

About a New Dawn

An Historical Eyewitness Account

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Fifty years have passed since I left Germany for the United States. I am an 'Old Timer'; some consider me ancient, because I remember the early beginnings of Hitler and the Nazi movement. I experienced them as a boy in my home town Bremen in Germany, and it took many years for me to comprehend the enormity of the forces that were unleashed during those years. We hear people say: "This must never happen again." But unless we know the enemy, we can still fall prey to those who enslave innocent people.

This narrative is an attempt to unmask and identify the enemy. It is also a chronicle of events that have convinced me that we are never all alone, and that most problems have a built-in answer, which we can find if we *really* want to know.

The Adolf Hitler I knew at the age of twelve was a war hero and a model citizen. He abstained from alcohol, didn't smoke, and was a vegetarian. He lived in an average Bavarian house on a mountain. He liked dogs, and played with them for all to see. Children flocked to him and brought him flowers, while their parents stood back and saluted their Fuehrer. When Hitler came to Bremen to inspect the shipyards, everybody went out to see the new German leader. Stores closed for a time, and there was no school. I went directly to the industrial complex to find a place to see Hitler. As expected, there were people everywhere. I was determined to get very close to the Fuehrer, and I found a narrow alley he had to pass through. On one side was a building, on the other side a big pile of coal. I crawled to the top and decided to stand there all by myself. Soon, I heard the loud roar of the crowd: "Sieg Heil....Sieg Heil...Sieg Heil." It got louder and louder, like an approaching storm. A black Mercedes came slowly around the corner, and then... there he was. Hitler was standing in his car, looking at me and smiling. He returned my salute, as his car drove past me at a snail's pace. I liked the way he looked at me. Hitler smiled at me! Few people could make that claim, and I was only 12 years old. I also admired his Iron Cross first class from World War I. Hitler was everything I had imagined him to be, and more.

Ten Years Later: 1945

Adolf Hitler was dead; killed by his own hand.
Millions of innocent victims had perished.
His judgment day had begun.

Some time ago, our family had a reunion at the East Coast. We had rented a house near the beach, and family members had come from all over the United States and Germany. There were so many young people I had never met and didn't know that I was embarrassed to admit that I knew very little about my extended family. I had spent a lifetime, taking care of my immediate family, worrying about my own children and grandchildren. The world around me was not all that important to me, and I should have known better.

Our reunion was a great success. One afternoon, a family member announced that he was planning to write a little book about our family, and he asked that each one of us write a short note about the most important day of his life. I had to think about it for a while, and finally wrote "The day of my birth was the most important day of my life, so far." Sadly, our cousin passed away before he could write the family chronicle. But his question remained with us:

"What was the most important day of your life?"

* * *

Retracing my life, takes me back to the day of my birth, and I think it is the best place to start, the very beginning. My parents told me that I was born on the 27th of August. I have to take their word for it since I don't remember anything. I don't know why I ended up on this globe; I had no say in the matter. But here I was, along with thousands of other boys and girls, born the same day all over the earth. We did not choose our place of birth, nor did we choose our parents, country, religion, or race. During the early years of our lives our parents taught us the difference between good and evil. Some of us were taught that there is a God, and others that there is no God. To some, Communism was better than many religions, such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, or Christianity. Our "Class of August 27th" had much in common. We had arrived through no fault of our own; we were curious about life and ready to learn from the people around us: Our parents, our ministers, our teachers, and our friends. By the time I was twelve, I had become a programmed creation, ready to put my *vast* knowledge to the test. As far as I was concerned, I knew all the answers. Little did I know what was lying ahead.

It was around that time that I was told to avoid certain groups of people, including their children. I became aware of a class distinction I did not like. "There are some people who cannot be trusted," I was told.

Instead of making friends at home and abroad, people made adversaries of those who belonged to a different race, party, religion, or nationality, and they admonished their children to do the same.

If children could have made friends with whomever they wanted, much suffering and dying would have been avoided in years to come. Unfortunately, people had learned nothing from history.

As a small boy, my bed stood in a corner of our living room, so I would be warm during the night. (It was our only heated room in the house).

I remember, one evening my mother hung a large bed sheet over and around my bed. Now I had my own little room inside our living room. I didn't know why she did it, but I liked it. While I was enjoying my new tent, I heard people coming into the room. At first they visited with my parents, and then my father began to read to them from the Bible. My parents had invited our neighbors to an hour of prayer and Bible study, and a few had come. I listened for a while, but soon I fell sound asleep, feeling happy and content...

My father's missionary work in his corner of the world would become part of my life, even as a small child. The initial group of neighbors grew eventually to about twenty, with a Sunday school attendance of about sixty children. The established independent Methodist Church in Bremen rented a room behind a store; the people renovated it and organized their own congregation. The minister from the downtown church conducted services every Sunday afternoon and on Tuesday evenings.

Most members were poor and unemployed. Some had family problems. All were looking for answers and encouragement from the Church. They had been baptized as babies, and confirmed into the State church at the age of fourteen. But they still were like straw in the wind, afraid to think of the future and unable to ignore the present. They were looking for someone they could trust.

My father worked sixty hours a week, making deliveries for an office supply company. His Sundays belonged to the Lord, and he spent all day in church work, distributing handmade invitations at street corners, and church publications to homes. He was my instructor; I learned from his accomplishments and from his mistakes.

While our family life was not affected by the history making events in Germany and Bremen, the political confrontations and other events outside in the streets did not go unnoticed. Bremen was a well known port city in Northern Germany. The North German Lloyd had its impressive fleet built there, including the new luxury liner "BREMEN". People marveled at this elegant ship, as she began to move slowly down the Weser River.

All of those who had been responsible for the most impressive building project since the end of World War I gave a sigh of relief. By contrast, thousands of workers who had built the ship were now unemployed. They did not celebrate; they worried! Soon their savings would be depleted, and they would be forced to live on welfare. The Communists were ready and waiting for them, and so were the Nazis. The workers had families to support, they were professionals in their chosen fields, and they needed work.

Germany was a country of extreme contrasts in those days. The rich accumulated more wealth than ever before, and many flaunted it, while the working class could not make ends meet. The large scale unemployment was a hardship for the working class, but a windfall for those who offered jobs and pay- checks. Employers paid their workers as little as they could get away with and amassed large fortunes as a result. People knew it, but there was little they could do about it; until the Communists came along.

The Communists were going to use force and violence to bring about changes, and many desperate families gladly turned to them for help. While the Communist party was growing,

Hitler offered an alternative: changes and a better future by winning elections with the support of the churches and the middle class. His propositions looked good on paper, and many people trusted him. He was gaining supporters and recognition. Hitler was also patient, he knew when the time was right to act, and he knew how to give convincing speeches. Germany still had sixteen political parties at that time and people didn't know whom to believe.

To a German man "Respect" is very important. A man would rather be respected by his family and friends than loved. Herr and Frau Holz and their children, six year old Anna and fourteen year old Kurt, were such a family. Herr Holz worked long hours on his job as a carpenter. He had no time for anything other than his work, because he had purchased a new house. It was small, but still roomy enough for the four of them. They had flowers in front of their house, and the windows were sparkling. They were proud of their possession, and they were respected in church as well as by the people they knew. Little Anna had many friends to play with, and Kurt had friends who accepted him as an equal.

Suddenly, their world collapsed. Herr Holz lost his job and desperation paralyzed the family. He had to do something to support his family and make the house payments. There were no jobs available, and his only way out was welfare. He knew that he would lose his house if he stayed on welfare longer than six months.

What made matters worse for the family was that many of their "friends" seem to avoid them. Anna knew that some of her friends no longer came to play with her. There were also fewer invitations for her. Kurt was very depressed. He was afraid to invite people to his home, for fear they might not come. It had become known that his father was now a door to door salesman. So, little by little they began to avoid him.

Frau Holz called: "Kurt, it's time to get up, or you'll be late for work". It was Kurt's third month on his new job. He was going to be a plumber, make his own money, and rejoin his friends. It didn't work out that way.

His mother called again, no answer. As she opened the door to his room, she fainted. Kurt was hanging from the ceiling with a rope around his neck.

Word spread like wildfire throughout the schools and community. People were shocked. My mother and I went to his funeral. The Hitler Youth sent a delegation, and the boys escorted his coffin from the chapel to the open grave. After Kurt's mother and sister had said their final good bye, the leader of the Hitler Youth stepped forward, went to the open grave, paused for a moment, and while giving the Nazi salute, said loud and clear: "Du warst der besten Kameraden einer." (You were one of our best comrades). They really didn't know Kurt that well, but they knew about him, and they wanted to honor him, they wanted to show *respect*. This was the only tribute Kurt received. No one else had anything to say. If someone had told Kurt earlier: *You are one of the best*, he never would have taken his own life.

What would our world be like, if all of us would extend an inviting hand to those who are lonely and depressed? Most people want to belong to a group of likeminded friends and join a church, a civic club, or some other organization for fellowship. Those who are outside the mainstream often organize into gangs. They too have the desire to belong. Kurt felt forsaken by all.

Many churches lock their doors during the week.

One of my childhood's highlights was May Day. I looked forward to it because it was a national holiday, which meant no school. Most houses and businesses were decorated with flags, and the parade was always exiting. It seemed like everybody was doing something to get ready for the events of the day. I strolled through the streets, admiring the many different flags. There was a black-white-red flag. I knew that this was the house of a World War I veteran. He was loyal to Kaiser Wilhelm and would have liked to see him back on the throne. My parents, too, had the same flag. They were Germans, loyal and bound to their country by family traditions, going back hundreds of years. "Germany above all" meant to them: "I love my country more than any other place on earth"; they never felt superior towards others. All people, all races, black, white, or yellow were God's children.

When I came to a house that displayed a red flag, I felt somewhat uneasy. Here lived people who were taking orders from Stalin in Russia. They were against churches and would have destroyed them, if given a chance. They started street fights and riots to bring down the Socialist government we had at the time. These people were Communists. Most of them were living on welfare and were looking for support wherever they could find it. Churches offered some help as best they could. But the Communists were unemployed and unable to support their families; they were looking for a way out of their plight.

There were more flags. The flag I liked most was a new one I had not noticed before. It was red, with a white center and a black cross in it. They called the cross a Hakenkreuz (a cross with hooks), the swastika. It was the flag of the Nazi Party. Since its colors were the traditional black-white and red, the Nazis represented traditional values, and people liked that.

The majority of the flags were the Social Democrat's black, red and gold. I knew that the Social Democrats wanted a democratic Germany. I also knew that they did not support the churches. To them, if there is a God somewhere, he certainly is not doing anything to help us. We will do whatever needs to be done, and we will do it ourselves. I had the impression that many supported this point of view.

All these differences did not matter on May Day 1931. The sun was shining, for once no rain, and the parade was about to start. I knew that it was time for the parade, because more and more police were coming into view, some on foot and others on horseback. People were lining the streets, ready to applaud their men as they marched by. I enjoyed the bands. Most men in the parade were in high spirits. They enjoyed the publicity and comradeship; also, there were going to be parties in the evening with plenty to eat and drink.

Of all the groups and organizations marching and singing in the parade, the Nazi Sturm Abteilung (SA), a par-military organization, impressed me the most. They were not like the others, walking leisurely down the street. In their brown uniforms, they marched in precise military fashion. A few bystanders raised their right hand in salute, which was promptly returned by the captain, the Obersturm Fuehrer.

One incident, however, disturbed me greatly. A bystander walked up to the marching SA and said something to them. Immediately, two SA men broke ranks and went after him. I knew the man, he was a poor Communist and I felt sorry for him. The bystanders did not come to his rescue because nobody seemed to be interested in him and his problems. From then on, I stayed away from the SA as much as possible.

Germany's unity was beginning to develop some serious cracks. *'Everybody for himself'* became their battle cry.

In 1932 few homes had radios and there was no television. Since newspapers were too expensive for average workers, they relied on public announcements which were posted on official bulletin boards throughout the city. Organizations with a political agenda printed newspapers and distributed them free of charge.

One of the more popular papers was the "Voelkischer Beobachter", which was published by the N.S.D.A.P, the Nazi party. It was a well written paper, encouraging people not to despair, because there were better days ahead.

The Nazis promised: Full employment, protection from Communism, freedom of religion, government contracts for the industry, safe streets, and a house with a Volkswagen for every worker.

Many people liked the new paper and the men in their brown uniform who distributed it. However, there were also those who knew better, and did not believe everything they read in the Nazi paper. At the same time, people agreed that the world was against Germany, and something had to be done; but what? Perhaps, the Nazis had the answer; but first they would have to be elected.

For many it was one thing to hope for better days to come, but another, to make it through the day. They needed money for food and rent. Men walked the streets, playing a violin or accordion, and collecting the small change people threw from their windows. Those who didn't play an instrument stood in the middle of the street and sang for money. Even more desperate men came to our door, asking for a sandwich. Conditions couldn't get much worse.

As for myself, I thought that the prevailing living conditions were normal. I didn't know that life could be different, without beggars and violent confrontations in the streets. I was afraid much of the time, but I didn't know what to do about it. God was high up in heaven and didn't seem to pay much attention to what was going on in Bremen.

It was during these turbulent times that my grandparents moved into the two rooms on the third floor of our house. My grandfather had been an unskilled laborer all his life. He worked in a factory, and never had a paid vacation or sick leave. My grandmother worked every summer in the fields for the land owners, and saved her money for a dowry for her two daughters. When they got married each daughter had her own bedroom, living room, and kitchen furniture.

My grandparents were glad to now have their own little apartment, and we were happy to have them with us. I spent a great deal of my time with "Opa", my grandfather. We played checkers on a homemade checker board; he took the black beans, and I had the white ones. Most the time I won, he made sure of that. Together we went to the port and looked at the many big freighters that had come from all over the world. Sometimes he succeeded in talking a sailor into permitting us to come on board and tour the ship. I would talk about that for days, because I knew of no other boy who had ever been inside a big ship. For years, Opa built kites for me and himself, and we went out together to see which one would fly the highest. We used to sit in front of his aquarium and watch his goldfish. He also grew many plants, and we checked the leaves every day to see how much they had grown.

My grandfather spent many days talking to me about the Bible, God, and Eternity. I was very young then, and he made sure that I understood the importance of being prepared. Jesus could return any day now, and those who were not ready for him would be left behind. Opa had

a picture chart, showing exactly what had happened so far since the beginning of time, and what was to happen. I remembered that there was a big fire at the end of the chart, and that we were headed for it if we missed the rapture and were left behind. I was worried. However, as time progressed, I thought less and less about his warning. Now, I am looking forward to the future.

In their desire to serve the Lord, my grandparents went to extremes. Every year they butchered a hog, which was their meat supply for a year. Some years they invited the congregation from the Methodist church of a nearby town, Paine, for a big dinner and served them most of the meat. It was their way to give thanks to the Lord. I will never be able to understand their *action*, but I admire their *motivation*. They did it their way.

Meanwhile, some events gave people hope for the future, but no direct relief. One evening we noticed a humming sound outside; it was getting closer and closer. My parents looked at each other, not knowing what to make of it. They had never heard anything like it. My father opened the window.

There was "Graf Zeppelin!" Soon, many windows in the neighborhood opened, and people looked in awe at the massive object in the night sky above us. We could see the outline of the huge colossus. It was so big; it was almost frightening to me.

Now Germany had the fastest ship on the high seas, and an air ship to take passengers anywhere in the world, at a speed faster than cars or trains at the time. Ordinarily, a noteworthy event such as this would have made big headlines. In our case, it was much more. It was an event of national importance. No other country in the world had anything like it. Germany was going to show the world what she could do.

The unemployed had their own priorities. They knew that some people were earning large profits, and they wanted their share.

Also, World War I was still fresh in people's minds. In retrospect, they didn't like what they saw. Three first cousins had sent their youth into battle to die, instead of sitting around the table and settling their dispute. If Czar Nicholas, Kaiser Wilhelm, and King George had been forced to personally lead their troops into battle, rifle in hand, World War I would never have happened; and the flames of hatred that led to World War II would never have been lit.

There is a lesson to be learned.

My time to learn in earnest began when I was six years old; I started school. On the first day of school I simply attached myself to some of the older children I knew, and made my way to school. It didn't take me long to find the first grade class room, I got in line, gave my name, and sat down. School could start.

Our teacher stood in front of the class, looked at us without a smile, and said: "I am Herr Fiess. The first thing you do when I enter the room in the morning is, you stand up and say 'Guten Morgen Herr Fiess.' Let's try that, stand up." We stood up: "Good morning Herr Fiess."

The stage was set. Herr Fiess taught first, second, and third grades. He was our teacher for the first three years. He was a very good teacher, but I never saw him smile, not once. At one time I saw him coming towards me on the street. I hurried into the house and looked out the window until he had passed. The next day in school he said, if you want to hide from me, don't stand behind the window.

The school also offered free dental care. Once a year, a dentist came to the school with his portable dental office. It was a bus, fully equipped for any kind of dental work, including fillings. There was no electricity in the bus, and the drill had to be operated by hand, or better, by foot. The dentist stood on one foot and operated a foot pedal with the other, while drilling in my mouth. It was slow motion drilling and it felt like it; I lived through it, but I would not want to do it again.

Back at home, family dinner was our time to hear the latest news. My father told us that Hitler had given a speech in Munich, and people had gotten killed in street fights. The Communist party had made big gains and was trying to take over the government. God help us, if that should ever happen.

My world was Bremen. Important political events in Berlin and Munich meant little to me. There was only one family in our city block that had a radio, and the reception was poor at best.

The SA made big gains in influence and power, and was marching through the streets in their well tailored brown uniforms, displaying their flags and ranks. More and more people were saluting them now. Their popularity had increased considerably. It was an uneasy feeling all around, because people would get hurt, if not killed. We stayed inside the house as much as possible and watched the world around us.

I was not happy and carefree as a child, even though my parents tried to keep the outside world from me. Everywhere I looked was unrest, caused by injustice and hatred. I was told to trust the Lord. Nothing could happen without Him knowing about it. We were Christians, and God would always take care of his own. This belief was beyond my understanding, because I knew people who deserved better than to perish in agony.

The upstairs apartment in our house was rented to a family with two small children. One day I heard loud screaming and shouting upstairs. It was Friday, payday, and the man had spent most of his money at a nearby tavern. I saw him standing there, still half drunk, with a sad face and shaking his head. He was a dependable man and loved by his family and friends. But now, for once, he had lost control of himself. He had worked hard for six days, yet he had nothing to show for it. And he was not alone. The workers were not asking for much. They were willing to work 48 hours a week without overtime pay. They demanded respect and stability, and they wanted it now. The government was supporting those who paid the most taxes, the rich. The Nazis promised full employment and fair wages for all, they were the worker's salvation, not the investors. Capitalists turned their back on the poor, and the Communists took their orders from Russia. Only the Nazis were for law and order and economic stability. Germans went to vote, while Hitler and the Nazis held their breath. The people's vote affected the course of history in Europe and the world.

*The German people trusted Hitler and the Nazis unconditionally.
They showed the world the danger of such action.
They paid with their lives.*

Growing up in the Shadow of the Swastika

My father came rushing into the kitchen, "Hitler has been appointed Chancellor." He had read the headlines, and it was official. The last election had given the Nazis the majority, and industrial leaders had urged President von Hindenburg to appoint Hitler to the post. My mother was concerned when she heard the news. My grandfather made light of it. His reaction was: "We have had so many changes lately, let's see what Adolf Hitler can do." Hitler was in power, but he was not in complete control. Not everybody went around saying "Heil Hitler" instead of good morning or good day.

In school we now had to stand up and say "Heil Hitler" every time a new teacher entered the class. At one time, when our biology teacher came in, I made my voice sound like a sick cat when we said "Heil Hitler." The class thought that was funny; the teacher did not. She marched me to the principal's office. Spanking was still the standard method of punishment. The teacher left the office, and I was at the mercy of the principal. He in turn told me to sit down and take it easy. An hour later he said, "Go back to your class, she is gone." I never told a soul what had happened to me in that office.

Hitler knew that he had opponents who could not be ignored, and he was prepared to deal with them. But he also had influential and wealthy supporters who were interested in huge profits, building military hardware.

The population in general welcomed Hitler by displaying the new national flag. There was no longer the variety of flags: Germany was united under one leader. Many Germans were concerned; they had been members of various political parties and organizations that had opposed Hitler and the Nazis. What would happen to them? To everybody's surprise, the Nazis were more magnanimous than expected. They welcomed all into their ranks, including the Communists. They wanted complete control, and this was one way to achieve it. Their slogan was "We are One People with One Leader."

A new day had dawned; people were happy and relieved, but at the same time apprehensive; they simply didn't know what to expect. Hitler had made many promises, including full employment. Was this one of the usual campaign promises nobody trusted, or was he going to be different? Within a few weeks they had their answer. Hitler was different; he kept his word.

Hitler let it be known that he considered it a disgrace for married women to work for pay outside the house. We honor, respect, and protect our women. It is a man's responsibility to support his family. He ordered all party members to keep their wives at home with the children. If they had no children, he suggested that they correct that.

It did not take very long for all housewives to quit their jobs and stay home. As a result, the employers lost their cheap labor force, the wages went up, and we had full employment.

When Hitler assumed power on January 30th, it was cold. Many people had no heat and were hungry. He didn't like what he saw, and he announced to Germany and the world: "By next Christmas, nobody in Germany will be cold or hungry." Again, he kept his promise. People were beginning to trust him.

Since Germany has a shortage of raw materials, the Nazis started a nation-wide recycling program. All paper, rags, iron, empty toothpaste tubes, bones and copper wire were collected every week. A man pushed a cart through the streets, shouting 'old iron, rags....etc.,' and women took whatever they had collected to him, receiving a few pennies in return. In some areas they also collected table scraps and potato peels. This was then delivered to a pig farm for feed. The farm supplied meat for large families with a small family income.

Even though the Nazis had done nothing to upset or hurt anyone - as far as the public knew - there were still some people who were opposed to them. They started spreading rumors about things that were going on behind closed doors. Some people were also upset about the increase in property taxes. They sold their old villas and built new houses in order to avoid the heavy tax burden on old mansions. Many villas were bought by the Nazi party and used for a variety of activities.

No matter what the reason for some people's justifiable discontent was, they could not openly complain. Even in those early days, the Nazis did not tolerate any opposition or criticism.

Prior to 1933, Thanksgiving Sunday was celebrated in the cities by decorating altars in churches with fruits and vegetables. In rural villages, farmers had also colorful parades and community events.

Cities had no public events; they were too sophisticated. Hitler bridged this gap at a national Thanksgiving celebration. He assembled farmers from all over Germany, and representatives from labor, commerce, and government in Bueckeberg, a small town in Northern Germany, for a nationwide Thanksgiving celebration. Germany had never seen anything like it. People from all walks of life came to the event and my grandfather was one of them.

The assembled bands played the well known hymn "Now Thank We All Our God"; people listened on their radios as thousands gave thanks for God's blessings. Then Hitler gave a speech worth remembering: "All of us are indebted to our farmers; without them we would starve to death. Farmers deserve our respect and our gratitude."

The farmers went home, bought a swastika flag, and a picture of Hitler for the living room. A hymn and a well written speech had earned Hitler the support of the rural population. Our family, too, was impressed and pleased with what they had heard. My parents had grown up in the country and were farmers at heart.

My grandfather was a deeply religious man. When he returned home from Bueckeberg, he proclaimed: "Hitler is a man of God." This assurance put our minds at ease for the time being.

Later I learned an important lesson: Never judge people by what they say or pretend to be. Throughout history, millions were betrayed because of that mistake. Germans should have scrutinized the men who belonged to Hitler's inner circle, and remembered the old German saying, "Tell me who your friends are, and I'll tell you who you are."

Hitler was not born the tyrant he later became; he was a politician who knew the German mind, even though he was Austrian by birth. He had a plan: to show the world the greatness of Germany and the German people. In order to accomplish this, Hitler was looking for support from the professionals, labor, and the churches. He also was in need of young men, willing to protect him and die for him. In the end, he had what he wanted. Some of his fanatic followers proclaimed: "The Jews had Jesus, and we have Hitler." Hitler became what many people wanted him to be, a *god*. What was true then, is still true today. Once evil forces are set in motion, there

is no stopping them, and all suffer the consequences, guilty or not.

In Germany life went back to normal. There were still bills to be paid and preparations for upcoming holidays to be made. Good Friday and Easter were important events. Good Friday was almost a national day of mourning. In the morning we went to church for Holy Communion. Most people were dressed in black or dark clothes. In the afternoon we stayed home, it was a quiet day for rest and reflection. Christians reminded each other that Christ died at 3 PM, and many paused and thought of HIM. (After fifty years in the US, I still experience Good Friday.) The Nazis, too, respected Good Friday. They stayed home and kept quiet.

My childhood would not have been nearly as enjoyable, if it had not been for the church. There was always something to look forward to. On holidays we took trips into the countryside; we enjoyed nature and played games. In summer we went to church camp, and getting there was part of the adventure. First we went down the Weser River by boat, which took four hours, then thirty minutes by train, and finally, after a twenty minute hike through the pine forest, we were there. It was one of the highlights of my childhood.

Since all children in Germany owned bikes, we also went on short trips to Methodists in neighboring towns, and spent an afternoon with them. Methodists had friends in many places.

My religious upbringing gave an anchor to cling to later in life. The Nazis knew about my belief in God, and that I went to church regularly. They watched me closely and reminded me when I failed to act like a "Christian." I knew from my Bible that I was to obey God and the authorities.

Nobody in Germany was hungry anymore, and every person, young or old, had complete health care coverage, including medicine. We had everything we needed, and life was tolerable. The stores were filled with items people could save their money for. A new washer, sweeper, radio, or bike was on most everybody's wish list. There were no credit cards. Either you had the money, or you did without. Mostly, we did without.

Romans 13, Verses 1 and 2 reads: "*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God. Therefore, whoever resists authority, resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.*"

This statement by St. Paul could be heard in every church and Sunday school class. It was the final tool Hitler needed to solidify his power. Our minister's son wore his SA uniform to church at his wedding. A visiting evangelist displayed the official Nazi party membership pin on his lapel. To be a party member meant being broadminded and in step with the times.

Pornography, abortion, homosexuality, or drunk driving put a person in jail for the rest of his life, or worse. The streets were safe at night. There was no street crime and no unemployment. How could anyone be against the Fuehrer? Hitler had the full support of the church for what he did to clean house. This was the Germany Hitler wanted us and the world to see, the one we saw, and the one we liked.

What we did *not* like, was an organization called the SS (*Sturm Staffel*), Hitler's personal division. These young men were outstanding in every way: They were tall, blond, and intelligent; they wore black uniforms, took orders directly from Berlin, and were above the law. They did not talk much; instead they observed what was going on around them. Their behavior was exemplary, polite and chivalrous. Young ladies loved them. My mother did not trust them because they were atheists and considered themselves invincible. Their motto was: "Do what is right, and fear no one." Their sworn duty was to protect Hitler and his Third Reich, and in this

they operated with zero tolerance. They had the power to arrest and jail anyone, including soldiers, without due process. Most ministers ignored the presence of the SS and what they stood for. After all, no government is perfect, they said.

In general, people believed in a Superior Being called God. They didn't know anything about Him, but they were quite sure that "someone" was up there.

The function of the church was to keep an open line to God so people could call on Him for help. To make sure that they could also call on the church in case of an emergency, people signed up for membership. They paid a small church tax from each paycheck, and for that they would get married and buried by a minister free of charge. They had paid their dues and had no need for anything else religious, they thought.

The smaller independent churches were more mission oriented. My parents belonged to that group, they were Methodists. The Nazis did not interfere with our activities; after all, we were helping people and had a good influence on children and families.

Hitler encouraged parents to have large families. The government paid for expensive vacations for mothers who needed a rest but could not afford one. Girls from the Hitler Youth took care of the families while the mothers were having a good time. Women were Hitler's strongest supporters. They adored him as a man and loved him for what he did for them. He declared in a speech that "A German woman is a man's highest reward." He did not marry, because he belonged to all women.

Also, women preferred men in uniform. The higher their rank, the more they admired them. The politicians had no uniforms and did not get much attention. By contrast, the Nazis were real *men*. They were resolute, well organized, and disciplined. They looked dependable. Party officials in Hitler's inner circle, benefited from this misguided esteem. They could do no wrong.

Not far from where we lived, the government built comfortable one-family homes for working class families. They had nice front lawns, space for a vegetable garden, and facilities for animals. They were available to families from crowded inner-city apartments and financed by the government; workers paid for them through payroll deductions. Many families had children who had spent most of their lives on street pavement in narrow streets. Now they were living in the country; Hitler had made their dreams come true.

Many people felt drawn to Hitler, because they had nothing and no one to fill their inner yearning. I knew a man who had lived in South America for a number of years. Hitler had heard about him and wanted to talk to him. So at the appointed hour Herr von Burghof went to Hitler's private residence in the Bavarian Alps. When he got near the entrance to Hitler's estate, he could not get to the gate. He was only five foot four and not strong enough to work his way through the crowd. Not knowing what else to do, he went to one of the SS (Hitler's own) guards and showed him the invitation. The guard saluted him, put him on his shoulder, and started marching towards the gate. When the people saw what was happening, they stepped aside to make room for them. They cheered and shouted, congratulating him, because he had an invitation from the Fuehrer. There was no higher honor. (I asked von Burghof what Hitler and he talked about, but he was evasive and would not tell me.)

It is difficult to explain how Germans feel about themselves and their war dead, fallen Kameraden, as they called them.

I was present at the dedication of new Army barracks in Bremen. It was a festive occasion. Yet, as the General stepped forward to accept the new facility, he paused and said: “We *remember* our fallen Kameraden.” He saluted, the crowd fell silent, all flags were lowered, men removed their hats; then came the command “Present arms” and the band began to play “I had a Kameraden” (a brother in arms). It was twenty years after the war; yet, to many Germans, their fallen Kameraden were still present in spirit.

This emotion gave special meaning to Memorial Day. Germans called it Helden Gedenktag (Heroes Remembrance Day). All flags throughout the city were flown at half staff. At the war memorial an honor guard of two soldiers paid tribute to the fallen heroes.

At a military memorial service the national flag was always lowered until it touched the ground. This was proper. To a German, the earth, never called dirt, has been created by God. It is also the resting place of all who have gone before; and it is our eventual resting place.

When Hitler spoke, Germany listened. He was able to verbalize what they felt. At times he made statements which some considered too radical, but that was soon forgotten. There was no one who could have taken his place.

To me as a boy, Hitler’s speeches were always exiting. The sound of fanfares on the radio signified that an important event was about to take place. It was followed by an important announcement: “This is the German radio network, broadcasting over all radio stations in the German Reich. In a moment our Fuehrer will address the German people. His speech is being transmitted to radio stations in France, United Kingdom, Austria, and Italy. It is also being broadcast over our overseas transmitters to North and South America.”

Here I was, witnessing and being part of an event in history that not too long ago would have been considered impossible. Our Fuehrer was being heard all over Europe and America. This was unbelievable! Surely, Hitler had something important to say.

Before Hitler spoke, Dr. Joseph Goebbels, his minister of propaganda, stepped up to the microphone: “My fellow Germans, our beloved Fuehrer, Adolf Hitler, is about to speak to us. We welcome him with our traditional Sieg Heil, Sieg Heil, Sieg Heil.” The audience was shouting itself into a frenzy, until after several minutes Hitler stopped them: “Fellow Countrymen, the hour has come for us to look at ourselves...”

Hitler talked about the shameful treaty of Versailles, the mistreatment of Germans in former German territories, the conspiracy against Germany at the League of Nations, and the clandestine activities of the Jews and Communists against him, the Nazis, and Germany. Germany was in need of a strong and powerful army, so it could defend itself. The crowd’s answer: “Sieg Heil...Sieg Heil!! Leader give the order, we will follow.”

Hitler still had a long way to go, but he had tested the waters, and he knew that he could count on the people. They were his, and now they had something to talk about.

As always, there were those for whom the war couldn’t start soon enough; “Let’s go and fight.” They were the ones who prefer war over working for a living. It made them feel powerful and important; fortunately, they were in the minority. Many were hoping that something could be accomplished through negotiations. They knew that in a war everybody loses, and that those who have been on the front lines in a war have no desire to be called to arms again.

My mother was concerned. “I still have not gotten over the last war, and here they are talking about a new one.” She prayed for reason and for peace. But Satan’s forces, the forces of hate and war, can be overwhelming. It takes an army of praying believers to defeat them.

Two years after the Nazis had been elected, in 1935, some teachers in the public schools still said the Lord's Prayer in class in the morning. We also had Bible study. At one time I told my mother what the teacher had said. That was a mistake. My mother disagreed with his interpretation and asked that I be excused from Bible study. The teacher, who was also the school principal, was very nice about it and agreed to send me to a different class whenever they had "Religion," as they called it. There were teachers like that, even in Nazi Germany.

One subject in school was America. We were told that Americans could make purchases without paying. They only needed a credit number. The teacher also explained American advertising. Instead of selling an item for \$ 10.00, they charged \$9.99. That really did not make sense to me. Politics were never mentioned in school. History lessons were about events on the European continent during the middle ages and before. Our teacher never talked about current events.

Our school had a very fine 16 mm film projector, and seeing an educational film was a rare treat. Once a month a student had to make the trip to the central office downtown to exchange the film we had seen for a new one. There was no TV, and we saw for the first time in our lives what the world and other countries were like. Many of us thought that someday we would go and see for ourselves the wonders of the world.

Thinking about my teachers, brings back many memories. In business college I had a very fine teacher. He was an older gentleman who not only wanted us to become good business men, but also good German citizens, in a positive sense. He supported the Nazis and Hitler, because he was convinced that they would restore Germany's greatness. But he was not fanatic and was willing to argue his point.

Five years later, in 1944, I was watching a Nazi funeral procession. Some high ranking Nazi had died and a few people lined the sidewalks. Not far from me I noticed my old teacher from business college. He had aged considerably. As I walked up to him, he recognized me right away. He looked at me, shaking his head, and said, "How could we be so blind, so wrong?" He was a good man, and in spite of his age, he too had been misled.

Hitler never would have dreamed that some day he would have the former King of England, George VIII, and his wife as guests at his home in Bavaria. There were pictures of him everywhere, shaking hands with the former king. We knew all along that Hitler had class. Kaiser Wilhelm's son was a general in the SA, and now a former king had come to visit him. The Nazi hierarchy was in high gear. They all wanted to be seen and have their picture taken with his Royal Highness. Perhaps they wanted to keep it for posterity in the 1000 year Reich. Pictures of the events were published in magazines in Germany and around the world.

When my mother read the story about the King of England, giving up his throne for women, she was touched. "It must have been true love." My grandfather, by contrast, thought that the man must have lost his mind. "Giving up a throne for a woman?" We were discussing world events.

A prominent American, Joseph Kennedy, was also said to be impressed by our Fuehrer; and in January of 1938 *Time* magazine featured a picture of Hitler on the front page, calling him "*Man of the Year*" for 1937.

We had read about him in the papers. Hitler was doing more for Germany than we had thought possible. As far as I was concerned, Adolf was doing OK.

Hitler's many building projects were singularly impressive. His large road system, the "Autobahn", is still being admired. Immense concrete structures, too large to be called bridges, span entire valleys to connect mountain ranges. His highways went through mountains, not around them.

Mobility was of utmost importance to Hitler, because Germany has a common border with ten countries. He had to be able to move his troops to wherever they were needed the most, and time was of essence, thus the Autobahn. To this day, I still don't know where the Nazis found the money to pay for everything. Millions of workers received cash money, no checks, every Friday. Manpower, horses, and small trucks moved most of the dirt and concrete. I watched them for hours; there were workers everywhere. I remember when they had a problem with ground water at one place. They put a man to work with a hand pump, and he pumped for days until the place was dry. They had no diesel or electric pump, and they didn't seem to need it.

While all this was going on, Hitler's popularity was soaring. Blue collar workers joined the "Arbeitsfront" (Workers Guild), which the Nazis had organized for them. School children joined the Hitler Youth; those who became members were excused from school on Saturdays, their meeting day.

In our school everybody joined, except for two boys. I was one of them. My mother simply didn't trust the Hitler Youth, because none of them went to church; and my friends were in church, so I didn't need them. As a result, I had to go to school on Saturdays, and a teacher had to be there to babysit us, while the other boys were having fun playing games and taking trips. I didn't like it, and the teacher liked it even less. "When you get home, I want you to pester your parents until they get tired of it and let you join the others" was his advice. After a few weeks, I finally succeeded in convincing my parents, and I was the happiest boy in town. The other boy joined too. Instead of being with a teacher in school, I now had fun, competing in sports, playing games, and exploring nature, things all boys enjoy doing. Being a member of the Hitler Youth did not affect my church activities. We still had our Sundays and summer camp.

At the age of fourteen, I enrolled in business college and began working as an apprentice for a company that built custom designed cars. The owner, Herr Pollmann, had no use for the Nazis; he worked hard, never took a vacation, and drove an old car, a Dodge. The Nazi officials did not work, and they knew nothing about his business. They demanded respect and issued directives he did not like and was not about to follow. He did not even have a flag, which was very unusual for a German place of business at that time. I had come to the right place. I did my work and kept my eyes and ears open.

It did not take me long to realize that some of the Nazis were not the kind of people I would want as neighbors. They were arrogant, rude, and demanding parvenus. I avoided them as much as possible and learned to go with the flow: "Heil Hitler" when necessary, otherwise, only scant talk about me and my business. I was disappointed with the Nazis, and I could not understand why church members did not speak up. There were things going on I was not supposed to know. Worst of all, atheistic groups, mostly Hitler's "SS" in their black uniforms, became more vocal and no one seemed to care. A feeling of uneasiness and uncertainty was starting to cause restlessness and doubt among some people. There were rumors, and people were more cautious about what they said and to whom. Everywhere I looked I saw and heard nothing but contradictions. It would be a long time before I had answers.

There was my boss, Herr Pollmann. Why did he not like the Nazis; after all, they were his best customers then?

One reason was the new officials, called *Gauleiter*, who were appointed by Hitler himself. These men ruled the eleven states as if they were their private domain, and no one dared to oppose them. They wore brown uniforms, lived in villas, drove big cars, had their girl or boy friends, and were fat. They issued directives people didn't like, and kept their private lives secret. It was their responsibility to keep Hitler informed about activities in their districts, including business activities.

Germany's industry was running in high gear. Military trucks, bombers, and a new flotilla were being built around the clock, and everybody knew about it.

My grandfather said to me, "Nobody builds an army unless he intends to use it. Throughout history, the military has always found an excuse to try their new 'toys' in combat. You just wait and see."

Hitler proved him to be right. His *Thousand Year Reich* needed a strong army. We had heard it many times: Our Fuehrer has begun to build a thousand year Reich; but nobody took that seriously. We were not going to live a thousand years, and we couldn't care less what Germany would be like in a hundred, let alone a thousand years.

Since Hitler was Austrian, it was only natural that he wanted Austria to become part of what he now called "Gross Deutschland"(Greater Germany). Most Austrians were glad to become part of Hitler's Germany. I saw newsreels, showing immense crowds welcoming Hitler to Vienna. Germany was now the largest country in Western Europe and had become so without firing a single shot. We had no doubt that Hitler was a man of peace. All he wanted was the return of former German territories that were inhabited by German nationals. Germany had never ruled foreign land during its sixty-five years of existence, and we were proud of our nation's history. We were also looking forward to the Olympics, to be held in Berlin later that year.

The 1936 Olympics solidified Hitler's international prestige. They were more than he could have hoped for. He stood high on a platform, and the athletes of the world marched in review, saluting him with their flags. He was on his way to world fame. The world was paying tribute to him, while many Jews were leaving Germany.

It had become obvious that Jews were no longer welcome; some had been arrested. Nations ignored the happenings; nobody objected or asked questions about it. The Jews did not seem to matter.

The Olympics were an ideal opportunity for the world to stop Hitler; the handwriting was on the wall, *Mein Kampf* (Hitler's ideology) had been published and translated into many languages, while the Jews were being persecuted. The nations did not confront Hitler, because they were tired of conflicts, and Hitler knew it.

At the Olympics, Germany's youth belonged to Hitler. We were like young people everywhere at that time: proud of our country. The time had come for Hitler and the Nazis to show the world that they were invincible. One world under Hitler was their aim. For some time, Hitler's attention had been focused on Italy. The dictator Benito Mussolini, had assumed power, and his army had marched into Ethiopia. The League of Nations talked a lot, but did nothing. In his speeches, Hitler was full of praise for his new friend Mussolini and made

fun of the League of Nations. Germany withdrew from the League, and Hitler proceeded to put his own plans into action. He intended to do even better than Mussolini.

Without warning, he marched towards France into the Alsace region and occupied former German territory. My parents had mixed feelings. They liked what he did, but they feared that it might trigger a new war. Nothing happened, and in a boastful speech Hitler said cynically, "I told you so." Germany gave a sigh of relief.

Now events happened so rapidly that it was impossible to comprehend their impact: news releases were censored. The thousand-year Reich has begun, they said, but not everybody applauded. People knew instinctively that information was being kept from them; they were afraid that things might get out of control. Even though the majority, including the post war generation, was intoxicated with Germany's successes, they knew that it would not go on forever.

The Nazis fanned the flames of people's enthusiasm, while the elite stood back, shaking their heads. They knew that they had missed their opportunity to control Germany's future. They had exploited the workers and ignored the poor. The time had come to "pay the piper": Hitler.

There was another group of individuals who did some fanning the flames of their own. Industry and big business knew that tremendous profits would be theirs, if Germany should go to war. They supported Hitler's aggressive policies. He was rearming the *Wehrmacht*, his combined military forces, and building large fortifications along the Western border with France. Thousands of workers found well paying jobs and the industrialists were amassing fortunes. The German military wanted war to re-establish their status of superiority. The *satanic* force that has been the curse of mankind was dominating and controlling events in Germany.

As for myself, I was young and took one day at a time. There was never a dull moment. It seemed like that there might be a war, and that would be very interesting. More and more people expressed concern or excitement, depending on their age and political orientation. One thing had changed, however; few people were making plans for next year's vacation. Church activities had changed some, too. Life was no longer completely worry free.

Aryan Germans and Jewish Germans had lived side by side for many generations. Yet, they did not accept each other as equals. The Jews knew how to make money, and the Aryans knew how to run an army. Each considered themselves somewhat superior to the other. It became obvious that the German Jews controlled Germany's purse strings. My father explained to me that many of the big estates in town belong to the rich Jews: the bankers, university professors, high ranking civil servants and owners of the new high-rise department stores. They were prominent Jews. Some had been officers in the German Army in World War I. They were the same people I had admired, entering expensive coffee shops, theaters, and concert halls.

Even though prominent Jews were leaving the country by now, many ordinary, everyday hard working Jews did not leave. This I will never be able to understand. Nobody was stopping them.

One such German Jew was working at Pollmann. He did very good work; he was friendly and well liked. One day he came to me: "Johannes, I would like to ask you to do me a favor. I have a son your age, and he is alone at home with his mother. It would make him very happy if you would come to our apartment and spend some time with him. Would you do that? Please."

I knew what he was asking: I was to go into the Jewish part of town and spend some time

with a Jew as a friend. No German in his right mind would have done that at that point and time in Germany. Prudence has never been my strong suit, so I went.

This visit is something that causes me deep emotional pain when I think about it. The boy and his mother were overjoyed when I came. They had a cake and we played some games. They were in seventh heaven, because I was there, a simple German boy. A few weeks later the family was gone. I hope they made it out of the country. For many it was too late.

A German Jew, by the name of Bamberger, built the largest department store Bremen had ever seen. It was six stories high and had an escalator which I rode, while my mother did her shopping. There was no animosity towards the Jews prior to January 1933 when Hitler became Chancellor. The first shockwave came when the Nazis published the "truth" about the Jews among us.

Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, the leaders and founders of the German Communist party, were Jews. Karl Marx, a university professor, was the author of the book Das Kapital, the Communist text book. He was respected because of his Ph.D. from the University of Heidelberg and his teaching position there. Dr. Marx was also a Jew. Word was out: The Jews are committing treason against our Vaterland by cooperating with our arch enemy, Russia. Don't patronize Jewish stores and don't trust the Jews. Educated people had known all along about the Jewish involvement in the Communist movement. They did not approve of what some Jews were doing, but they were not about to sever their relations with all Jews, just because the Nazis demanded it. To them, nothing had changed.

The working class was more credulous. They did not question what they were told. Also, they wanted to work for German employers, and end what they called their enslavement to Jewish capitalists and foreign interests. German workers agreed that the Fuehrer could only keep his promise if they gave him a free hand. The churches were glad to have someone to stem the Communist tide.

It was at this time that I first heard official anti-Jewish propaganda: Jews were to blame for our defeat in World War I. They were Communists, promoting international Zionism. Their influence was worldwide. They were out to control finance and industry all over Europe and the United States. The Jews referred to themselves as "German Jews" not "Jewish Germans" and should not hold positions of importance or responsibility.

Recognizing this anti-Jewish trend, many Jews left Germany. The animosity against the Jews increased. Large billboards went up: "Die Juden sind unser Unglueck." (The Jews are our misery). It was official: The Jews have to go, send them home. Thousands of Jews left, millions stayed in Germany. This, too, will blow over, it's happened before in other countries, was their attitude.

My mother was appalled, she insisted, "The Jews are God's chosen people, we will pay for this." By contrast, the merchants were glad. The Jews were strong competitors, keeping the prices low. "It's about time they shut them down," was their comment. The man on the street was influenced by Nazi propaganda movies. Comments such as, "Jews are trouble makers, nobody likes them, send them to Israel," could be heard. Nobody suggested prison confinement or labor camps. At that time, nobody knew what a so called concentration camp was; people had never heard the word.

The world turned up-side down for the German people when Hitler and Stalin signed an agreement to divide Poland. Everybody in Germany should have known then that Hitler was a

man without scruples or principles. For years Stalin had been the curse of mankind, and now our Fuehrer had signed a pact with the devil. How could this be possible?

Only Hitler and a few trusted insiders knew the answer. Hitler had nothing to fear. The German people were in his hands. They were well fed and taken care of and in no mood for changes. His party apparatus took care of any dissenters. If a person were missing, people would say, he must have done something terribly wrong. Hitler knew that most people liked him, and that was important to him.

Hitler was also a man who made dreams come true, and he gave his people something new to dream about: a car for the people, or in German, a Volkswagen. Many people were excited and making plans for the future. The cars were never built; war clouds were gathering on the horizon.

After five years of Nazi rule, life was no longer the same. The once popular “man of the people” had turned into a dictator. His speeches were no longer what people wanted to hear; they primarily were what he, Hitler, wanted *them* to hear.

He issued a stern warning that he would not tolerate any opposition or dissent. He also demonstrated to the world that he was not a man to trifle with. He ordered the military to march into the remaining former German territories that had been annexed by neighboring countries after World War I. Inside Germany, people began to be concerned. What was he going to do next, when and how would it end?

People were hoping for the best, which was a mistake. Only those who look at a political landscape from a guarded perspective and take nothing for granted will not be disappointed. *Caveat emptor!*

War

The German diplomat, von Radenau, was murdered by a Jew, or so they said, and all hell broke loose. Synagogues went up in flames, Jewish stores were looted and destroyed, and all Jews were moved into ghettos. Many Jews took what they could carry and left the country, while they still could. More than one thousand Jews left on a German passenger liner for the United States. When they arrived in New York, many were not allowed to disembark; American officials refused them entry. The ship returned to Germany via Cuba, France, and England. I still remember Hitler's speech: "No country wants the Jews, and neither do we."

Soon, the whole picture changed. Nazi officials assumed complete control; the police and other law enforcement agencies took orders from them. The majority fell silent and stayed silent. The few individuals, who questioned what was happening, soon learned to keep their mouths shut, or lose their freedom. The music changed, too. Hitler Youth and SA were marching through the streets, singing: "Heute gehoert uns Deutschland, und morgen die ganze Welt" (Today Germany is ours and tomorrow the whole world). The Nazis had dropped their disguise, declaring: "We will rule the world."

It was impossible for the Nazis to expand their reign by peaceful means, because Jewish capital would not let them get the upper hand worldwide. The German economy was no match against the combined power of London's financial district and *Wall Street*.

When Hitler realized that he was facing an insurmountable obstacle: the Jews of the world, their money, and their influence, he went insane and declared war on the world. Hitler was fifty years old, a difficult and dangerous age for some men. In addition, criminal minded officials assisted Hitler for their own gain. They wanted power, fame and wealth. Germans had no one to turn to. They said: "There is no God". And God withdrew from them.

Hitler shouted in a rousing speech: "I have only one wish, to be a German soldier." The people replied: "Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil!..." until their voices gave out. The lights went out, and total darkness covered the land. The beginning of the end had begun.

Hitler was ready. The generals were saluting him with the Nazi salute; the Army, Air Force, and Navy were in place. The German Hitler Youth shouted "Fuehrer befehl, wir folgen" (Leader give the order, we follow). His special forces in their black uniforms, the SS, were keeping a watchful eye on the military, and the SA in their brown uniforms kept the population at large under control. The Western Allies and Russia were not prepared for war. It was now or never.

Hitler gave the order, and the Army marched into Poland. The British dropped the first two bombs of the war on Bremen, hitting a hospital and the Police Headquarters. The whole town went out to see the damage. It was a sensation, and everybody wanted to see it; and I was no exception. Little did we know what was to follow.

This war was different. It was not at all what people had expected it to be. In addition to soldiers killing soldiers at the front, thousands of women and children were killed in cities all over Europe. Modern science had found more ways to kill more people faster, and they were proud of their accomplishments.

Most of the dead were never found; they were buried under mountains of rubble. Whole cities were destroyed in one night; and after the war new houses were built where the old ones once stood, bodies or no bodies. The innocent perished in agony, the ones who gave the orders did not. It is my hope that Eternity will rectify this injustice.

On Pentecost Sunday, members of churches in the region had gathered for fellowship and a church service. It was before I was drafted into the Army as a medic. During the main service in the afternoon, the minister interrupted his sermon to read a message that had been handed to him: "I have just been informed that our troops have taken Paris. Let us give thanks to God." (They thought that God was on our side).

Who were these young men in the armed forces? The German soldiers were misguided young men. As small children they enjoyed playing war games, and many had toy soldiers to play with. They also enjoyed listening to their elders when they talked about the war, and admired their war decorations. Boys flocked to the soldiers when they had their war games and bivouacked in the open. I, too, was among them, admiring the guns and equipment, and smelling their bean soup. We had no TV or radio. The military was our excitement, our dream of fame and adventure. We did not dream about war and conquest. We just wanted to be soldiers, impress the girls we knew, have fun, and protect our Vaterland.

We were taught to obey and respect authority. Don't ask questions; just do as you were told. The military represented the best any country had to offer. They welcomed Heads of State as honor guards and were prominent at important national events.

As nations need a police force, so a country needs an army, unfortunately. We have a long way to go. Children must learn that guns are made for killing, and that there are many other professions where they can prove their strength and resolve.

As soon as the first shots of World War II had been fired, the German press and the movie industry did all they could to misguide and arouse the masses, especially the Hitler Youth. There was nothing more glorious than killing invaders. Neighboring countries were vilified, and reason was drowned in wanton madness.

We had been at war for about two years, when I noticed a long line of ambulances lined up near the railroad depot. Most were delivery trucks that Pollmann had converted into makeshift ambulances. A long train pulled into the station, and I noticed that all cars had a large red cross painted on both sides and on top. Within minutes medical personnel began to unload the train. Soldiers on stretchers were transported into the waiting ambulances and taken to the nearest hospital; the ambulances returned to the train for load after load. There was no welcoming ceremony for the returning soldiers. Their families didn't know about their arrival. As I stood there, I realized that in a few weeks I would be going where they had come from: Russia.

Now Nazi control was complete. Law enforcement was instant: jail, concentration camp, or execution. People began to realize that they had made a mistake, but they had made a choice and had to live with it. There was nothing they could do. They were at war, and Germany's future was at stake.

When the military realized that people were beginning to get worried about the outcome of the war, they had to find a scapegoat: the Jews! They were spies, cooperating with the enemy. Jews had friends and relatives all over the world.

People in general paid no longer attention to Nazi propaganda; they had enough to worry about. Hitler had declared total war, and that meant total destruction on land, air, and sea. Allied bombers began a systematic destruction of German cities. Germany's Luftwaffe did the same in England. People had two things on their mind: To stay alive at night, and to find something to eat during the day.

This meant standing in line, because most stores had been destroyed. Eighty thousand people were killed by bombs in Hamburg; it was wholesale killing everywhere, and nobody paid attention to the concentration camps and the Jews. That was something for the officials to worry about. It was their responsibility.

I joined the Army medical corps in September 1941 and received an excellent medical training. Our officers were medical doctors, and they taught us all we needed to know to save lives. I knew that I would be miles away from the nearest doctor or field hospital. It would be my responsibility to keep the wounded free from pain and alive while they were being transported.

To complete my training I worked in an army hospital in Germany for one month. There I found out what war was all about. The wards were filled with soldiers who had been brought in from the front. At one time, a lady came to see the doctor. He asked her into his office and to take a seat... She just looked at him and burst into tears:

"Herr Doktor, bitte, bitte retten Sie meinen Jungen ...retten Sie meinen Jungen. (Doctor, please, please save my boy, save my boy)."

She finally sat down, and the doctor tried to comfort her. There was little he could do, and I knew it. War, life, and death had become a *reality* for me.

After six months of intensive training, I was ready to face the Red Army. The temperature was minus 40 degrees Fahrenheit in Russia, and I was 18 years old.

I was leaving a country that was suffering and beginning to fall apart. The future was uncertain and threatening. I took one last look at our house and remembered my grandfather, who was no longer with us. He had high hopes for us when Hitler assumed power, and I am glad that he did not see the end of Germany, as he knew it.

Walking to the train station was depressing. There were people who were forced to display the Star of David on their clothes; they were Jews; Polish forced laborers had to wear a "P." These orders had been issued by some Nazis, and nobody knew who they were. People were numb, and they didn't care. Their homes were being destroyed night after night. They had not had a night of uninterrupted sleep for months. They were no longer in any condition to oppose the out of control Nazi gangs, and succumbed to loathsome instincts, influences, and forces. Nobody seemed to care, and I was on my way to Russia to defend my country.

I was at the low point of my life, and still falling deeper into what seemed like a bottomless pit. My faith was being put to the test. I didn't even look back as the train crossed the German border, going east into Russia. I was too tired.

Russia

Our destination was Luga in Northern Russia, the end of the German railway. A passenger car had been attached to a freight train. It was very cold, and I had to learn to adjust. Getting to our destination meant a thousand miles trip in a slow moving train, pulled by a single steam locomotive over war worn tracks. Every now and then steam from the locomotive warmed the radiator in our car as we traveled through Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia into Russia, always going north-east. It got colder by the hour. For food I had a loaf of bread. Butter was to come later. When we got the butter, we had a major problem. They had given us a lump of frozen butter, and we had to divide it into six portions. No knife could cut it; it was solid like a rock. Not knowing what else to do, we took a bayonet and hammered it into the butter. It worked. Little by little we each got chunk of frozen butter, some had more, and others had a little less. But we didn't care.

The trip was depressing. Looking out the window, the scene was always the same: a wide expanse of frozen tundra. The few people I could see were wrapped in rags to protect themselves against the cold. They walked as if they were carrying a heavy load. In nearby villages clusters of old log houses could be seen and Shetland ponies were pulling big sleds. The larger cities were showing the effects of Communist exploitation and the war.

The train kept on laboring its way over the endless expanse, stopping only for fuel and water. Each hour took me farther away from home to a place that filled me with trepidation. The relentless movement into the unknown had its effect.

"From now on it's just You and me, Lord," I thought. Looking out the train window at night, everything was covered with a white sheet under a black sky. There were no lights anywhere, and there would be none for many months to come. When we arrived at our destination, I said goodbye to my newly won friends. We were ordered to different units and lost track of each other.

After getting off the train in Luga, I saw the first results of war: damaged trucks and jeeps, still being used, and Soldiers with various kinds of bandages. Other soldiers putting up communication telephone lines to artillery installations, their uniforms covered with frozen mud. They worked like robots, not like the soldiers I had seen in news reels and on parade grounds.

When we got to a so-called field hospital, I was shocked. It was a room in a log house. Ten soldiers with severe frostbite were stretched out on makeshift cots. They were happy to be out of the cold, and with a little bit of luck they might lose a hand or a foot and be sent home.

The smell inside the house made me go outside for fresh air. I had to wait for orders where to go from there. It didn't take long, and the Master Sergeant of my new company showed up to get his new medic. We walked for about an hour to get to my final destination. There I finally met the men with whom I was to form a bond stronger than death.

My new family were the soldiers of a Tank Defense Company, south of Leningrad. It was one of the coldest winters on record. Rifles and machine guns didn't fire properly most of the time, and drivers had to build bonfires under their vehicles to get them started. The hospitals were filled with cases of severe frost injuries. There were many amputations, and the German advance into Russia had ended.

I aged two years during the first two months in Russia. To begin with, I was away from home, and there was no one I could ask for advice. I was responsible for men at a time when they needed help the most. I saw Russians dig in the dirt with their bare hands for something to eat. Our reason for living was to kill them, theirs was to kill us. All that killing occurred just because someone had given the order.

I was surrounded by suffering, death, and madness. In short, I was depressed, disgusted, and tired of the whole damn war. In addition, the odds were against me that I would ever make it home in one piece, if at all. Nobody knew how long, how many years, it would be before the war would end, and life return to normal. Worst of all, God was nowhere in sight. Was Lenin right after all: "*Religion is opium for the masses?*" A lifetime of church, daily devotions, revivals, and prayer meetings offered no comfort. I was just like the rest of the guys, hanging in there.

It was at that time that our Division Chaplain came to our little village, inviting us to a Holy Communion service. He had found an empty stable, cleaned the dirt floor as best he could, and set up a portable altar. Four soldiers came; I was one of them. He read from the Bible, said a few words and prayed with us. Then we kneeled in the dirt and took *Holy Communion*. There are no words to explain how I felt at that moment. When I left the stable I was completely at peace. I *knew* that I was not alone. I was free from fear. Later, when we were under direct enemy fire, I still felt safe. The Holy Communion Service in that stable in Russia was the most important event of my life. It was and still is a constant reminder of things I don't fully understand.

When spring finally arrived, everything changed. We no longer had roads. Everything turned into soft clay and mud, up to two feet deep. Tanks and similar vehicles were the only ones able to move. Since ordinary cars couldn't be used, we had to rely on horses to move our equipment. The Russians were prepared for these conditions; we were not.

I took my equipment and moved to the front line. There were skirmishes back and forth, but no large scale fighting. I had no difficulty, taking care of the few casualties. However, there was one case I have never been able to dismiss from my mind:

A soldier took a hand grenade, pulled the pin, and instead of throwing it right away, he held it in his hand for a few seconds, to see it explode in mid air. He waited too long and it exploded in his hand. When I got to him, his hand was gone, and he was bleeding profusely. I stopped the bleeding and looked at his back. He had several holes in his lungs, bleeding inside. Causing self inflicted wounds was a serious offense in the German army. The man knew it and said, "I saw a Russian and was going to throw the grenade at him." A minute later he looked at me, and said "I didn't see anybody, I was showing off." He knew he was dying. Another medic and I gave him an opium injection and he began to feel better, where upon he changed his story again to, "I did see Russians." While we were transporting him to the hospital, he felt that he might not make it, and his story changed for the last time. "I was showing off, there were no Russians." His final cry while he was still conscious was, "Damn the Russians." He died later at the hospital. He was just a boy, trying to show off what he could do.

Spring 1944

The Red Army was smelling victory. They had advanced into Poland, and Germany was just around the corner. The German army was in absolute confusion and disarray. We arrived at our assigned position late one afternoon and didn't sleep that night. We were out in the open and a light rain was falling. Shortly before sunrise we were attacked. It was mass slaughter, pure and simple. As we retreated, wounded soldiers were left behind and killed by Russian soldiers with their bayonets, while I watched from afar, not able to do anything about it. Fifteen minutes after the assault three shocked and confused soldiers came stumbling towards me:

“What do you want us to do?”

“Help me to get this man on the stretcher back to safety.”

We were the only survivors.

The only thing I remembered was a grenade that had exploded on the street pavement ten feet from where I stood, leaving a black burned spot. I had kept on walking, not fully realizing what had happened; but *Someone* knew. Later I felt something under my helmet. It was very small shrapnel from the grenade. “Don’t forget” was its message; and I never did.

Europe’s Armageddon

The outcome of the war had long been decided, yet the killing was getting worse by the day. Thousands of innocent people died every day from bombs, grenade shells, and machine gunfire, just for the hell of it. The German army was retreating as fast as it could. The soldiers were under orders from Hitler to fight to the death, and in some places they had to put up some resistance for fear that they might get killed from behind if they didn't.

Germany had started the war, started the bombings, invaded other countries, and persecuted innocent Jews. Germans started mass killings. There was only one way to stop the Nazis, kill more Germans than they had killed; anything the Germans could do, the Allies could do better with the help of the Red Army.

Nothing will ever be gained by comparing torture methods, or describing actions of Satan possessed soldiers, and I will not go into details. Those who need more information on the subject have an abundance of printed material to choose from in libraries and book stores.

They said: “You must tell the people about it,” And so I did.

Every person comes face to face with our *Creator* at some time in his life. When this happens, we can ignore the events and move on, or stop and search for the meaning. The following events have given me cause to think:

It was late in the afternoon when our company arrived at a destroyed village in Germany. Soldiers were looking for a place to rest. The church was badly damaged and no place to sleep,

but the organ was still working. There was no electricity and I found two men to operate the bellows by hand, so I could play some well-known hymns.

The sound could be heard for miles around the war-torn country side. It was the only sound. Later in the evening a man came to me: "Did you know that while you were playing our colonel was standing at the wall of the church, listening to you?" The colonel was highly decorated, and very respected, if not admired, by the troops. He was always there when needed.

Throughout the war, I had never seen an officer at a church service, yet here was a man who had listened to hymns for reasons of his own. Fifty years later, my sister was visiting a nursing home. There she met an old man, who told her about the organ music he had heard during the war, played by a soldier he didn't know. It was the colonel.

In another small town I found myself in a room on the ground floor of an undamaged house. I was standing with my back against a door, when a grenade struck the outside wall below the window. It destroyed the wall and demolished the room. There were shrapnel holes everywhere, except in the door where I had stood. (Luck?!)

One late afternoon, about a month before the end of the war, I was called to our company command post. As I entered the room, the captain and his second-in-command, by now a master sergeant, were standing at a table, looking at a map:

"Grewe, we are almost completely surrounded by the Reds. If we try one of these two roads, we might be able to get out. Which road do you want us to take?"

They were looking at me and waiting. I glanced at the map sideways and, pointing to a road, said, "Let's take this one." Within minutes the cars were lined up and ready to go. Before we left, the master sergeant came to me:

"I want you in my lead car; nothing is going to happen to you."

By now it was getting dark. We left and after some driving found ourselves at an open airfield we had to cross. The Russians were at the edge of the field, no more than a mile off. They had anti tank guns and were firing at us with tracer grenades. We could see them like a long chain of colorful beads, coming at us and going over us. We made it through without losses. (Luck?!)

Our chaplain had found an empty hall in a deserted village, and we were told that there was going to be a service later in the day. There were, also, rumors that a major offensive was planned for the next day. The hall was filled to capacity with ordinary soldiers, no officers. The minister read from the Bible and began his sermon:

"By tomorrow night some of you will be dead." He continued, reminding us of the importance of being prepared to meet our Maker. The next day some of the soldiers were no longer with us. A few weeks later, most of them were dead.

The closer we came to the end of the war, the worse the confusion became. It could only be described as "Hell without borders". I didn't know where the actual battle lines were, and neither did anyone else. I went into a house for protection and saw in the corner of one room a woman with a number of small children huddled on the floor, paralyzed by fear. A Russian soldier burst through the door, looking for a place to hide. Within seconds a German soldier, ready to fire his gun, came after him. All of this occurred in front of the children.

I was beginning to feel sick, everything happened so fast. I looked at the soldier and ordered him to put the gun down:

“We don't kill unarmed enemies. Take him prisoner.”

The man just looked at me in disbelief. This was the Red Army, meaning kill or be killed. He just stood there, an order was an order, and we were in combat, even if the difference was only two stripes.

While he was deciding what to do next, the Russian jumped out the window and escaped. (How can anyone in his right mind start a war?)

I got sick. I didn't know what it was, but I had a high temperature and decided that I must do something about it. I made up my mind to see a doctor, and perhaps get some medicine. When I went to the captain to inform him that I would be gone for a day, the master sergeant was standing next to him, not saying anything. As I saluted to leave, I heard the master sergeant say:

“Herr Hauptmann, wir gehen zum Teufel, Grewe haut ab.”
 (“Sir, we are going to hell, Grewe is leaving.”)

Those were his last words I heard. After I left, the Russians attacked, and the command post was wiped out. The captain was killed; about the others I have no knowledge.

The End of Total War

The next day I was one person in a never ending column of homeless refugees, walking past a liberated concentration camp. It was a spring day, the sun was shining and a few former prisoners were standing outside the fence, enjoying the warmth of the sun. The liberated prisoners were looking at us, their former tormentors, while we were passing in review. There was no expression of hatred on their part, no revenge. Stoical and sad faces were looking at me, which hurt me more deeply than contempt would have. These Nazi victims knew from their own experience how painful suffering can be, and for a moment they saw themselves in the faces of innocent victims, passing before them. The Nazi criminals had left the country...

Our march into an uncertain future continued. We, too, were not completely innocent. Neither was the world. Why did life show no compassion towards the millions of homeless refugees all over Europe, who were hungry, sick, and without hope? They had been pawns in the games of the mighty. Soon, the world would pronounce them guilty, because they had obeyed orders from the Nazis. In the end, they would be held liable, and the guilty would look for prey in other regions. World War II was not the end of us, even though it could have been, if a few more atom bombs had been available to the human race. With the first two bombs dropped, other countries would have done the same, and we would have started over again with “Year One”, the year after the bomb.

Since it has not happened yet, it still can happen when we least expect it.

THERE IS A LESSON TO BE LEARNED.

A Story That Speaks for Itself

Bethel near Bielefeld in Germany is a small town, consisting exclusively of hospitals. It was founded by Pastor Friedrich von Bodelschwingh.

For more than one hundred years, destitute and sick people have found an ever open door, and a warm welcome in this oasis. The von Bodelschwingh family is still the guardian of this large institution. Towards the end of the war Hitler gave orders to confiscate Bethel and turn it over to the military, which needed more beds for the war casualties. The sick and helpless people, mostly epileptics and mentally ill, were to be sent to “camps” for treatment, meaning gas chambers.

When von Bodelschwingh received the order, he informed his dedicated staff. Countless prayers, desperate pleas for help, were spoken on bent knees. There was no answer. The officials began to make the necessary preparations for an “orderly” transfer.

Pastor von Bodelschwingh was well known throughout Germany and in Berlin. He went from one government official to another, begging for the lives of his “children”. He found some sympathetic ears, but nobody was willing to risk his life, by going to Hitler and pleading on his behalf.

Pastor von Bodelschwingh returned to Bethel, and the preparations for the transfer continued. The end was near.

Two Gestapo Generals arrived, demanding the keys. Von Bodelschwingh suggested that they tour the hospitals, because they had come to facilitate the evacuation. They agreed to accompany him. When they entered the children’s hospital, frightened eyes were focused on the two well fed men in their black uniforms. For a moment, there was absolute silence. Now the children looked at their Pastor, they called him “Onkel Fritz”.

“Children”, he said “this is Uncle General, he has been sent to us by Uncle Hitler to take care of us. We must pray to Jesus and ask him to BLESS Uncle General and Uncle Hitler. They have much work to do and Jesus must help them.”

THE CHILDREN TALKED TO *THEIR* JESUS.

The Nazis left and never returned.

Today, Bethel is home to fourteen-thousand patients.

My Pilgrimage to Bergen Belsen Where Anne Frank Died

On a recent trip to Germany I felt compelled to visit a Concentration Camp. My 40 year old son came with me. We went to Bergen Belsen in Northern Germany. The memorial is located in a remote area, surrounded by a large beautiful forest. The landscaping is sober and dignified. There are no flowers.

First we visited the memorial museum, where we were shown a gruesome documentary that defies description. Shocked by what we had seen, we walked towards the Concentration Camp grounds where the barracks once stood. We followed the narrow path and came to a big iron gate. It was open. On one side was a bronze sign with an inscription which read:

Please show respect.

Looking through the gate, I could see many grass covered mounds. The graveside nearest me had a simple stone marker with the number '4000'; of the forty thousand buried here, four thousand were interned in this one mass grave. My son was behind me, still at the gate. He was unable to enter the grounds. "Dad, I can't go in there. I just can't." He stayed for a while and never said another word. Forty thousand murdered victims were asking to be left alone. This was hallowed ground, not a place for sightseers. I felt out of place.

A.D. 2000. America's Turn to Lead

The Berlin wall had come down, the Communists were nowhere in sight, and the people in East Germany were all smiles. Finally, we were able to visit the cities behind the Iron Curtain.

Everywhere we went, we found that people look to the USA for leadership. Now it is our turn to take our place in the line-up of nations that have led the world. We are the first Christian Nation!

We cannot change the world, but we can make a difference.

Nothing good and constructive will ever come to pass
on this earth until someone makes it happen.

I strengthen the forces of evil by denying their existence.

Every person leaves footprints on earth.

GOD is the final judge.