, had been in Paris before and had served with the Americans and told me where to go. I saw most of the sights, and went to the top of the Eiffel Tower using the metro network.

We left from the Gare de L'est in the evening for Munich. When we had arrived in Paris we were met by a First Lieutenant who would be in charge of us until we got to Munich. We travelled all night arriving at Strasbourg on the German border in the early morning. We got a sort of breakfast from a field kitchen beside the tracks. Then on through Germany. I was amazed at the amount of devastation. All the towns were damaged. One large town called Pfortzheim had not a single house standing. Being a troop trains, there were no civilians on our train of course. There were German children beside the track begging for food or chocolate. Everywhere along the tracks, there were shattered trains, some blown onto their sides.

We got to Munich after dark, twenty-four hours after leaving Paris, and transferred onto some two and a half ton trucks to take us to the camp at Pullach, eight miles outside Munich on the south side. Pullach was a large camp built for the SS. The main part was built pre-war. Good quality houses, an assembly hall, large headquarters building and a large detached house used as a kindergarten. There was an extensive underground bunker system, bomb proof and gas proof with its own power plant, offices, dormitories etc and linked by a tunnel to the main buildings



including a large surface bunker about 200 yards away. Beside the brick built camp, there were about a dozen large wooden barrack blocks. It was to one of the wooden barracks that I was moved. I shared a room with three other men from our group. The rooms had four beds. They were, Otto Stark about twenty-five years old, a Jewish actor. Schadek in his mid thirties, also Jewish and Perez in his mid thirties. Perez had served with the US forces before and knew all the tricks. Perez was what we called a BTO (a big time operator) who could get you anything on the black market. I was put off by his attitude, as I was at that time a rather naive young man with high morals.

When I was about to go to Germany, I was contacted by a Mr Kastner, a German official of the Social Democratic Party. I joined the party and was officially sent to Germany as a courier/liaison man. Mr Kastner gave me the names of Germans to contact and also the names of a couple of our men already with the US forces in the Munich area. Being in the forces, our mail was not censored and we could therefore transfer literature and messages to the German Social Democratic Party. I carried my work out conscientiously. Mr Kastner later wrote to my stepfather saying how pleased he was with me. The other two army contacts, Langhammer and Gabert, did not seem to be doing much to help the party.

It was about a quarter mile walk to the mess hall, which was actually outside the camp in the Pullach Village. A very large hall overlooking the Isar River. The food was very good with breakfast a buffet service with a wide choice. For the first time I encountered flapjacks with butter and syrup. The food was prepared by German civilians but with an army Sergeant in charge to make sure we got American food. The food in the evening was very good with waitress service. (Good looking girls whom we found out were the girlfriends of the SS who used to be there and who carried on the same function for the US army). In the evenings, we had a resident four-piece band playing. Middle-aged German civilians usually playing the same tunes, some of which I can still remember.

We were treated like officers and we wore officers uniforms but without the brass buttons and insignia. Ours being a triangular shoulder flash with "US" in blue. My pay was like that of an army master sergeant. The waitresses were not allowed inside the camp, evident by the number of used condoms around the perimeter fence. Half of the inmates of our camp were female in uniform. Either allied civilian ie Danish (a large contingent) Belgian, and refugees from England like me. All the ones from England were Jewish. There were also American women, mostly middle aged, who had slightly different uniforms and who considered themselves superior. Half the Danish girls and all the Belgian girls were good looking and sexy and I am sure a large number were ex-prostitutes.

As with all American army establishments, the facilities were excellent. There was the "Post House" which was a large building with a coffee shop. Large hall and stage and scope for record playing, books, a boxing ring, cinema shows. The hall was used for dances, cinema and stage shows like travelling USO shows with American singers and dancers. Several times we had the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra playing there. Again the Post House was run by an army sergeant, with German civilians. Similarly the motor pool with our two and half ton trucks, one and a half ton trucks and Jeeps was run by an American officer and sergeant with German mechanics and drivers. The camp hospital where we were given our injections (shots) was staffed entirely by an American army doctor and army nurses (2nd lieutenant). The camp was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Doidge, a regular army, West Pointer (America's Sandhurst) and a regular adjutant 1st Lieutenant Don Castle. There was also a flamboyant Texan, Captain Matthews, an ex tanker. All the higher echelons in our organisation, the section heads, were middle aged Americans, probably picked for their business experience, but who could not speak German, so the actual work was carried out by German speaking allied civilians.

The work of our organisation, CCD "Civilian Censorship Division" was to censor all German mail, telegraph and telephones. Mail was collected from the post office and first went to "scrutiny" where I worked. The letters were first checked against a "black list" of ex Nazis and criminals. These letters were taken out and given special treatment and checked for invisible ink, microdot and code. All other mail was censored in the normal way. All telephone lines were tapped. Each operator had about twenty lines on their switchboard. When a call came through, a light showed, one could then flip a switch and listen in to both sides of the conversation. If the call sounded interesting, the operator could switch on a tape recorder and record it. Hilarity was sometimes caused when the conversation between two prostitutes discussing their clients was switched through to the loudspeaker system for the benefit of the whole building. Telegraphs were also censored.

In the American zone of occupation, Southern Germany, there were three main censorship offices. At Munich where I was, at Frankfurt and at Kulmbach in Franconia. The object of it all was to catch Nazis who might be in hiding and black marketers and other criminals. The whole country was under military government "AMG".

In our camp and generally everywhere where the army is, there are PX's or "Post Exchanges", an army shop, where we could buy our weekly allowance of 200 cigarettes, chocolate and a small amount of tobacco and liquor (rot gut Italian brandy made from woodpulp). We were paid in US Dollars and we used this in the PX. German civilians had their own currency, Marks, which could not buy much. A week's wage for a German was 100 Marks. 20 cigarettes 1/10 of our weekly

allowance could be sold on the blackmarket for 100 Marks. When we went out walking and smoking we were always followed. When we threw away the butt end (there were no filter tips in those days) this was immediately picked up. Five butt ends made one new cigarette. Twenty cigarettes equalled one week's wages. I was told one packet would buy the services of a prostitute.

We used to walk from our camp to the local railway station, about ¼ mile, then catch a special train which would unload us at a station near to the main post office where we worked., another ¼ mile. Ditto in the evening. We could travel free on all public transport rail and trams.

A facet of German post-war mentality was the way they obeyed anyone in uniform. They were shouted at and bullied by the uniformed tram and train conductors and always meekly obeyed.

As I mentioned earlier on, I had contacts via the party in Munich, one being the Mortl family who were ex social democrats, obviously keeping low during the Hitler period. They owned a business making breezblocks and had a car, an "Adler" Saloon. They had a son not much younger than I and lived in a large flat on the outskirts of Munich. I used to go there about once a week. Their flat was about a ½ mile walk from the station. They also had a friend who used to be a social democratic member of parliament in 1933. They also were friendly with the Bavarian prime minister. Unfortunately, the one time that he came to visit the Mortls, I was unable to come. However, I supplied them with cigars and other goodies.

I got around in their car. They used to call me their Ami baby (the Americans were called "Amis" by the Germans) and baby because i was 19. There were lots of people in our camp who were always out "on the make". Whenever there was anything going, they would get it from the PX. One pair of Danish fellows heard there was some interesting loot going in the French Zone of Austria in Tyrol which borders on Bavaria. They got to Innsbruck by crossing the border illegally, because they had no papers, getting shot at by border guards on the way. In Innsbruck they joined a queue of French soldiers (who gave them funny looks). However, they persevered because with such a queue there must be something interesting at the end. When they did get inside they found they had been queuing at the French army brothel.

From the top floor of our office building you could see the Alps and one day not long after I got there I was joined by a dapper little guy called Heinic who also shared my adventurous spirit and we decided to go to the Alps. We always had Saturdays and Sundays free so one Saturday morning we stood on the road to Salzburg and

hitchhiked. First in a six by six small six wheeler army truck which took us on the Salzburg motorway and dropped us at an army coffee and donut kiosk run by American Red Cross ladies. Then a lift by a German couple in a Mercedes who took us past Rosenheim. Then another army truck took us to Chiemsee. By this time it was lunchtime and we were getting a bit hungry so we went to an army post and asked for food. The Sergeant grumbled a bit but eventually gave us some enormous slices of bread and cheese. We then caught the boat to the island of Herremchiemsee on which there is a palace built by King Ludwig of Bavaria. This is a copy of the palace of Versailles but without the side wings. (When I later went to the real Palace of Versailles in France I realised the German version was much better). Having seen the palace, we retraced our steps to the shore but instead of hitching back to Munich we caught the train which was much easier. Train travel was free for us.

A week later we set off by train from Munich early on Saturday to Salzburg in Austria which was in the American Zone of occupation. We did a bit of sightseeing and went to the Opera House down by the river. They were performing the "Barber of Seville". Afterwards we went to an army transients hostel and talked the main in charge, a "PFC" to let us stay. Not very luxurious, but welcoming. In the morning we had breakfast in another army canteen and then went to Berchtesgaden. I think we hitchhiked there. Anyway we got there and then went on to the Königsee, a lake surrounded by mountains. We had a boat trip, got back to Berchtesgaden and caught the last train back to Munich and the camp bus back home very late.

A week later we took the train to Garmisch-Partenkirchen, the Skiing resort. We changed to the mountain (cogwheel) railway that climbs through a long tunnel and comes out about 500 feet below the summit. Then we took the cable car to near the summit at about 10,000 feet. To get to the summit cross you have to climb along a ridge for 50 feet, then cross a rather hairy gap with a 3,000 foot drop on one side, then climb an iron ladder for 10' to get to the cross. Heinic went a couple of steps up the ladder and then froze with fear. I tried to persuade him to go up all the while standing in the hairy gap. In the end I had to move his feet one rung at a time while he kept his eyes shut. Still we got to the top. I had to repeat the process on the way down. We caught the train back to Munich. I went to the summit cross on several other occasions after that but when I went there in 1988, I was going to do it again but chickened out (the wisdom of age?) Mind you by 1988 the whole summit areas had been built up so that the summit is actually lower than the buildings and not so impressive as it once was.

I did not do any more trips with Heinic, maybe it was because Hermann Ollenhauer whom I had known in England arrived, we formed a new group of friends, and I believe he was moved to another area.



My new friends were Hermann Ollenhauer who was about a year younger than I and I lost my place as the youngest man in camp. Olly had teamed up with an Englishman Jim Hilder who was 23. I wondered how Jim got into or organisation because he could not speak German. The fourth member of our group was a 24 year old Danish school teacher, Vagn Borgholt. Whereas Olly and Jim were extrovert, Vagn was the quiet type and he and I were great pals. Another lad who sometimes went with us was a 22 year old Belgian Jew named Buchholz who had escaped from Belgium in 1940 and joined the Royal Navy as a boy. He was always very worldly wise having been around. There was a riding stable in Pullach and we used to hire horses and ride in the woods around Pullach. Once I was galloping along when we hit a soft patch, the horse sank on its knees and I went over its head landing in the mud. I looked around to see the horse doing a head stand just behind me. Luckily for me, it fell back onto its feet instead of on top of me. Buch Holz was a keen rider and we went out quite a few times.

Naturally with half the people in camp being women there was quite a lot of sexual activity going on. We had lots of dances and parties at the post house but I was too young and naive to take part in anything serious. The nearest I got was to cuddle up to a beautiful Danish girl, a model type about six feet tall, after a party.

I had a girlfriend in the camp. She was a waitress in our camp coffee shop. She was 23 and her name was Hilda Pautz. She came from Halle in Saxony and fled West before the Russians at the end of the war. She lived a mile outside the camp and I used to walk her home. I took her to Munich to see the opera a couple of times. In the spring of 1947 she decided to go back home to East Germany. We quite liked each other but she was teased for baby snatching.

I made quite a few trips by rail to see my friend Emil Schmidt from Peaslake who was stationed in Heidelberg. I would leave Munich on Friday evening, travel all night and arrive in Heidelberg in the early hours. Then I would walk to Emil's digs in the town. He had fallen in love with a German girl whose family lived outside Heidelberg along the Neckar River. I met her family and Emil used to take me around Heidelberg and the army nightclub. Emil's girlfriend had a friend named Ria who became my girlfriend. I did the trip about four times. Emil came to visit me a couple of times. He knew a family in the centre of Munich, mother, father and two daughters in their early twenties. The family owned the costumiers that supplied clothes to the Munich Opera House and the basement of their house was crammed with costumes. I went on an outing with Emil and the younger daughter, a pretty dark-haired nervy girl, on a trip to Lake Starnberg, south of Munich. We went rowing on the lake, a popular tourist spot. I think the daughter was keen on Emil. I quite liked the other daughter. Of course there was a great shortage of young German men. A lot had died in the war and in 1946 few of the millions of prisoners of war had returned home so American soldiers were in great demand.

Emil and I decided to go on leave to England at Christmas 1946 when we had a week's leave. First I had to travel to Heidelberg to Emil's flat where Emil and his girlfriend shared one bed, while I shared the other with Ria. Ria was a big buxom girl with dark hair. During the latter part of the war she was an auxiliary with the anti-aircraft defences and served on an anti-aircraft gun. She was a couple of years older than me. I did not see her again. This was on a Friday evening, the following morning we went to Frankfurt to the "American Airways" office and from there by bus to the airfield where we boarded a Douglas DC-4, 4-engine airliner. It had a central gangway with 2 seats each side and a tricycle undercarriage. A great improvement on the Dakota. We landed at Northolt which was London Airport. Terminal buildings consisted of a few huts. By that time it was evening and we had to travel through Central London. There were still lots of American troops in London and they were very popular with the girls. Emil had a chat with one whom he had known in Germany but who was now obviously a prostitute in London. Emil was very attractive to women and he was a very charming fellow who made friends with everybody. It was odd that he was besotted with his girlfriend in Heidelberg, who was to put it bluntly "plain", although she had a nice personality. She had been raped by the Russians in Berlin at the end of the war. They later got married after he left the army and settled in Frankfurt. To get back to our story: We visited my stepfather's workplace in Send and visited Emil's folks in Peaslake and the Hiekes who were still living at Brook Lodge. I thought my stepfather had aged a lot in the 9 months that I had been away.

After a week we went back to London and out to Northolt for our flight back. There was no direct flight to Frankfurt so we took a British European Airways Dakota to Paris. We had a few hours to spare in Paris so went up the Eiffel Tower. We said goodbye at the Gare de L'est and took our separate trains to Germany. I arrived in the early morning in Munich and managed to catch the shuttle bus back to camp.

When I got back there was a lot of snow round our camp which lasted for a couple of months. This was the time when England had the great freeze with fuel shortages. We went skiing most weekends. A couple of times we went to Bayrisch Zell in a converted 2 ½ ton truck which had a steel box with windows on the back for passengers. Heat was provided by passing the exhaust pipe through. We must have stayed overnight there, but I cannot remember. In order to ski down mountains we had to climb up them first. There were no ski lifts, which meant putting sealskins on the underside of the ski, so that you could slide forwards, but the seal fur prevented you sliding backwards. We had all bought a set of skis by this time from a factory in Munich. The skis were what are now called cross country skis. Downhill skis had not been invented. With cross country skis the toes are held on the ski, but the heel can lift to enable you to "run". To turn downhill you either had to do a "Telemark" or a "Stem Christiana". Turning with modern skis is very easy by comparison. Also

with modern skis if you fall they come off, the old type did not and you were more likely to break a leg.

An interesting thing happened one day when we had climbed to the top of a mountain. Shooting downhill at speed, I heard a crack and the next moment was doing the splits with one foot stopped and the other still moving. The tip had broken from one ski. I had no option but to take the broken ski off and continue the descent sitting on one ski.

At other times we would take the train to Garmisch and ski either at the Zugspitzplatt Glacier or ski down from the cable car station Kreuzeck back to Garmisch. This run was quite hairy as it was a narrow track with trees either side so it was difficult to slow down and besides others were following down.

When the skiing season was over we decided to go mountain climbing. All these services were provided by the army recreation unit. We stayed in a hut near the Kreuzeck in Garmisch and with the aid of 2 guides practiced rope handling and how to use pitons on some school rocks. Whilst there, we climbed the Alpspitze. In the Berchtesgaden area we climbed the Watzmann, Germany's second highest mountain. This was a two day trip with our guide Martin. The first night was spent in a small hut about two thirds up the mountain. Early next morning we went up to the lower of the two summits separated by a 20 yard ridge. Because the ridge was heavily iced and because we had no ice picks or crampons, we had to leave the higher summit. In the same area we climbed the Untersberg, again with Martin as our guide.

At Easter in 1947 we four, Olly, Vagn, Jim and I decided to go on holiday to Paris. We arrived at the Hotel Ambassador which catered solely for American servicemen. This is situated in the centre of town near the Opera. We had two rooms on the top floor. When we arrived, the first thing we had to do was get some French currency, since we had only a small amount of Dollars. The way to do this was to sell cigarettes on the Black Market (we had an allowance of 200 a week). We had been saving up and had about 3 cartons each. We went to a cafe across the road and they put us in contact with a taxi driver who "knew someone". By this time it was night and he drove us into the back streets of Montmartre. We stayed in the taxi when some men came up. They looked Arab and the leader, or spokesman, was small wearing a port pie hat and thick "brothel creeper" shoes. He suggested a very good price for our cigarettes but he said "hand us your cartons and we will give you the money". We did not like the sound of that so we said no, give us the money first, and we will give you the cartons. "Oh no, you give us the cartons first" they said. It was obvious to us that as soon as we handed them over they would run off or slit our throats so we told the taxi driver to drive off fast.

We eventually sold the cartons at the cafe across from the hotel, cartons and money changing hands under the table whilst we had an aperitif. We stayed on the top floor of the hotel. Olly and I shared one room whilst Vagn and Jim shared the other. We spent the week sightseeing, visiting Sacre Coeur, Notre Dame, the Arc de Triomphe and the Eiffel Tower etc. In the evening we went to Montmartre which was not far from the hotel to visit shows like the Folies Bergere and Casino de Paris. These shows were much more daring than the Windmill in London.

There were always "girls" hanging around outside the hotel. We chatted to four of them and suggested that they come up to our rooms and they were quite willing. Unfortunately, their high heels clacking across the foyer alerted the concierge who told them to leave, under their loud protest. We then had the idea that they should take their shoes off. Then Jim and Vagn would ask the concierge for our keys and while his head was down under the counter, Olly and I would sneak them past. Unfortunately the concierge looked up too soon before we disappeared into the lift. The week ended all too quickly and we took the train back to Munich.

To travel to places like Garmisch or Berchtesgaden, which were classed as army recreational areas, one needed "travel orders" to show to MPs (Military Police). We got over this by Vagn taking blank forms from the adjutants office and then forging the adjutants' signature. This enabled us to get free food and accommodation at these places. One of our favourite places was the Hotel Schiffmeister right by Lake Konigsee near Berchtesgaden. When I went back there again 41 years later, I was appalled by the change. The lake is still the same, but what was a tiny village with 2 hotels is now a sprawl of apartments and car parks.

In June 1947 my contract with the army was ended and I tried to stay on and find other work with the US Army. There were jobs going with the Army depots in Italy and Greece as guards. I might have joined the regular Air Force but all this came to nothing as my mother sent me a telegram to say that Ernst, my stepfather, had died. He had a heart attack in bed and died immediately. I could not go to the funeral. He was cremated in Woking and I had to wind my affairs up in Germany to get travel orders etc. I sent one of my suitcases by mail which unfortunately never arrived (probably stolen) and lost all my photo albums among other souvenirs. I travelled back via Paris staying at the Hotel Ambassador again, then from Gare St Lazar to Dieppe for the ferry to Newhaven. I foolishly omitted to declare a watch I had bought to customs who found it and they confiscated the watch and I had to pay twice the value of the watch as a fine. Not a nice return home.

I returned to both Garmisch and Berchtesgaden about 40 years later, three times in all to Berchtesgaden, but was simply unable to find the places we used to frequent.



As I might have mentioned earlier, the group of close friends I had were Ollie, Hermann Ollenhaver, a German living in England and a few months younger than me, whom I had known in England, Jim Hilder, English with a French mother, 3 years older, Vagn BOrgholt, a Danish schoolteacher, 3 years older and also Per Saxman, another Dane, 6 years older. After we all returned home, we kept in contact by means of a circular letter going from place to place, each person adding news. This lasted about 4 years. I met Ollie twice again. Once when he and Jim visited me in Guildford and we went to Newlands Corner together. The second time I met Ollie in London in 1948. I keep in touch with him at Christmas time. He stayed in Germany after the army. His older brother and wife had moved to Munich. His mother and father, who became the leader of the Social Democratic Party and Opposition Leader in Parliament in Bonn.

I met Vagn once again when he came to London to see the 1948 Olympic Games. We went to Wembley Stadium for the last day of athletics and saw the finish of the marathon. That was the last time I saw him. He contributed to the circular letter till 1949, then dropped out and have heard nothing from him since.

I had more contact with Jim who lived in Borehamwood, North London, and I visited him there a few times. When I bought my motorbike in London, Jim rode it home for me, with me on the back. He had a motorbike of his own and later I will describe a tour I did with him. I went to his wedding in 1950 and in 1952 Ailsa and I stopped overnight at their home in Borehamwood (a prefab) on our bike tour of Scotland. At one time we had thought of going together but Jim called it off. That was the last time I saw him. Shortly after they emigrated to Canada and lost contact.

I never met Per Saxman again but have recently been in contact with him. He lives in Denmark. He was always extrovert, always joking.



At Königssee 1947. From left Vagn Borgholt, Jim Hilder, me and Len Janka



At Pullach 1946



In camp 1946

## Chapter 8

### Sozis and Nazis

I have always been involved in politics; my grandfather was a staunch social democrat, as were my father, mother, uncle, and a lot of our friends. The social democrats used to hold a big annual rally in our local town of Teplitz, ten abreast and four deep, carrying long bamboo poles on which were large red flags. These were followed by the various village contingents with their flags. I was chosen to lead the rally once when I was about 9 years old carrying a (small) red flag.

On arriving in the town square there would be speeches and we would give the "clenched fist" salute, and we would sing the socialist anthems. First, the "Internationale", Nations hear the signals, rise to the final battle, and the German socialist song "brothers, to the sum, to freedom". After the rally we would march home.

The Nazis of course also had their rallies, and I remember the swastika flags draped on the houses in the square.

Each party had their semi military "militia" and their youth organisations. I was in the socialist youth, "atus". We wore a white shirt with a red triangle badge, and dark grey shorts. The Nazi youth, based on the "Hitler Youth" had pale grey shirts, and grey shorts.

We used to meet in a hall in our village, do PE and also drill and learn how to march in step. The Nazi Youth was more militaristic, and I remember seeing a large group marching along the road, and being made to sing. They were being shouted at by bigger boys acting as sergeants, and did not look very happy.

The Czechs (about a third of our village population was Czech) also had their youth organization, called Sokol".

One morning in the early summer of 1938 we looked out of our window, and there were swastikas painted all over the road. A little later I was near Wenceslas Square in Prague, having just fled there, I heard the sound of engines and turned round. It was the motorised section of the "Bodenbach" militia, with their motorcycle combinations, grey uniforms and peaked caps. I felt sad. They had pulled out, and I knew that we had lost, and the Nazis had won.

## Chapter 9

### Lost Fatherland

I have not yet mentioned in this book about the expulsion of my fellow countrymen from Czechoslovakia.

At the end of the war in 1945, the Czechoslovak government decided to expel the German speaking minority from the country which had been their homeland for 800 years. In my old village they were given a couple of hours notice to pack their belongings, take all that they could carry and were then escorted to the border with Germany by soldiers. At the border, they were searched and any valuables were stolen from them.

The Czech President, Dr Benes, decreed in a letter and I quote "everything must be taken from the Germans, leave them nothing except a handkerchief to cry on".

Three million German speaking Czechoslovakians were expelled, the biggest piece of ethnic cleansing in Europe. The ethnic cleansing carried out by the Serbs later and over which we went to war, was small by comparison.

The expelled Germans were mainly artisans, miners, engineers, glassmakers etc. They settled in Germany and helped to build the German economic miracle. The Czechs were left with an almost empty country with disastrous effects. When two thirds of the population was gone, the infrastructure suffered. Suddenly there was no baker, butcher or doctor. The Czech government asked for settlers from the Slovakian part of the country. Unfortunately, they turned out to be mainly Gypsies. They took over the houses that the Germans had left but did nothing to maintain them and when they fell down just moved to another one. They took over shops, but when all the stock had been used up, went back home! The majority of those who stayed had to be maintained by the state. The proverb "cutting off your nose to spite your face" comes to mind.



## Chapter 10

### One of the Lucky Ones

As Printed in the Unitarian Church Magazine

Gerhard ("Gerry") Höfner escaped from the Nazis in 1938 at the age of 11 and came to England as a refugee. This is how it happened.

In July 1938, when I was 11, my mother, stepfather and I had to flee our home in the Sudetenland, part of Czechoslovakia, which had been handed over to the Germans.

My stepfather was a German national, who was active in the Social Democratic Party, and had been fighting the Nazis [n the streets since the early 1930s. When Hitler came to power in 1933, my stepfather was tipped off that he was on their "death list", and he managed to flee to Czechoslovakia, where he worked as an agent on the border. It was a dangerous job, and it was here that he met my mother, who was also an active member of the Social Democratic Party.

We fled to Prague, the capital, but we knew it was only a question of time before the whole country would be taken over. The Czechs were now defenceless. The old border was mountainous, heavily forested, and heavily fortified. The new border was on the plain. They had also lost a third of their army.

We tried hard to get out of the country, but soon found out that nobody wanted refugees. One country that accepted immigrants was Bolivia, and we would go to the embassy every day to ask if our visas had arrived, only to be told; "Come back tomorrow". Always "tomorrow".

In Prague, we could not stay long at any one address, and had to move constantly. We could not let the police know where we were, as many of the Czech police were pro-Nazi, and kidnappings were frequent. My stepfather had to carry a gun at all times.

By the end of December, we were getting quite desperate. We had been introduced to the representative of the British Labour Party in Prague, a Miss Warriner, who found out that the Barbican Mission to the Jews was Planning rescue flights of Jewish children to England. The first flight was due to leave on 12th January 1939. She heard that there was a spare seat on the plane and immediately contacted us. We agreed that the only way to get out of the country was to split up.

The Barbican Mission to The Jews was an English organisation, whose aim was to convert Jews to Christianity. The refugee situation in Czechoslovakia prompted

them to rescue Jewish children, on the understanding that they would be brought up as Christians in England. Parents had to be left behind. They were disliked by both the Church of England and the Jews, who disapproved of their methods.

Miss Warriner asked the Barbican Mission representative about letting me have this spare place, but he refused, saying: "He's not Jewish". Miss Warriner persuaded him, however, that it would be wrong to let the plane go with an unfilled seat. That is how I came to England on the first flight of Jewish children from Prague.

We got to Prague airport on 12th January. It was a grassy field, as most airports were then. I was excited, I was mad on planes and flying, and I stood enraptured as I watched this great silver bird wheeling in the sky and then landing. It was a Douglas DC-3 of Dutch Airlines (KLM). I was far too excited about the flight to think about the fact that I was leaving my parents and homeland. I realise now that it must have been heart breaking for my parents at the time, since they had no prospect of a visa and did not know whether they would ever see me again.

There were 24 of us on the plane, 12 girls, 12 boys and a stewardess. We refuelled in Rotterdam and flew on to Croydon (London) airport. The girls left us, and we boys went to a church hall in Chislehurst, where we slept on the floor. We were looked after by a Swiss Couple. By law, we had to go to school, so we were sent to a local secondary school, but no attempt was made to teach us any English. We were put at the back of the class and looked at magazines.

Every two weeks more boys arrived, and we moved to a large house next door. By the end of February there were about 60 boys living there.

Good news in March, my mother arrived! She managed to get to England on a visa, which stated she had to work as a domestic. She told me that my stepfather had a visa to Belgium.

I shall always remember the dreadful day at the end of March. We were all in the lounge when we heard on the radio news bulletin that Czechoslovakia had been occupied by the Germans. I was all right, my mother had got out. However, for the majority of the boys there, their parents had not got out. There was a lot of crying and despair when they realised that they might not see their parents again. With hindsight, I doubt if many of their parents survived.

In May, my mother got a job as a cook in Wondersh, and I moved to a refugee hostel in the Guildford area, where, at last, I learned some English.

## Chapter 11

### Fate

Having spent 6 months in our Private school, at the hostel in Brook Lodge Albury, we boys had learnt enough English to go to the local primary school, the Albury Church of England school on Albury Heath. The school system at that time was that in the villages, pupils joined the primary school at the age of 5, and stayed until the leaving age of 14. If you lived in the town, like Guildford or Dorking, you could go to the local state secondary school until the age of 14. The alternatives were fee-paying school, like public, Grammar, or technical Schools, all of which had entrance exams.

We had a very bright boy at Albury School called Betts, who was top of the class in most things. He was first in English and I was second. He told me he was about to sit the entrance exam for the Guildford Junior Technical School. These schools were fairly new, founded in 1929 to produce future engineers, as against the more academic Grammar schools. The idea of technical school interested me so I spoke to my mother about the fees. She agreed to pay and I asked our headmaster if I could sit the entrance exam, which I did at our school, together with Betts. Unfortunately, soon after, Betts had an accident with a shotgun and was killed.

The Technical School had a huge catchment area, extending north to Farnborough in Hampshire. The intake was only 24 pupils per term. I passed the exam, having just scraped in on the strength of my English. I stayed near the bottom of my class for the whole of my school life, handicapped by my poor maths and difficulty with language. If Betts had lived he would certainly have passed and I would probably not have got in. Betts and I were the first pupils in the history of Albury School to take this exam. After I Joined the Technical School, others at Albury School took the exam, and in the following terms more of my former schoolmates joined me at the Tech. I was at this school for 2 years and left the sixth form aged 15 and a half.

## Chapter 12

### The Homesteaders

In a previous article in this book, I told you how I came to England. Before we all split up in Prague, we had planned to meet up in England, and then emigrate to Canada.

Unfortunately, our plans fell through, because although my mother and I had arrived in England by the spring of 1939, my stepfather could only get a visa to Belgium and could get no further. The war put a stop to our plans.

The British and Canadian governments were anxious to help the Sudeten German, mainly Social Democrat, refugees. The British government had set up the 'Czech Refugee Trust Fund' to help and to pay for the transport of refugees by train from Prague to Gdynia in Poland and by ship to London. The Canadian government wanted to help the refugees by settling them in Western Canada. Three hundred Sudeten German Social Democrat families, who had reached England in the spring of 1939 did choose to go. They sailed to Montreal and then on by rail. The Canadian government placed them near existing German settlers who had arrived in the previous decades, in the hope that they would get a warm welcome and a smooth transition. It was not always that easy, as a number of them had Nazi sympathies!

There were two settlements, with 150 families in each. One in St. Walburg, Saskatchewan, on land supplied by the Canadian National Railway, and one at Dawson's Creek in British Columbia on land supplied by the Canadian Pacific Railway. They arrived virtually penniless, and were even wearing the wrong clothes, suits, dresses and town shoes!

The plots of land were 160 acres and the railways would provide each family with the basic necessities required for farm life, such as food, stoves, beds, tools and livestock. Some plots had houses. Large equipment, like ploughs and seed drills had to be shared until they could afford to buy their own. C. N.R and C.P.R. supervisors instructed the families in all aspects of agriculture and local German speaking men were hired to teach them basic skills, like how to milk a cow, feed animals, and repair machinery. The most serious problem facing the refugees was that none of them knew anything about farming. Planting crops was out of the question that first year. Building houses, or shoring up existing ones, clearing enough land, which was covered in trees, to at least plant a garden, were priorities. They had to learn fast in those first few years. In the years that followed, some of the settlers moved back to towns, but the majority stayed on the farms they now owned, won over by their freedom and independence as well as the natural beauty of the region.



In the late 1950's, one of the settlers came back to England to visit old friends. At that time there was still a small Sudeten German group living in the Guildford area and we spoke with him about his new home. He told us they had just built a new village hall. He showed us colour slides of a beautiful land, of hills covered in birch forest, near Dawson's Creek, British Columbia.

It is strange to think that but for the lack of a visa, I might have been a Canadian farmer, instead of an English Engineer!

## Chapter 13

### My Mother

My mother, Antonia Maria Höfner (nee Schwarzbach) was the third child of 5 of my grandfather's second wife.

My maternal grandfather Ignaz Hoffman, 1861-1942, was of peasant stock. He was illiterate, because by the age of 9 he was already at work herding oxen. He was good with horses and used to go to Hungary to catch wild horses.

His first wife bore him five children Marie (1889), Josef, Anna, Ferdinand and Emma (1894). The only one of these I met was Emma.

His first wife died in her early thirties (born 1860) because by 1897, he had the first of his five children by my Grandmother Theresia Schwarzbach, a weaver's daughter. My grandparents were not married, which was quite common among the working class at that time.

They had five children, Heinrich 1897-1916, died in the Great War aged 19. Then Emil (1901), Antonia my mother (1904), Karl (1906) and Rudolf (1908).

My grandmother again did not live long, and died of dropsy in 1915, aged 45, 12 years before I was born. My grandfather then had a third wife who was so hated by the children that my mother never told me her name.

Apparently, she used to spend all the housekeeping money on herself, buying luxuries, and starving the children, who had to rummage in dustbins for food scraps.

My grandfather refused to believe what the children and neighbours said about her, always believing her story of how the children squandered money, which always resulted in them being beaten. My mother left home as soon as she could and at the age of 14 was a nursing assistant in a hospital run by nuns, and living in.

The eldest son Emil was already 14 when his mother died, and was at work when the stepmother arrived. Rudolf was 7 and not so affected, but my mother aged 11 and Karl aged 9 got the brunt of the beatings. My mother and Karl therefore became very close, and looked after each other. They were still close in adult life and the closeness seems to have jumped a generation, for I am friendliest with my cousin Inge, Karl's daughter.

When she was 17 or 18 my mother went out with a butcher who seduced her and made her pregnant, on the only time she went out with him. When he found out he

offered to marry her, but she would not have him after the way he had treated her. He was a few years older, and should have known better. What happened next is a bit of a mystery, all I know is that she had the baby, a girl, and that she died at 3 months. She would have been my half-sister.

I do not know whether she remained with the nuns during her pregnancy, probably so, for she would never have gone home. Illegitimate children and their mothers were very much looked down on in those days, and it must have been hard. I think after her baby died, she left the nuns and started work as a guillotine operator in a local can factory, living in digs with other girls.

She was in digs and working at the factory in Turn, just outside Teplitz, when she met my father. Whether they were in love, I do not know, or whether she wanted to get out of digs and have a home of her own. Friends told her "Josef is a good catch with a steady job etc".

They married in 1925, my mother was 21 my father 24. I arrived in 1927, but before then the marriage was a bit rocky, and I suppose they were not suited to each other. They were both very temperamental. My father used to throw things around when he was in a temper. He once threw a razor at my mother when she was 7 months pregnant. He was also very self-centred. My mother was also temperamental, when she loved someone it was completely. On the other hand, if she disliked someone they had better watch out, especially if they did something to her boy.

The fact that they both worked full time did not help, coming home tired and irritable. When you look at photos of my parents at that time, you realise how gaunt they both were. My mother was a very good singer, and at school was always out front singing. Her teachers thought her so good that they recommended to her parents that she should go to a special Music School. The teachers were keen, and she could have gone, but her parents blocked it, for which she never forgave them. It was one of the great disappointments of her life. It would have enabled her to rise from her working class roots to become a professional singer, and as events showed in her later life, she certainly had the will to succeed.

I do not quite know when their marriage went wrong, but they did not have any more children, which I regret.

My parents were members of the "Nature Friends", a rambling organisation, with huts placed all over the mountainous areas of Czechoslovakia and Germany. Our local group used to hold socials at which my mother used to sing. As I said, my mother used to work in a tin can factory, and she worked there for the whole of our life in Czechoslovakia, which meant I was alone all day until she came home at 4.50 pm. She used to cycle to work at Turn about two and a half miles away. It

must have been monotonous work, operating a guillotine all day, but she had some good friends there, her foreman Mr Stadler being one, and we became friendly with his family. His son and I were the same age, and they also belonged to the "Nature Friends".

It was in 1936, when my mother and I were on holiday with our bicycles by ourselves in the mountains to the northeast of our home, that she met Ernst Graf, and fell in love with him, the great love of her life. As I said in an earlier chapter, he was Social Democrat from Saxony Germany, who had to flee from Hitler, when he came to power in 1933, and was in the Czech border area carrying on undercover work. Her marriage had by then completely broken down and I believe my father was seeing Berta Fuchs, who later became his second wife.

My mother saw Ernst at intervals, sometimes with my knowledge, but I did not tell my father about the affair. This was because I was close to my mother and distant from my father, who did not seem to take much interest in me. The following year my mother and I again went on holiday in the mountains, this time by arrangement with Ernst. He always took a great interest in me.

He was married, and had to leave his wife and 2 daughters behind in Germany. A year later in July 1938 it was clear that trouble was brewing with Hitler, and an invasion was imminent. My father had been called up into the Czech Army reserve, and my mother and I took the opportunity to leave home and travel to Prague, the capital which at that time was not threatened. We met Ernst by arrangement in Prague. A couple of weeks later the Germans took over my old home.

In early 1939 our "family" was split up. I went first on the 12th of January to England, Ernst went in late February to Belgium, and my mother left in early March, in the nick of time as a domestic to England. Czechoslovakia was occupied by the Germans a week later. She left Prague by train through Poland, and embarked on a Polish ship in Gdynia, bound for the port of London. She was not a very good sailor, and was seasick most of the way, not helped by the fact that her cabin was in the bows of the ship. On arrival in England, she first went to a hostel for Czech refugees. She was longing to see me again, but did not know how to get to see me at Chislehurst from central London. Some English people who had befriended her and saw her crying took pity on her, and took her to see me. We were glad to see each other again after all we had been through.

I must digress here and tell you that neither of us could speak a word of English, having anticipated going to South America and learning Spanish instead!

The latest plan was for us to meet up in England, and then emigrate to Canada.



After spending a couple of weeks at the hostel in London, she was moved to the hostel at Brook Lodge on Albury Heath run by the Czech refugee Trust Fund. I joined her there in May. As she came to England on a domestic visa, she had to go into service, and a job was found for her at Wonersh Chase as a cook.

In those days with large houses, the cook did not go to the shops, rather the tradesmen came to the house (at the tradesmen entrance). They brought a selection of their wares with them. Mother then selected the goods according to the menu that the lady of the house had planned. As my mother could not speak English, she used sign language and noises, i.e. for beef (moo), for lamb (baa) and for pork (grunt). Everything was on account and was settled at the end of the month.

Eventually I joined her at Wonersh, as did Ernst who had been interned on the Isle of Man. We left Wonersh in September 1942, and rented a house in Stoughton, Guildford, from Mr Puttick a retired policeman who let the house after his wife died. My mother lived there for the rest of her life.

I returned from Germany after Ernst died in June 1947. My mother then became friendly with a prisoner of war, a Hungarian, and probably had an affair for a few months. He seemed a nice enough man but it ended when he went home.

There was a German P.O.W. camp at Merrow, and we, that is the Sudeten Germans in Guildford made friends with a few of them who used to visit our homes. I think the last P.O.W. went home in 1948, when the camp closed and was pulled down.

In 1950 she met Charles Lord, an Auditor. They met in Lyons cafe in Guildford. He and his wife had separated, and eventually he came to live with us in Grange road. My mother changed her name to Lord by deed poll, as they could not get married as Mrs Lord refused to get a divorce.

My mother worked as a seamstress at Rebeck, a dress alterations firm run by a Czechoslovakian refugee Mr Beck. The shop was situated in upper High Street in Guildford. After a few years, when Mr Beck retired, my mother bought the business, employing 4 ladies, 2 of them ex refugees. Later she moved to new premises in the lower High Street, on the second floor above Randalls shoe shop. She ran this business very successfully, and had many wealthy customers. She not only did alterations, but new dresses to measure. She had had no proper training in dressmaking, or business, but managed both very well. She retired in 1964 when she was 60 and sold the business.

In retirement, she was still very active, especially in the townswomen guild, and did a bit of travelling mainly to Germany and Austria. She became frail in the last 5

years, and had chest trouble. She suffered a stroke in the summer of 1984, and never really recovered, and after months in hospital, died in November 1984. Her ashes were scattered at the viewpoint on Newlands Corner, the view that lifted her spirits, when she first saw it after the gloom of London in April 1939



My Mother in 1938



## Chapter 14

### My father

My father, Josef Adolf Höfner (nickname Peppi) was born on 5th February 1901 in Stockheim in Bavaria. My grandfather, a glassblower, had moved to Bavaria. While there, he married Maria Astel, his second wife. His first wife had died, leaving two young children. My father was the eldest of the second group of children. My grandfather had eight children, of whom six survived childhood.

Soon after my father was born, the family moved back to Bohemia where my grandfather worked in the glass factory in Eichwald, about 2 miles from where we lived in Pyhanken. My father was apprenticed as a "smith" (or toolmaker) in the same factory where my grandfather worked. When he finished his apprenticeship in 1918, the war had ended and the country was no longer Austria but Czechoslovakia.

All young men had to do National Service so my father spent 2 years in the Czech Army. It was while doing so that he learned to speak Czech.

My mother and my father met, and then got married in 1925. My mother, a good looking girl, worked in a factory and was keen to get out of "digs" and my father was, I suppose, a "good catch", a tall (6') young man with a steady job as a toolmaker in the glassworks. With hindsight, they should never have got married. My mother was very loving, intelligent woman but could be very temperamental and my father, an egotistical man with a bit of a roving eye.

I arrived in May 1927 but even during the pregnancy, they were having arguments and throwing things. His roving eye was evident on lots of occasions that I remember, like in a Gasthaus, he would pretend that I was not with him in order to flirt with another lady. On another occasion, at a fete, my father was in control of a climbing pole, with presents attached to a ring which could be raised or lowered. When I climbed up the ring would always be above my reach but when the son of a lady whom my father was trying to flirt with, climbed up, the ring was lowered quite low, so that the boy could grab the presents. It infuriated my mother and made me very unhappy.



My Father in 1937

Although I was a fairly good boy, I got frequently whacked by my father for what I thought were quite minor offences and undeserved. My mother tried to intervene but sometimes got whacked herself. This, of course, made me grow closer to my mother and explains when later she met Ernst Graf in 1936, I kept quiet.

## Chapter 15

### My Grandfather

Anton Höfner, the son of a railwayman, was born in 1869 in Bohemia. He was a glassblower by trade. He married Theresia Koparnitzky in 1893. They had 2 children, Maria born in 1894, and Karl born in 1896.

His wife died in 1898 at the age of 28. I do not know what the cause of her death was. At that time there was also a lack of work, so he took his young family aged 2 and 4, and moved to his sister Rosina's house in Stockheim in Bavaria. There he found work, and met and married my grandmother Maria, nee Astel, a shoemaker's daughter, aged 27. My father Josef Adolf, the first of their 6 children, was born in 1901, followed by Grete in 1902, Aloisia (Louise) in 1904, Gustav in 1906, Maria in 1909 and Rudolf in 1911. Gustav died at the age of 5, and Maria aged 2. Both, I suspect, of the same illness.

In 1914, when Karl was 18, he met Käthe Hohla then aged 25. She was a governess at Karl's employer, where he was apprenticed as a mechanic. They both wanted to leave their employment to get married. My grandfather objected to the girl, and had a violent argument with Karl, so much so that he picked up a revolver, and went over to where Karl was staying with Käthe, and threatened to shoot him. However he calmed down, and Karl married Käthe. They had a son Ernst, born in 1916.

My grandfather was a big man, about 6 feet tall, and well built. Shortly after my father was born in 1901, the family moved back to Bohemia (Austria) to Pyhanken. There was a glass factory near Eichwald where he worked as a glassblower. As glassblowing was very hot work, the workers were given an allowance of a gallon of beer a day. Apparently, drinking water was not effective, and this contributed to his beer paunch.

In late 1916 he was called up into the army. He was then aged 47. The army was desperate for men by this time, and were "scraping the bottom of the barrel". The war on the Eastern Front had quite a shattering effect on him, and he returned quite slim, or as my father said "skin and bone".

In 1918 the Austrian Empire broke up, and they found themselves citizens of



Czechoslovakia. My father was 17 at the end of the war, missed call up, but was subsequently conscripted into the new Czech army.

My grandfather's oldest child Marta, from his first marriage, died in 1918, aged 24, together with her husband and their child in the great influenza epidemic, which killed more people than were lost in the war. At that time four children were still at home, Karl having moved away.

Karl was killed in a car accident in 1927 aged 31. He was a chauffeur/mechanic, to a wealthy man with a large car. When he was killed, his employer was driving, the car crashed and somersaulted, and Karl was flung out, the driver escaped.

I was very fond of my grandfather, and I think he was very fond of me. I saw him every day, because I used to have lunch with my grandparents and my cousin Robert, the orphaned son of my aunt Louise. At that time my grandfather had retired (compulsory) as he had lost three middle fingers of his right hand in a circular saw accident. I remember when a beggar came to the door, he shouted look I have to go begging myself and holding up his hand.

My grandmother always favoured my cousin Robert, but grandfather was always fair to both of us. After Robert's mother died, he stayed at my grandparents flat. This consisted of a large living room/kitchen, a large bedroom and a small bedroom. The house was quite old, three stories high and infested with cockroaches, which we used to call Russians. Occasionally the house was fumigated, but they always came back, sometimes dropping onto our food. His great pleasure was smoking a pipe and sitting with his friends chatting. I left home in 1938 and did not see him again until 1947. My grandmother died in 1941 aged 71.

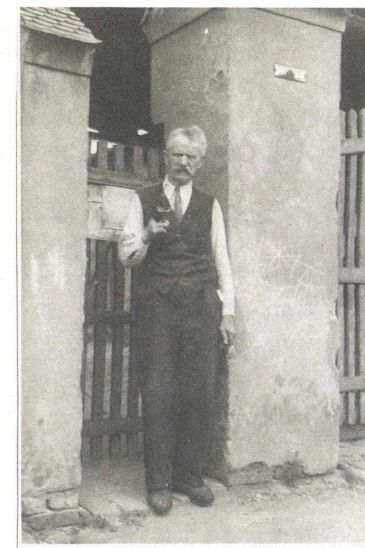
I saw him again in 1947. I was in the army in Germany at the time and I heard that the entire family (except my father who had been kept back by the Czechs because he was a key worker) had all been expelled from their homeland by the Czechs, and were now living in Okriftel near Frankfurt. The whole family, grandfather, aunt Grete and her two daughters, Rudolf and his wife and two daughters, and my cousin Robert.

I managed to get 2 days leave, left Friday evening on the overnight train to Frankfurt, arriving in the early morning, caught the train to Hattersheim, and walked to Okriftel. I entered the backyard of the house where he and my Aunt lived and found him sitting down chopping wood. We had a very tearful reunion. I had last seen him as a boy of 11, and now I was 19 and 6 feet tall. He was now stooped with age but still kept himself busy. He was then aged 78 and felt a bit lonely as all his old friends had by now died. Anyway I brought a whole lot of tobacco and cigars with me, which made him smile. When I left on the Sunday, he walked all the way with

me to the station at Hattersheim to see me off. I remember him wearing a black overcoat, which seemed several sizes too big for him, and a large black hat.

I next saw him 2 years later when I paid him a visit with my army friend Jim Hilder. We travelled from Borehamwood where he lived on his BSA 500 cc twin motorcycle, with me sitting on the pillion. We went from Newhaven to Dieppe then Paris, where we stayed a couple of nights at his uncle's, then across France and Luxembourg to Frankfurt where Jim left me to go to Switzerland.

My father and his wife Berta had by this time joined the rest of the family and I had arranged to go on holiday with him to the German Alps. I had not seen him for 11 years. My grandfather had moved to a flat which he shared with Robert. I spent two days with him and he seemed very frail. That was the last time I saw him. He was very keen to see my mother again, whom he had not seen since 1938. He was very fond of my mother and was upset when my parents split up. He told my father "you've got a good woman there, why don't you try to keep her". She did visit him for a day in 1950. He was delighted to see her and as though his life was complete, died a week later. He was aged 81. Our son Peter Antony was named after him.



My Grandfather, outside his house in 1940

## Chapter 16

### Ernst Graf

Ernst Graf, who became my stepfather during the most formative ten years of my life, was born in Grimmitschau in Saxony. He was always very proud of being a Saxon and a German. A bricklayer by trade, he volunteered for the army in a Saxon Infantry Regiment in 1914. He fought four years in the front line. He was wounded in his left hand, the knuckle of his fourth finger being taken out, so that his fourth finger was lying on his third finger.

After the war he had a hard time, as did everybody in Germany, with inflation etc. He was always a staunch Social Democrat and must have joined the party fairly

early and from 1921 onwards always fighting the Nazis and the communists. He was a trade union official and married with 2 children. In 1933 when Hitler came to power, he was told he was on the Nazi black (death) list, and had he been caught, would at the very least have finished in a concentration camp. He fled to the Sudeten land part of Czechoslovakia (bordering on Saxony) leaving his family behind. He then continued his anti-Nazi activities on the border and became an agent for the German Social Democratic Party in exile ferrying people and information across the border, a very dangerous job.

He lived among the German people in the border area. These were generally poor people who did not have too much to eat but shared it with him because they were anti-Nazi. They never betrayed him. There was always the danger of kidnapping and he carried a gun, a small 25-browning automatic, small enough to slip into a pocket. This saved his life on a number of occasions when about to be kidnapped by Nazis, by showing he was armed.

My mother and I first met him when we were on holiday in the mountains to the northeast of our home in 1936. Not too far as we went there on our bikes. That was in the summer of 1936. My father was not with us, I do not know why, but my parents' marriage was rocky, if not finished, for some years. My mother must have fallen for him immediately and he became the love of her life. A giant of a man, 6 feet tall and built like a boxer, with grey hair and blue eyes. Always gentle and considerate, he took a great interest in me, contrary to my father, who always made me think I was inferior to other boys (why can't you be like him?).

On this holiday I learnt to swim. Ernst was usually dressed in shorts and I wore sandals made from old motor tyres. I of course was told not to say anything to my father and I did not. The following year in 1937, my mother and I again went on holiday alone and met up with Ernst, not in the same place, but further east. Again we were on our bikes. I do not know if my mother and Ernst met between holidays, I cannot remember.

In the summer of 1938 the situation with the Nazis was getting desperate. There were rumours that Hitler was coming, rumours that the Russians would send paratroops to rescue us. Most of the people were not Nazis, about one third, with one third socialists and communists and the rest undecided. There was talk of war with Germany. The reservists including my father were mobilised and called up. The Czech army had a very good defence line along the border, which I witnessed personally. Trees were set with demolition charges to block roads and the forests would have been almost impenetrable for tanks. The Czech army was also well equipped, even having better tanks than the Germans. However, despite France having a non-aggression treaty with Czechoslovakia, the French told the Czech

government that they would not come to their aid if attacked by Germany. The British government also told the Czechs to give in.

Without any hope of support, the Czechs had no other option but to hand over the Sudeten land to Hitler.

My mother and Ernst must have made provision for this, because my mother and I left our home and fled to Prague before the Germans moved in. We met Ernst in Prague. My mother, if caught would have been locked up, being a party member and an associate of Ernst.

We left home at the end of June 1938 and spent the next six months in Prague, trying to leave the country. I left first on a Jewish children's' rescue flight to England in January 1939. My mother followed me to England in March 1939 to work as a domestic. Ernst could only get a visa to Belgium in March. We were hoping to meet up in England and then go on to Canada, but Ernst could get no further than Belgium and then the War got in the way.

In May 1940 when the Germans invaded Belgium, Ernst had to flee again for the fourth time. Dodging bullets and dive bombers, he managed to get on the last boat leaving Ostend. He said later that by hauling people on board, he must have strained his heart and since then had had heart trouble.

On reaching England, he was promptly arrested as an enemy alien and sent to Pentonville prison. From there he was sent into internment on the Isle of Man. We finally became a family again in early 1941, when he could prove he was anti-Nazi, and he joined us in Womersley. At first he earned his keep at Womersley Chase by doing odd jobs like mowing the lawn, but quite soon doing "war work" at the Guildford Glass and Metal Works as a fitter.

At the factory there was a fitter with whom he was great friends, who had been a soldier in the Great War, and they realised they must have been in the same stretch of front line but on opposite sides.

He soon made contact with all the other German Social Democratic Party members in exile, mainly in London, including people who had fled to France and Norway after 1933 and who managed to get to London. Like the party chairman Hans Vogel, and Erich Ollenhauer, who later became Opposition leader in the German Bundestag. Of course I omitted to say that Ernst was a very literate person. My mother, Ernst and I would often go up to London and meet all the Germans émigrés at their homes in Mill Hill and at Schmidts restaurant in London.



Ernst was great friends with the Chairman Hans Vogel, whom he might have known before 1933. All these exiles were very patriotic and could not wait to return home. When it became obvious that the war was drawing to a close, plans were made for the Party exiles to return and start up Democracy in Germany. Ernst had great hopes for getting a post as a Trade Union Official. But then his friend Hans Vogel died in spring of 1945. Without his friend to back him, he was more pushed to the side while others scrambled for the jobs. After the war he was keen to return to Germany, he was never very happy here, and could not adapt to the English way of life. From autumn 1945 to his death in June 1947, he and my mother were ready to "pack up and go". However, his departure was delayed and delayed. His fellow Germans had all by that time gone to posts in Germany but Ernst was left behind.

When I last saw him I was on leave in Christmas 1946, he had aged suddenly, his spirit seemed to have gone. He died in June 1947 aged 54. The cause of death was given as heart failure but I suspect that he died of a broken heart. He did return to his beloved Germany. In 1952 my mother took his ashes to Germany and scattered them in a park in Munich.



Ernst Graf in 1937

## Chapter 17

### Richard Kretschmer

I first met Richard while on holiday in 1937 in the border area of Sudetenland with my mother and future stepfather Ernst Graf.

He was a medium height, upright dapper man with a dry sense of humour and piercing blue eyes. He had been a soldier in the First World War. He had been an official in the German Social Democratic Party in Germany. When Hitler came to power in 1933 he had to leave his family and fled to Czechoslovakia. He was about 50 years old when I met him. He was very friendly with Ernst and probably had the same job as an agent in the border area.

We met up with him again in Prague, the Czech capital, after the Sudetenland had been occupied and Ernst, my mother and I had fled there.

Like us, he was desperate to get a visa to leave the country. He managed to get a visa to Norway at the end of 1938 and lived in the south of the country near Lillehammer. When the Germans invaded Norway in 1940, he fled again, keeping ahead of the Germans and managed to get on a ship from Trondheim. This ship was torpedoed and he was rescued from the water by a British destroyer and brought to England. He was promptly arrested as an "enemy Alien" being a German national and sent to internment in Canada at Nipigon in Manitoba. He was released in 1942 and came back to England. At the time we had moved to 103 Grange Road in Guildford and Richard came to live with us as a lodger, living in the back bedroom.

At that time everybody had to do "War Work" and Richard being a plumber by profession, worked with my stepfather and I at the Guildford Glass and Metal Works. We used to catch the bus every morning at the corner of Grange Road. He longed to go back to his homeland, having been in exile for 10 years and being on his own. He also did not like living in England and could not get used to the English way of life.

At the end of 1943 he got more and more withdrawn and seemed to lose his previous good humour. He fell ill in the winter of 1943/1944, went into hospital and suddenly died. I forgot what the cause of his death was. I saw his body at the mortuary, it was the first time I had seen a dead person. He was cremated at Woking and all the Germans exiles from the Party came to the funeral; Hans Vogel, leader of the Party, also Erich Ollenhauer, future leader of the Party in 1950, Sander and many more. Most of those present were veterans of the First World War, as was Richard. After a speech, we all gathered round the coffin and sang the soldiers farewell song to a fallen comrade, a very moving song "Ich Hatt Einen Kameraden".

## Chapter 18

### The Baron

Baron Tony von Chlumetzky-Bauer was an Austrian aristocrat about 30 years old in 1941. For some reason he fell foul of the local Nazis when Austria was annexed by Germany in 1938. His family seat was appropriated by the local Nazis, and Tony had to flee the country. He used to tell us "Goebbels is now living in my old family seat".

He had been to University where he studied Chemistry and could speak English. He was in England when the war started and was promptly interned as an enemy alien, and sent into internment on the Isle of Man. It was there he met my stepfather Ernst Graf, and despite the difference in background and age, the German bricklayer and the Austrian aristocrat, became firm friends. Tony was quite striking, being six feet six inches tall and well built. He had a great sense of humour and seldom mentioned his background.

After release from the Isle of Man in 1941 he got a job in chemical research with the government and was living in London. He quite often used to visit us in Grange Road and always had amusing stories to tell. My mother and I last saw him in 1948, about 18 months after my stepfather died. I remember my mother proudly saying, "Gerhard has just done his Ordinary National and next year he is doing the Grand National". I think Tony got married and emigrated, probably to the U.S.A. I do not know whether he ever got his family seat back after the Russians left Austria, but knowing Tony, I do not think he was too bothered.

## Chapter 19

### Ailsa

Ailsa joined the over 18s Club in mid-1947 after the breakup of her love affair with Peter Fairmaner. I also went there a couple of times in 1947 but then did not go again until early 1948 when I joined the cycling group. I saw Ailsa from afar as a tall girl "on the Committee" emerging from meetings in the small room at the orphanage hall next to the station (the site of the club hut). She was one of the older group with Ron Hill the secretary, Ron Burgess etc. When we went on cycling trips there were usually two groups, the fast group to which I belonged, on sports bikes and the slow group on upright bikes, Ailsa was one of these.

We first met to talk to on a youth hostel weekend to Streatley on Sunday 4 July 1948. We left Streatley to go home and for some reason Ailsa and Kitty Green attached themselves to our group ie Bob Carrington, Eric Langhorn, myself and one other. We got near Stratfield Saye and as it was a very hot day decided to go for a swim in the River Loddon. We did not have any swimwear so the girls swam in their pyjamas and the boys in their underwear. As you can image quite a topic of conversation at the club! I first spoke to Ailsa on that afternoon, resting on a little hillock above the Dover Arms. At that time Ailsa was going steady with Ron Burgess. In those days I was studying for my Ordinary National Certificate at the Technical College and had very little free time with working all day at Drummonds, some evening classes and lots of homework at weekends.

I next spoke to Ailsa almost a year later on a club holiday, youth hostelling in Scotland. By this time I had bought a motorcycle, found a new girlfriend, Olive Lonsdale, a club member, and as she did not cycle, went walking instead on the club's Sunday rambles. I had passed my Ordinary National Certificate and was feeling a little happier. By this time also, July 1950, Ailsa's romance with Ron Burgess had broken up and her mother had died in January, so she was not feeling very happy. Of course, I was unaware of all this. I went on this holiday to go with Olive. However, as the holiday progressed, I got more and more fed up with Olive as she seemed to go more with the others and ignoring me. Ailsa and I seemed to be drawn together and we had a long talk on the Isle of Skye walking over the moors to Glenbrittle Hostel. We found we had a lot of interests in common, chiefly our love of the mountains. We got to talking more and more after that and I took some good photos of her. She was naturally photogenic and always came out well in photos. After the holiday I dropped Olive as my girlfriend and chatted more and more to Ailsa on club nights. In August, about 3 weeks after the holiday, I took her home on the back of my motorcycle and that was the start of our love affair. We went out more and more and as we both worked in Guildford, saw each other every day.



We married in June 1953 and had 2 children, Katherine Margaret, born in October 1957 and Peter Antony, born in August 1960. Ailsa developed multi-infarct dementia in 1990 and died in January 2000.



Ailsa, and our Dog Lassie in 1951

## Chapter 20

### My Cousins

I have seven cousins on my father's side and eight on my mother's side, all living in East and West Germany.

On my father's side the eldest cousin is Robert Lieblich, born 1925, the son of my aunt Louise and a barber named Lieblich. Louise died of a heart attack in her early thirties and Robert stayed with my grandparents although his father lived in our village. I saw quite a lot of Robert because I used to have lunch with my grandparents and Robert was there. He joined the Luftwaffe in 1943 and became an air gunner. He did not serve long as an air gunner because in 1944 there was a surplus of gunners, flying having been cut down by that time. They were then used as infantry and thrown into the Eastern Front to try to halt the Russian. He spoke to me of the horrors of fighting Russian tanks. The SS used to have a screen of men just behind the front line and would shoot anyone who retreated. One of Robert's friends was wounded and Robert tried to carry him back to the aid station but was stopped by the SS who threatened to shoot him if he did not drop his friend and return to the front line. His friend died. Robert was shot in the head and paralysed on one side. He gradually improved but still has a slight impairment in his speech and cannot properly use his right hand. He had to learn to write with his left hand. He lives just outside Mainz in Germany and has a son also called Robert and a couple of grandchildren.

My aunt Grete, born 1902, had 2 daughters, Traude, born 1933 and Elisabet (Liesl), born in 1935. My aunt married Max Rudolf who worked in the office of the local glassworks. I did not see too much of them even though they lived in the next village. My aunt also worked in the office. In those days there was quite a social gulf between office workers and shop floor workers and my aunt and Max were a bit snobbish. We used to see them only a couple of times a year and they never came to see us. Max was called up in 1944 when he was in his forties and was convinced from the start that he was going to die. He fought on the Russian Front and received a minor wound and died! At the end of the war my aunt and her daughters, my grandfather (my grandmother died in 1941) and my uncle Rudolf, his wife and 2 daughters together with my cousin Robert, were expelled from their homes and sent across the border into Germany. They were lucky in that they were able to keep together as a family unit but also that they were sent to Ockrattel near Frankfurt in West Germany. My father and his wife were not allowed to leave because as a toolmaker he was a skilled man and needed for teaching the job to the Czech workers.

My cousin Traude married a barber and ran a hairdressing business in Okriftel until she retired. They had one son, Reiner. My cousin Liesl married a plumber who had a family business in Okriftel and they had 2 sons. Liesl sustained an injury to her back by falling down stairs when she was in her twenties and has had back trouble since.

My other cousins on my father's side are the four daughters of my uncle Rudolf. The eldest, Brigitte, then Renate, Ruth and Edith.

The cousins on my mother's side are my uncle Emil's 2 boys, Erich and Heinz. Emil although living only a mile from where my father's family lived in Pyhanken, was expelled to what was the Russian Zone of Germany at Triptis in Thuringia. His son Erich and his then girlfriend (now wife) Christa, escaped to West Germany and live in Wuppertal. They had one son Olaf, now a policeman. The other son Heinz remained in Triptis. He married and had a son Ralf and a daughter Antje. He divorced and married again and has a daughter Christiane.

My uncle Karl married a Czech lady called Maria. They had 4 children, Alois, Helga, Inge and Karl. Of these, Inge escaped to West Germany with her husband and lives in Moers. Her husband was a coalminer and they have 3 children. Walter, Sabine and Claudia. Inge is the only one of Karl's children that I keep in touch with although I met them once in 1966. Alois had one son. Helga had 3 children. My uncle Rudolf (my mother's brother) had a son Werner, from his first marriage and a daughter Christine from his second marriage. Werner has a son from his first marriage, Olaf and two daughters, Ute and Ulrike from his second marriage.

My uncle Emil was not called up in the last war, he was 38 when the war started. He was the only one of my family who joined the Nazi Party.

My uncle Karl served on the Russian Front and was so badly wounded that he was placed outside the aid post to die. His sheer will to live and return to his family pulled him through. He was captured by the Russians and released after 8 years. He was only released because he was too sick to work. He died in 1963 at the age of 57. He was never quite well after his return. He was my mother's favourite brother, only one year apart in age.

My uncle Rudolf, the youngest of my mother's brothers, a year younger, also served on the Russian Front and was wounded with shrapnel in his liver.

I met my uncle Emil frequently because they lived in the next village, although he and my mother were not close. My uncle Karl, I only met when I stayed on holiday with him for a month. I never met my uncle Rudolf until after the war in 1966.

## Chapter 21

### Doreen Warriner

Doreen Warriner was instrumental in the rescue of me, my mother and my stepfather from Prague in 1939. She landed at Prague airport on 13th October 1938. She was the official representative of the committee for refugees from Czechoslovakia (BCRC).

Some 200,000 people had fled their home when the Nazis occupied the Sudetenland. Miss Warriner stayed in Prague from October 1938 until April 1939, when she had to escape because she was about to be arrested by the Gestapo.

In this short time, she managed to find visas for 5,000 persons to go to various countries including England, Norway, Sweden and Canada. Her first task was to get the Social Democrat and Communist leaders out of the country and 250 of them got out. Another 1,000 Sudeten Social Democrats went to Canada via England, to be homesteaders in Western Canada.

My parents and I were called to see Miss Warriner in her Prague hotel room. She had found out that the Barbican Mission to the Jews was flying out a planeload of Sudeten German Jewish children on 12th January 1939 and that there was a spare seat. They were flying out to safety in England. Miss Warriner asked us if they would like to send me to England and my parents and I agreed, as we realised we would have to split up to get out of the country. She then had to persuade the representative of the Barbican Mission to take me. He at first refused saying I was not Jewish but Miss Warriner must have had a forceful personality, because the Barbican man agrees to take me.

In February another 500 Sudeten Social Democrats were given visas and left via Poland, half to England and half to Sweden. My mother must have been in this batch for she arrived in England on a domestic visa, travelling by train to Gdynia in Poland and then by ship to London.

I believe my stepfather and myself were saved from the Nazis by this lady. I will forever be grateful to her for allowing me to have a fresh start in a new country.



## Chapter 22

### My Trip to Germany 1949

In the Spring of 1949 I had heard that my father had moved from Czechoslovakia to my other relatives at Okriftel. Up to this time the Czechs had not allowed him or his wife to leave because they needed him to train replacement craftsmen as so many of the German speaking craftsmen had been expelled that it became impossible to run the glass factory. At that time I was working on the shop floor at Drummonds and we were only allowed one weeks holiday per year. So I asked for my one weeks holiday knowing that I would be away longer.

My friend from army days Jim Hilder who I had kept in contact with and lived in Boreham Wood, Hertfordshire, had just bought one of the new design BSA motorcycles, the A10 500cc twin. He was planning a tour to Switzerland and asked if I wanted to go with him, he would drop me off in Okriftel and pick me up again a week later in Oberstdorf in the Bavarian Alps.

I jumped at the chance and travelled to Boreham Wood via train to Waterloo, tube to Edgware and bus. I just wore a suit, army ski hat and my army "valet pack" soft suitcase. I left home on Friday after work and got to Jim's place that evening. He lived with his mother who was French. We left early on Saturday with me sitting on the pillion seat. No crash helmets or course, just ski caps. My bag strapped behind me and Jim's clothes etc in the pannier bags. We got to Newhaven to catch the boat for Dieppe. No roll on ferries then, the bike had to be picked up by crane in a cargo net and put into the hold. We got to Dieppe in the early afternoon after a 4 hour crossing and had to wait for the bike to be unloaded by crane, So it was late afternoon before we left for Paris. The roads at that time were not very good, there were no motorways and all the roads went through towns. It was beginning to get dark when we got to Paris where we went to Jim's uncle's flat in the (Square) Place de Bretagne. It was a large first floor flat in a posh neighbourhood. His uncle (his mother's brother) was a jeweller with a shop in the Rue de La Paix, Paris's Bond Street. He had a Citroen 15 car and that evening he took us on a tour of Paris. After we got back some of Jim's very attractive female cousins turned up and wanted to take us out to a night club but by that time we were completely tired out, shame!

The following morning, Sunday, Jim and I walked round Paris and in the afternoon were lucky enough to watch the finish of the Tour of France cycle race.

We left Paris on Monday morning heading for Germany, travelling via Meox, Chateau Thierry where we came across a British couple whose BSA 250 had broken down. Then to Reims for lunch where we bought a bottle of champagne. The weather was hot so I was not cold sitting on the pillion just wearing my suit.

On to Stenay for an afternoon stop. We then got into a hilly area with bad roads and coal mines at Longuyon and Longwy before finally crossing over into Luxemburg and carried on into Luxemburg City. By that time we had had enough and decided to stop. We got a room in a cafe. The locals in the bar spoke a kind of German language, which sounded awful. We drank our warm and well shaken bottle of champagne.

We left Tuesday morning, crossed the border into Germany and headed for the City of Trier. Then driving along the banks of the Moselle River along a terrible road and got to Bernkastel climbed up a hill to a place called Neumagen which translated means new stomach, very apt after the shaking we had had. Our motorbike despite being the latest model, had no rear springing, just sprung forks, so bumpy roads were bad for the pillion rider. We had lunch there, then over the Hunsruck Mountains to Bingen on the Rhine where we crossed the bridge. From there we went to Okriftel where my relatives lived. We got there late in the afternoon. I met my father whom I had not seen for 10 years and also met his wife Berta. There was also my aunt Grete and her two daughters, my uncle Rudolf, his wife and 2 small daughters, my cousin Robert and my grandfather. They were all living in ex army wooden barracks as refugees. Jim and I went to a Gasthaus where there was music and dancing by the river main. I spent the night at my aunt's sharing a bed with my cousins Traudl aged 16 and Liesel aged 14 under the watchful eye of my aunt! Jim got put up somewhere. Jim left the following morning (Wednesday) to go to Switzerland. We arranged to meet up again in a week's time on Tuesday evening or at the latest Wednesday morning at the station in Oberstdorf in the German Alps.

I spent the day in Okriftel and spent some time with my granddad of whom I was very fond. He was sharing a room with my cousin Robert. That was the last time I saw my granddad who was aged 80 at the time.

Robert, my father and I left that evening to travel to Oberstdorf where we were going to have a week's holiday. Before we left we had some ham and pickled cucumbers. They must have been a bit off for I was very sick for 2 days later. The journey by train was very long and bumpy (wooden seats) and we did not get to Oberstdorf until lunchtime the following day (Thursday). We got digs in the village with a widow whose husband used to be a racing driver with Mercedes before the war. As soon as I got there I was ill with food poisoning for 2 days, very painful. By Sunday, I was fine and my father, Robert and I walked round the local Alps and climbed the local mountain, the Nebelhorn. The weather was good. My father had lent me a pair of leather shorts (Lederhosen) and braces, the local costume. Robert and father also wore leather shorts. We had a nice time there but on Tuesday evening they had to leave. They also had only a week's holiday. I saw them off on the train. Jim had still not arrived.

I left our room the following morning (Wednesday) and went down to the station, still no Jim. As there were only 2 trains, one in the morning and one in the evening, I decided to take the 9.30am train. The line from Oberstdorf to Kempten was what is in German called a "Bimmelbahn" a single track line with little old carriages with a top speed of 20mph. I got to Kempten at about 11.30 and then had to change trains from Kempten to Ulm. This was slightly faster than the Bimmelbahn but not much about 30mph with wooden seats and open balconies at each end of the coach. We got to Ulm about 1.30pm and changed trains for an express train to Stuttgart. I got to Stuttgart about 3pm and the train to Paris did not leave until 9pm. Another problem was that I had almost run out of cash. The banks had already closed but I was told at the ticket office that the conductor on the train would take travellers cheques. I sat in the park near the station killing time until 9pm.

When the Paris train rolled in I got on and the train set off. The conductor, a very large rude man, saw me after about half an hour and flatly refused to take my travellers cheque. He would only take German or French cash. I had enough German cash left to take me to the border where the guard ordered me off the train. This was at about midnight. The banks did not open till 8.30am (on Friday). I sat on a bench in Strasburg Station all night then at 8.30 changed my travellers cheque into Francs, bought a ticket and caught the 9.30 express to Paris. By this time, I had no sleep for 24 hours. I arrived in Paris Gare de L'est Station about 1pm. I suppose I should have gone to Jim's uncle but by this time I was so tired I could not think straight. I had to make my way across Paris to the Gare St Lazare and found that the boat train did not leave till 8.30pm. I bought a ticket to Dieppe and spent the last of my French money on a salad which is all I could afford. I caught the boat train and then on to the ferry. I still had my return ticket which would take me all the way to London. I got to London about 9am on Saturday. By this time I had no sleep for 48 hours and had a 2 day growth of beard. I got back home to Grange Road in the afternoon, 54 hours after leaving Oberstdorf. When I started work on Monday 1 week late, I was brought before the Managing Director, Mr Hickman. When I told him I had been to see my father in Germany whom I had not seen for 10 years he said, makes no difference, you get one weeks holiday at this firm, do not do it again!

When I contacted Jim again he said he missed the rendezvous in Germany because the previous day while going fast on the autobahn one of his silencers blew out. He could not carry on like that and had to get it fixed. He then went straight to Paris to his uncle's on the Friday hoping to find me there. If only I had known!

## Chapter 23

### Cars and Rallies

In 1962, my brother in law Peter gave me his Ford Anglia car, a 100E model in green. He bought the car new in 1956 when he came for a visit and took it with him to Trinidad. In 1962 he brought the car back from Trinidad, used it here for a few weeks and then moved with his family to Calgary in Canada. Unfortunately having bought the car here, he was unable to sell it as the taxes payable would have been more than the car was worth (£250). The only option left to him was to give it away, which he did. I sold my 1946 Vauxhall 10 for £120. At that time in the early 60s motor sport was very popular. More people could afford cars and treasure hunts and rallies were popular.

We formed a motor club at Drummunds in 1964. I was keen and was a founder member. We did a few treasure hunts and were then approached by Billings Car Club. Billings was a printing firm in Guildford. They had a very keen and experienced secretary, Doug Jennings, and he suggested we should do joint events. They were already doing rallies twice a year. The Mini-Monte and the Challenge Cup. It was a much larger club than Drummonds and had members from outside the firm. Their Managing Director was also very keen and gave his backing as also did our Managing Director, Ken Tiner. We also had access to our social club house which Billings did not have. We started off with Drummonds doing treasure hunts and Billings doing the rallies. In 1965 Doug Jennings left and without him Billings Car Club would have folded up, so it was decided that Drummonds would run the club but using the name Billings Car Club which was recognised by the South East Area Association of Car Clubs as a major club, running championship events. Ken Jones of Drummonds became Secretary, and I became Competition Secretary, as I was good at organising and paperwork. I was never a very fast driver but fairly good at navigating.

We used to do two rallies a year. That is timed rallies on public roads at night. The Mini-Monte and the Challenge Cup. We also did three or four treasure hunts, one production car trial and one navigation exercise. The production car trial and treasure hunts were run in daylight. There was a lot of paperwork involved in rallies. The RAC controlled all motor sport and this involved lengthy legal screeds such as ASRs (Additional Supplementary Regulations) and also a route of the rally. The local police had to be informed (Surrey, Hampshire and Sussex) and the route given. We could not proceed without the approval of the police and RAC.

The organising of the actual timed rally was as follows: first of all I laid out a route of approximately 50 miles on the 1 inch to a mile ordnance survey map, or



maps (2 sometimes 3 maps). Time checkpoints had to be laid out around the route, usually 12 to 17 timed checkpoints. The next step was to actually drive around the route. Places had to be found so that the marshall checking the cars could park his car off the road. The place had to be safe so that the drivers had a clear view of the checkpoint to avoid collision at the checkpoint. It also had to be at least 200 yards from the nearest house. In between timed checkpoints were route checks in the form of some object beside the road to ensure that the correct route was followed. Having gone around the route and established all the checkpoints and route checks the next step was to drive round at rally speed (30 mph average) and time all the check points. 30mph might seem slow but do not forget this was run at night and out of this time must be taken the time spent by the navigator to plot the route and signing in at the checkpoint which put the average speed up. If you had a slow navigator the speed went up too. You were not allowed to arrive at a checkpoint early. For each minute of lateness one penalty point was given. The marshal closed his control 30 minutes after the last car was due. The maximum lateness at any checkpoint was 30 minutes. The marshals at the early checkpoints had time to go cross country and open up a checkpoint at the later stages.

There was a halfway stop usually at a pub of 30 minutes. This allowed slow drivers to catch up. The organiser had to go round the route a third time on the night of the event to make sure that the route checks were still there and that the marshals were in the right place. Marshals of course had to be able to find their place in the dark and were given precise instructions by the organiser. Competitors were given their route cards and sent off at one minute intervals. Of course, when you got your route card, your navigator had to plot the route to the first checkpoint. The time taken to plot meant you had to increase your speed. The more experienced crews could usually demoralise the opposition by tearing out of the car park seconds after having received their route card only to stop a little down the road to do their plotting.

The competitors were sent off at one minute intervals at the halfway stop. The organiser hired watches in (sealed boxes). These were set by the organiser on the day with one minute stagger then sealed so that competitor No 1 started on Greenwich time, No 2 on time + 1 minute etc so all competitors should arrive at the checkpoints at the same time as on their watches. The marshal would take the watch and read off the time and mark it on the competitor's time sheet. Competitors were also given panic envelopes so that if you were hopelessly lost you could find either the halfway point or the finish.

These were the rallies of the mid sixties. As time went on it became more and more difficult to find rally routes as the police kept increasing the "red" no go areas through which the rally could not pass. Similarly treasure hunts were restricted to

12 cars. The organisers dared not break the law as they could be personally fined by the police. This still left "off road" events such as production car trials, usually held on army land and driving tests held in private fields. Driving tests consisted of completing a twisty course and driving in and out of garages in the shortest time. In production car trials the object was to get as far as possible up a series of hills with points awarded for the distance up the hill.

In the end we got over these rally restrictions by what we called "moonlight monster hunts". These were held at night. The cars were given clues to a place usually a National Trust or WD car park. The marshal there would give them a clue sheet and noted the time. Competitors were then timed to find the clue and return to the marshal. The marshal would then give the competitor another clue sheet to take them to the next car park. Although you were not timed between car parks, if you spent too long on foot finding the clues you would not have enough time to get to the next car park. All the timing was done on foot and the competitor with the shortest time won.

Billings Car Club eventually changed its name to Wey Valley Car Club. Eventually all the club did was driving tests and after about 3 years the club was closed. Nowadays of course, all rallies are held off road on special stages.

## Chapter 24

### The Defence Line at Chilworth

In 1939 a defence line was built to protect London from invasion from the South in case of war. The North Downs was the obvious place for this defence line. In Chilworth the line started at The Tillingbourne and stretched up to the crest of the Downs. Tanks could only cross The Tillingbourne by road so that the road from Lockners Farm was protected by a concrete barrier. Steel girders could be dropped into slots in the concrete, thus blocking the road. You can see a similar structure in Blacksmith Lane. The house on the sharp bend still has loopholes, now blocked.

All the pillboxes that remain and those that were in the open were all camouflaged, usually made to look like haystacks or small barns. This was done with wooden frames covered with canvas and painted, some with thatched roofs. One looked like an old castle. The weakest point in the defence line would have been the A25 Road from Silent Pool to Newlands Corner as tanks could drive right through the defence line. Therefore at the point where the road climbs steeply up from Silent Pool and through a defile, concrete cylinders about 4 feet high and 2 feet in diameter with a lifting hook at the top, were left beside the road ready to block the road. A pillbox protected the defile and concrete pyramids about 3 feet high were placed in a line

each side of the road to prevent tanks driving around it. A little further up where the road levels off before climbing up to Newlands Corner, was another defence work. This was a large anti-tank ditch, about 8 yards across and 45-degree sides dug at right angles across the road at the lower side. The upper slope was protected by concrete pyramids (Dragons teeth) again concrete cylinders were placed ready to block the road. A pillbox was built beside the road on the Newlands Corner side by the ditch. This was made to look like a filling station with a thatched roof and wood canvas side painted to look like the office. There were even real petrol pumps outside. I remember seeing this as I lived on Albury Heath in 1939 and the Farley Green bus used to go over Newlands Corner.

After the war, the road was straightened and the pillbox removed.

## Chapter 25 And Finally

After Ailsa died in 2000, I decided to see a bit more of the world as I had intended to do when I retired in 1992.

I travelled to China twice, seeing quite a lot of the country sailing on the Yangtze and Li rivers and travelled thousands of miles by air, ship, railway, coach and minibus. I also went to Sri Lanka and saw the elephants; to Egypt, sailing from Luxor to Aswan and Abu Simbel; across Russia from Moscow to St Petersburg by ship; to Sicily to see the Greek temples; to Greece to see Olympia and Delphi; to Andalucia in Southern Spain, Tuscany in Italy, Romania and to the Outer Hebrides.

I still helped out with the Alzheimer's Society as before but this time attending the monthly meetings with patients and their carers to do the tea and help out with advice, because Alzheimers always progresses the same way.

I joined the Guildford Natural History Society to go on their coach outings and walks. It was on one of these walks, at Painshill Park, that I met my present wife Yvonne in 2004. She had been a nursing officer in the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps and had travelled all over the world. She had moved to Chilworth in Surrey in 1999. In 2009 we got married and have been very happy together ever since.

We keep very active and look forward to our centenary!

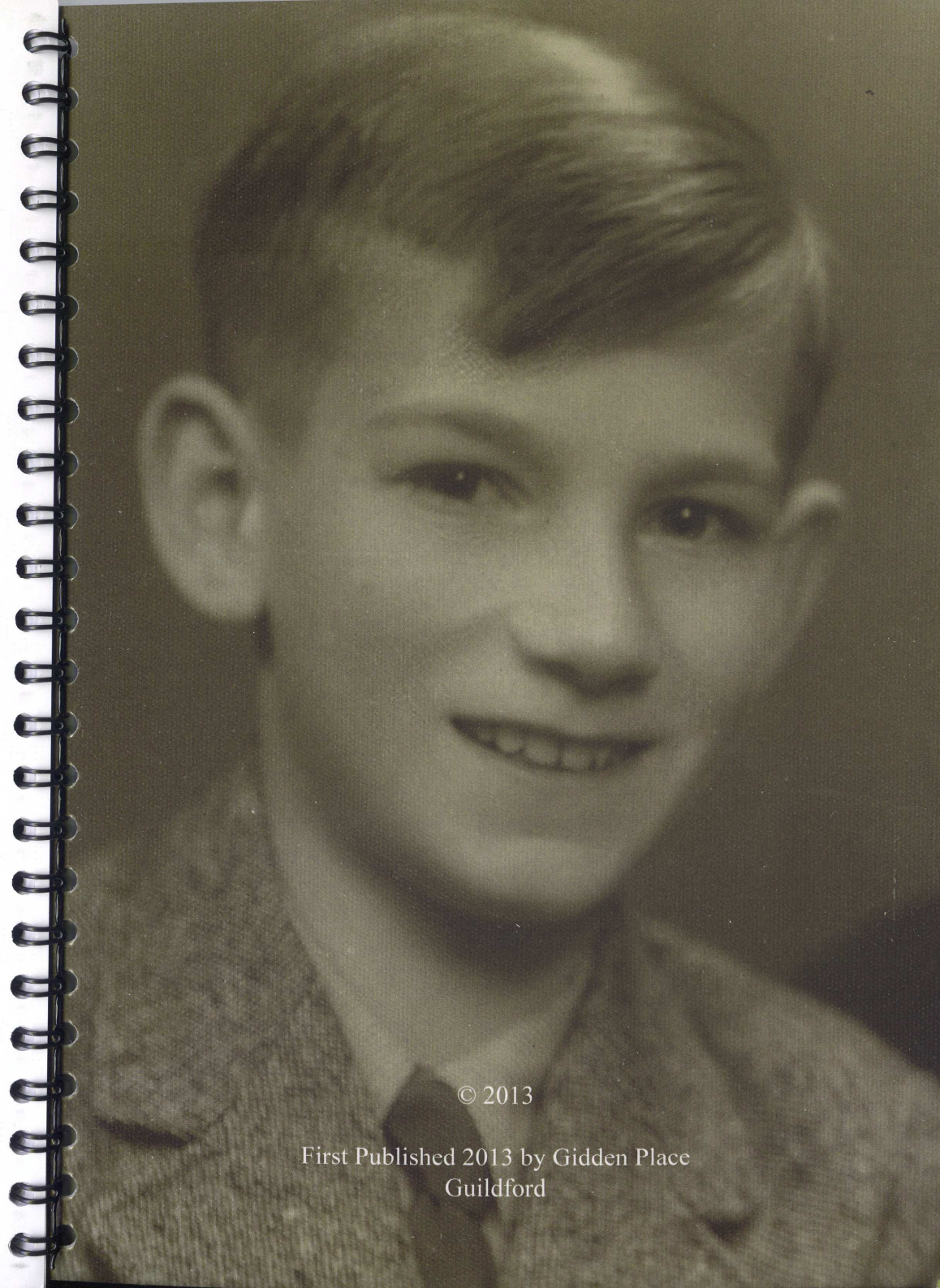
Auf Wiedersehen



Yvonne and me on the Rhine 2010



IN MEMORIAM  
ALL THOSE WHO SAID GOODBYE  
AT PRAGUE AIRPORT,  
BUT WERE UNABLE TO FOLLOW.



© 2013

First Published 2013 by Gidden Place  
Guildford