

Alfred Bader

Kindergarten

Kindergarten, Autobiography
of a Sunday - W. S. Bader

1998

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AUTOBIOGRAPHY
of a survivor

W. Sheridan

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To Mr. & Mrs Alfred and Isobel Bader!

I am writing this letter to you, via Queen's University in Canada, because it seems to me that you have been immersed in the same Camp, in Canada as I have. Please, don't think I want anything.

I am 87 years old now, but I still remember our Mini University which we established with the help of our Camp, Communist. It was he, who got in touch with all the Universities in Canada, after a young student tried to commit suicide. I was then the Camp Electrician and had the opportunity to talk to all the Professors and lecturers whilst they were making nets for the War-effort. Never in my life have I seen so much enthusiasm. The great advantage was that by studying for 2½ years, the students were allowed to carry on their studies in England where they left off. We also get chess sets and had

chess tournaments; Football (organised
by a former Flakool Player. Violins and
a Piano helped us to have great Sun-
day Concerts. And I was allowed to sing
my beloved Schubert Songs and also
Opera Arias etc. Our Camp became a
holiday home and there was no more
grumbling. I do not know whether
you were in this Camp in Sheer brooke
near Montreal. I enclose herewith
also a short resumé of my life history
which, I hope will interest you. Should
this letter reach you I will send you
also the book I wrote: Naturally
free of charge!!

Yours Willi Sheridan
früher Wilhelm Silber

Spotlight on the remarkable story of a Lichfield man now in print

As Hitler's army rolled into Austria in the famous Anschluss of March 1938, many Jews and socialists were forced to flee Vienna in fear of their lives.

Among them was a young electrician who came to Britain as a refugee.

Now in retirement in Lichfield, William Sheridan (formerly Silber), has published his remarkable and inspirational story.

From Vienna to Lichfield - The moving memoirs of a true survivor

William, an amiable and quick-witted 87-year-old, has every right to be bitter and full of regret after the ordeals and trials which plagued his early life, from his poverty-stricken upbringing in Vienna to the anti-semitism which over ran his homeland, forcing him to flee.

Instead, he is a positive individual, popular among his friends and neighbours. "I remain philosophical, taking life as it is. Whatever the difficulties, I always come out smiling," he said.

He admits he was very lucky to escape the political upheavals of Central Europe in the 1930s and 40s to come to England.

Once accepted as a British citizen, he attained the rank of staff sergeant in the army, where his German language skills were useful at a prisoner of war camp near Peterborough.

After the war he settled in Leeds with his wife, Trude, and son Peter.

A victim of his parents' divorce, he was sent by his extended family to a Jewish orphanage in Vienna. As a young man his first jobs, in a Vienna hotel and apprenticeship as an electrician, forged his political out-

look and he became involved in the socialist movement during the turbulent inter-war period.

The socialists were the only political party open to an apprentice Jew, and William joined the 100,000 socialists who marched through the city in July 1927. It was a march that ended in tragedy, when troops fired on the protesters.

"I was 16 shall never forget it, especially since one of my mates was killed and two others were injured," he said.

"It was not the end, because the Palace of Justice was burned to the ground and the corpses were never found. That day was the beginning of the end of Austria's liberties and also the start of the growth of the Austrian Nazi Party," he added.

Anti-semitism

Anti-semitism was taking hold in Austria and saw him robbed of his chance to perform in the Vienna Opera House.

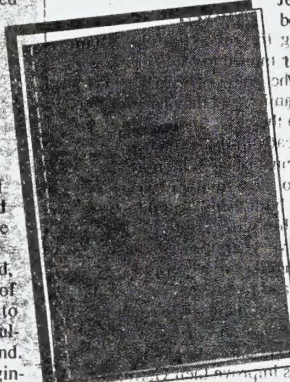
The quality of his singing voice was recognised by all who knew him and for a while he was tutored at the famous Vienna Conservatoire. Within a year the lessons were stopped, apparently due to the economic crisis, but more likely because of his Jewish name.

The arrival of the 1930s saw William forced to join his gambling and heavy-drinking father in Poland. He soon became involved with the socialist movement there and was imprisoned for six months as a 'danger to the state' because of his beliefs.

His long-awaited return to his beloved Vienna in 1936 was brief.

"My first thought was happiness.

Back in Vienna - what greater happiness? And then I opened my eyes. People with grim faces, teenagers with swastikas on their arms, running about shouting 'Heil Hitler - down with the Jews'," he remembered.



This visit was the last time William saw his mother and friends.

His final house call was to his employer's shop. He pulled me inside the shop and warned me to leave the country very quickly, as some suspicious characters were asking me questions.

He told them that I did not work for them any longer. We went inside and then sat down and he explained to me how to get to Czechoslovakia.

"He warned me to keep away from the Austrian villages, because the farmers may betray me."

"Walk by night through the woods and sleep there as well," he told me, before saying: 'Here I still have some Czech money which will be of no use to me any more,'" William remembered.

"We shook hands and he wished me good luck. So I left another good friend," he added.

William's journey did not end there - until 1939 he continued to flee Hitler's advancing army as it invaded Czechoslovakia and then Poland. He finally made his way, by sea, to England and then to Canada.

After two years there he returned to England, where he adopted the name Sheridan and fell in love with his wife, Trude.

He joined the army, as an education officer, and was soon posted to

prisoner of war camps for the remainder of the war.

In peace time, William lived happily in Leeds and was the electrician's union shop steward at Yorkshire Switchgear until his retirement.

Moved

During the mid-1980s, William and Trude moved to Lichfield. It was already the home of their son Peter and his family, and they had fallen in love with the city.

"The cathedral always reminded us of Vienna, because there they also wanted to have another two spires, but never built them," he said.

Sadly his wife Trude died from cancer five years ago. But today, Willi, as he likes to be known, is still an active and popular member of the Lichfield community. He remains a student of English literature at Lichfield College, and a teacher, helping youngsters improve their German.

William Sheridan's self-published autobiography is available from John Menzies, in the Three Spires Shopping Centre.



● Above: William Sheridan looks back over his 87-year adventure. Below: Leeds, 1946: The Sheridan family, William, Peter and Trude (L98-640-74)



● Young soldier William, during World War Two.



1914

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FOREWORD

This story covers a period of eighty-seven years. The idea of writing my life story has been brewing in my mind for a long time. When I was telling some of my friends some snippets of my experiences, they urged me to write about them before I pass away. So I decided about a year ago to take the plunge and put the story down just as it really happened. It leads me from Vienna to Poland, then back to Vienna; my experiences there, then back to Poland; prison, then return to Vienna via Czechoslovakia; my activities in the CSR; helping people to escape to Poland, and my own escape. Landing in Britain; experiences there and internment during the war. Life in Canada, then back to Britain; meeting my future wife in Leeds, and activities in Leeds and Lichfield.

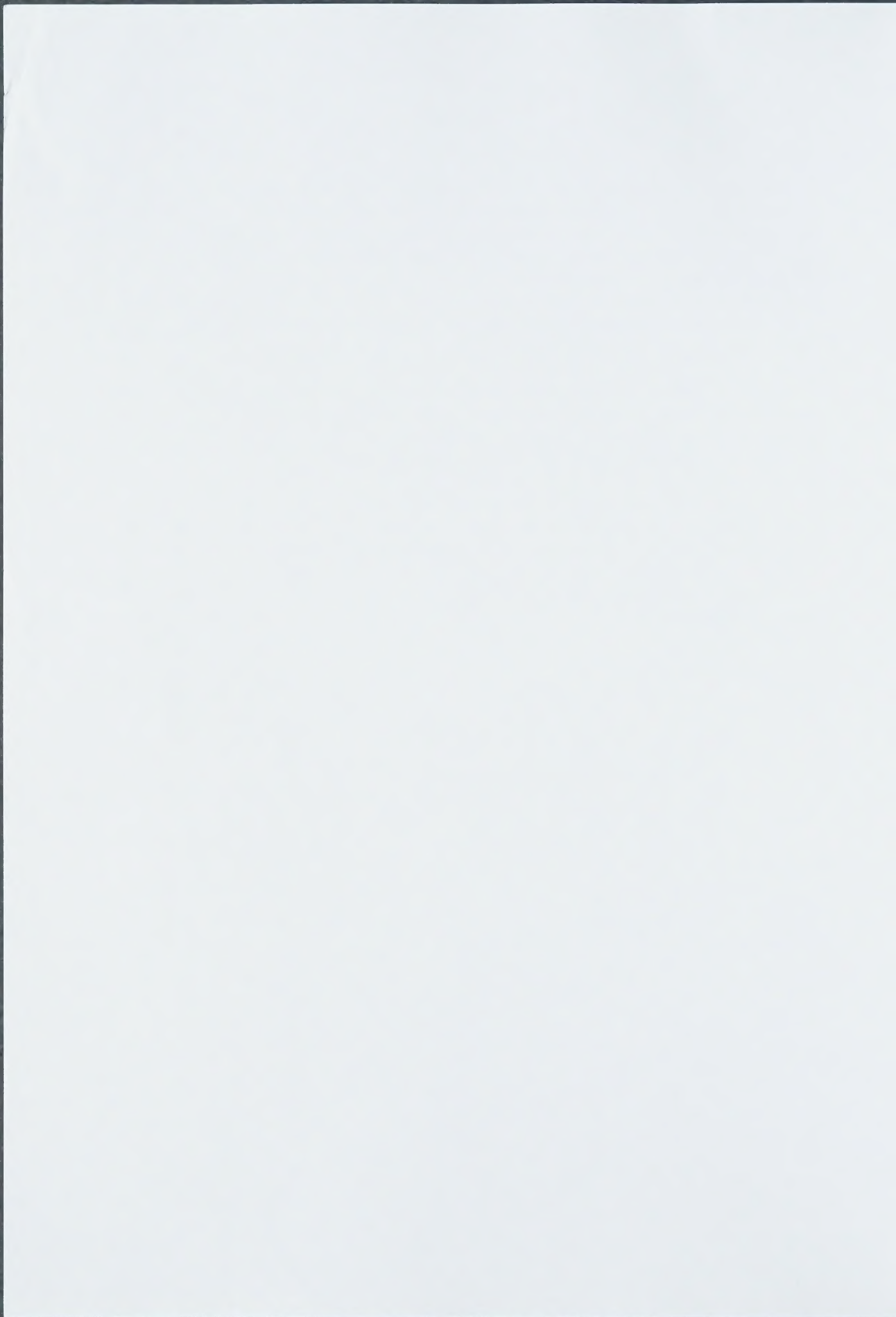
My story starts when my mother was eighteen - two years before my birth on 23 December 1910. Then the sudden death of both her parents forced her into marriage with a Polish Jewish locksmith. My birth in Poland - then back in Vienna - orphanage - Hotel Astoria as lift-boy - apprentice as electrician - unemployment - 1927: the Blue Danube becomes white.

Joining a trade union - the Dollfuss dictatorship - the Nazis becoming strong in Austria - Hitler's entrance into Vienna - my flight to the CSR - helping refugees to get accommodation in villages - Nazi invasion of CSR - helping refugees to flee to Poland - ship to England - internment in Canada - return to England - join the British Army - marry Trude - get permission to work as electrician - work for English Electric, then Yorkshire Switchgear for twenty years. Live in Leeds for fifty years. Join my son and family in Lichfield.

Lichfield
March 1998

*Ich hoffe das Sie dieses Buch
noch einmal gut durchlesen
und genießen. Danke für alles
was Sie für mich getan haben*

Willy



AUTOBIOGRAPHY

W. Sheridan

CHAPTER I: VIENNA -1907-1914

Vienna in 1907 was a thriving city. Being the headquarters of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, all important events took place there. Wealth came in from many countries. Trade boomed and continually expanded. Naturally, this had a great effect not only on the industry, but also on the cultural life of the whole country. New inventions were made, literature and music flourished, operas and theatres were full to capacity. The best musicians, singers and actors came to Vienna. The city was full of visitors from all over the world. The shopkeepers in the elegant inner city were very successful. It seemed that this wonder would last for ever.

The ordinary citizens did their shopping on the main roads leading from the inner city. The most popular one was called Maria-Hilferstrasse, and it is there where several of my relatives had their shops. They did quite well. In other words, they had no reason to grumble. One of them was my mother's father. Unfortunately, he and his wife died of a mysterious disease and left Elsa, their eighteen-year-old daughter, an orphan.

As is usual when serious problems occur among Jewish families, the relatives gathered in order to solve them. Firstly, the girl must stay in turn with each family. She must not stay in the flat alone. The flat and shop must be sold. She was spoiled and completely helpless. She was a pupil at the conservatoire for singing, as she hoped one day to become a singer. That dream was gone.

In the eyes of the relatives, the only solution was to get her married. This was done the usual way, as it happened to them in the past. You marry first, and love follows. They advertised in the Jewish journals, which were also sold in Eastern Europe, where there were millions of Jewish people.

At first there came Viennese people to look at the girl. She was beautiful, but had little money and no experience in housewifery - a poor advertisement for getting a husband! Old people didn't mind a very young wife, but she didn't want them. This attitude did not please the relatives, and eventually they made it clear to her that if she refused the next man who showed an interest in her, she would be abandoned to her own fate. Poor girl, she cried her eyes out: too young to marry; completely helpless.

One day, a man came from a place called Stanislaw, which still belonged to the Austrian Empire. (After the War, it belonged to Poland, and now it is in the Ukraine.) This man - a Mr. Silber - had read the advertisement, and took a chance to see Vienna and to find himself a wife. As soon as he saw the girl at one of her uncles' houses, he said he would marry her whether she had money or not.

She was forced to accept him, otherwise they would have abandoned her completely. He explained to the relatives that he had a workshop and a little house. He was an electrician and a locksmith with six people working for him. He was earning a lot of money.

The relatives were pleased to hear that, and the marriage took place a day after. Poor Elsa was heartbroken. Having to leave that wonderful city of Vienna and probably never to see it again. No

more singing lessons, and away from all her friends! The next day they arrived in Stanislau, where his sister and a lot of friends and neighbours awaited the couple. The sister immediately took my future mother to her heart and became a good friend.

When they arrived at their new home, there was only a flat. She could not imagine that two people could live in a place as small as that. She was shocked that he had lied to her relatives, and wanted to return to Vienna immediately. But Stella, the sister, restrained her and helped her unpack their luggage.

My future father had to promise that he would get a better place to live in. Stella explained to him that Elsa was used to better things, and that he had enough money to provide his beautiful wife with the best he could afford. Elsa had to get used to this new life, and this was only possible with Stella's help - she was a tower of strength. She taught Elsa how to cook wonderful and tasty Jewish dishes and many other things.

A few months later, my future father promised his wife to do everything she wanted, when he was told that they were going to have a baby! A larger flat was bought, and many new kitchen utensils. When he was told that his wife was pregnant, he was delighted. Up until then, he was known as a drunkard and a gambler, but an exceptionally good worker. He had a workshop - not very large - with two apprentices and two journeymen. They mainly did electrical installations and mechanical jobs.

When he had a lot of money, it disappeared very quickly to his vodka and gambling in the café. That's where he lost his money. But now he hoped to get a girl, and looked forward to it. He was so sure that the child would be a girl that when it was me who came into the world (with the greatest difficulty - my mother and I nearly died), he was shattered. From that moment on, he went back to his old habits and made my mother's life a misery.

All the neighbours were very nice and helpful in many ways. Stella was a tower of strength and when she was around, he did not dare to touch my mother. My poor mother begged her not to leave, although she had two daughters of her own to look after. My father was able to chase the neighbours out, but his sister knew how to handle him. Stella remained as long as she could.

One day, when the doctor came to my parents to tell them that my mother could not have any more children, her life became a complete misery. She withstood this until I was two years old, and then, with Stella's help, she divorced him and returned to Vienna with me - a heavy burden.

When we arrived in Vienna, she went straight to her favourite uncle. He knew from her letters what had happened to her, but when he saw her emaciated body and face, he could hardly believe she was the same person. He had always been nice to her, in spite of the other relatives. He and his wife decided to look after her until they had found her a job and a small flat. He would also pay for her until she would be able to fend for herself. Of course, there was no talk of singing lessons. There was only me shouting and singing to my heart's content, not realising what was happening in the world.

CHAPTER 2: 1914-1918

My uncle kept his promise to help my mother, but he stressed the fact that since the beginning of the War his business was very slack. He halved the donation he had given before, and later on, when she got a job, my mother had to use her poor wages for our upkeep.

His wife was also in favour of helping my mother as long as she did not stay there with me too long. They looked for a flat in a very poor area, and were prepared to pay for lodgings until my mother found a job. They found lodgings in a little street with three-storey houses. They met someone who knew a widow who needed a lodger. And so it happened that we landed on the second floor of no 3, Dianagasse.

The lady - Mrs. Wimmer, a woman I shall never forget - came to an agreement with my uncle. He paid her for the first three months in advance. Before he went, he again insisted that my mother should find herself a job as soon as possible. Mother promised to do her best.

At this stage of my story - according to what my mother told me - I feel that I have to say a few words about Mrs. Wimmer. When she found out what my uncle had said, she immediately reduced my mother's rent and suggested that we should eat our meals together. That would be cheaper and less time consuming. My mother was very happy about this arrangement. The cabinet was very small - so were we! Somehow, we fitted in. Mother was allowed to cook and use the plates and cutlery. The water tap was outside on the landing, as was the toilet. These were used by four families on each floor. It was really one of the slum houses in the row of streets. The women would stand around the taps chatting or arguing.

Mrs. Wimmer turned out to be a wonderful person. She had compassion and helped my mother in every possible way. Here was a lesson for me which has lasted all my life. A devout Catholic and a Jew can live together. Mrs. Wimmer had lost her husband at the beginning of the War, and left her with two children. The boy got married, but the girl still went to school.

Mrs. Wimmer told my mother not to worry because she worked in a place where they always look for someone who had a nice handwriting. Mrs. Wimmer was astonished when she saw a few lines which my mother wrote on a piece of paper. They decided to go first thing in the morning to see the boss of the firm for which she was working.

I was left with one of the neighbours, and off they went to the centre of Vienna, where in one of the little streets this office was situated. There Mother met the boss - a very energetic lady. When she saw my mother's handwriting, she immediately engaged her.

This firm wrote addresses for big firms who advertised. There were hundreds of lists with names and addresses. These had to be written by hand and stamped with the name of the advertiser - a very boring job. Until I was able to go to school, my mother had to do the writing at home, which meant that Mrs. Wimmer brought and returned the envelopes to the office. Both of them worked very hard.

Until I was five years old, I was allowed to stamp each envelope with the firm's name. Later, when I wanted to write as well, they both decided that I was writing like a cockerel on a dung heap. I was offended, but this didn't cut any ice with these ladies.

The daughter often played with me. But she also played tricks on me - especially shortly before Christmas. On the fifth of December, she dressed as a Krampas (the Devil) . She would come to the door and knock, shouting "Is Willi there?" The two women would say, "Yes, he is with us!". I was frightened and shouted, "No! I am in bed, sleeping!" But they would open the door and push me forward, saying "Here is that naughty boy." The girl would pretend to smack me with a broomstick. Then she would say, "Say your prayers now" and I would shout some Jewish prayers which I had learned. Next day she would come dressed as St. Nicholas and give me sweets and chocolates.

But soon life started to be serious, when I had to go to school. My mother had to go to the office with Mrs. Wimmer while I was there. When I returned, I was all alone. My school was not very far away, but after school I became one of the street urchins. When the weather was fine, I played with the other children in the street. As we didn't have any money to buy a ball, we made our own. It consisted of an old stocking filled with "horse-apples" of which there were plenty about. But the trouble was that the dogs also took part - without permission. The balls were soon torn to shreds and we had to find some more stockings. The dogs were nipping our feet while we were kicking them. Our mothers were not very pleased when they came home.

Sometimes we went to the Prater, a place like Blackpool. But there were woods as well. I was once brought back by the police, all wet and dirty, having jumped into a dangerous pool. This was the last straw for my mother. She cried her eyes out, and when I saw her crying I felt very guilty and promised her that I would never cause her any more trouble. I kept that promise. My uncle bought me a new suit with a serious warning that I should never get another unless I became a very good boy.

Now that both women went to the office, there was a chance to earn some extra money by taking several hundred letters to stamp for both ladies.

There was a time when my mother had to go to a hospital for an operation. It was a second-rate hospital, called Rudolph's Spital. During this period, I stayed with my uncle. He bought me a new suit so that I could visit my mother. She was telling all these people that I could sing, and at Christmas time I sang "Silent Night" for them. What surprised me was that they all were crying because "you have such a beautiful voice". And so they came from all the wards to listen to me. Since then I was asked to come with Mother to sing for them, and she sang like an angel. What I didn't understand was why these women always cried when I sang, until my mother explained to me that they were so touched - especially when I sang "Silent Night".

Every time I went there to visit my mother I saw a man with a violin. He was begging for money. But he didn't play - just one stroke. I watched him and asked him "Why don't you play something? People will give you more money." "Scram!" he shouted, "or I'll kick your backside!" I had to run away. It dawned on me later that this poor man couldn't play the violin.

CHAPTER 3

At the end of the 1914-1918 war, the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed. Their dream to remain a great power was shattered. What remained was a tiny country with seven million people, two million of whom lived in Vienna: in other words, a big head with a small body. Hungary was cut off altogether. Cereals, fruit and vegetables remained in the adjoining countries and could only be purchased at exorbitant prices. What remained was the countryside. Austrian agriculture was neglected and could not supply enough for Vienna. Rich people could get everything they wanted, but the rest of the population had to starve.

So began the great trek to the countryside by thousands of people. This was called the "Hamstern", deriving from that little creature, the hamster. People with bikes were better off. Others had to get up at three or four a.m. to be able to get potatoes and other vegetables. Those who were unable to walk had to stay at home. Others went to work for nothing on the farms all day, to be able to take home any vegetables that might be available. Vienna was starving. People got cards stamped by the authorities in order to get rations. Disease connected with undernourishment spread very rapidly.

Various charitable organisations sprang up to contact better-off countries in order to take the starving children for a period of time in order to alleviate the situation. Our Jewish Council contacted the Jewish Councils in Holland and Hungary. The response was fantastic. So one day my turn came, and I was sent to Holland.

I can still remember the atmosphere at the railway station: two hundred children and their parents, all excited. Mothers crying, and yet happy for the children to have a chance of getting some good food for their children and certain that they would be well looked after. My mother pleaded with me not to get into mischief, knowing what a wild boy I was!

The train was waiting and we had to jump in very quickly in order not to be left behind. Of course, we all said good-bye to our parents and soon they were out of our sight.

In the train each one of the children got a label on which was printed the name of the person and the town where they were going to stay. On the train we got some sandwiches, a box of chocolate and cocoa. That was our first treat. When we arrived in Holland at the station, there were groups of people waiting with placards of the various towns. On my label was printed Sheveningen and my name, Silber. All children had to go to various stations like Rotterdam, Amsterdam, etc.

There were several children who went to the train for Sheveningen - myself included. We arrived there after an hour. There were a lot of people waiting for us. We heard a lady shouting my name. I ran towards her and immediately knew, just looking at her, that I should be well-treated. We went by car to her house.

As soon as we arrived, she said she would prepare a meal for both of us, but you must first have a bath. I never had such a wonderful bath in my life! I just didn't want to get out of it. I could have stayed longer, but she shouted that the meal would be ready in five minutes. When I looked for my clothes, I found that they were missing and new ones were there instead. I put them on, although they were a bit larger than my own. Whatever I was wearing before was gone. The lady watched

me eating with tears in her eyes. "Why do you cry, Madame?" I asked. She said, "Just eat your meal. I'll tell you after." The meal was just out of this world. I didn't know what to eat first.

After several days had passed, she told me that she had had a son of my age who was drowned at sea by a huge wave. This is why she wanted a boy of his age as a guest. He was apparently slightly taller than me. She also said that in a few months' time the clothes would fit me as I would certainly be growing. I thanked her very much. One day she said to me, "You know, I have been listening to you just singing to yourself. Come to my piano and I shall play for you any songs you know. We got on very well until the two months allowed were over. She tried to adopt me, but the authorities said that this was strictly forbidden. The children had to be returned to their parents.

On the journey back, the children were telling their experiences to each other and didn't think much about their future. But as soon as we arrived in Vienna, the dirty station and shabbily dressed relatives brought us back to reality. Of course we were disappointed. But in spite of that we were pleased to see our parents again. My mother had tears of joy in her eyes and kissed and hugged me. After all, I was the only precious possession she had. At that moment, I forgot Holland. It was not her fault she was poor. I promised that I would try not to be naughty again and hurt her in any way. She smiled, but then she started crying again. I could feel that she wanted to tell me something unpleasant. So I said "Please, Mother, what is it that you want to tell me?"

And then it came out. "You know our relatives - these uncles and aunts. They think that it is not right you should sleep in the same room as I, with only a mattress and blankets. So they have decided that you should go to an orphanage. They will pay for you until you are fourteen, and then you will start as an apprentice in some trade. The older you get, the more of a burden you will become to me." I reluctantly agreed, but understood that this was the only solution to our problems. My mother promised that she would visit me once a month only, because this was the regulation, and that she would take me to see operettas, operas and cinema shows.

CHAPTER 4: LIFE IN MY FIRST ORPHANAGE - 1919-1920

It was arranged that in January 1919 I should go to the orphanage and stay there for six years until my fourteenth birthday. The orphanage was on the outskirts of Vienna. So when the fateful day came, I said goodbye to Mrs. Wimmer, the landlady, and her daughter. I thanked them for everything they had done for me. The girl warned me that if I am a bad boy the Krampas would come and smack me with a broomstick on my backside. We all had a good laugh about that threat, as I had learned long ago who that Krampus really was. Then we made our way to the orphanage by tram. I realised that it was necessary to break away from that sort of life, and that my relatives were quite right to send me to the orphanage. There was no other solution.

We arrived at the gate - No.21. We knocked at the door and the porter came and took us straight up to the office. The Director asked my mother for the necessary documents, which she gave him. Then he asked several questions which she answered as best she could. Then he said to her, "Visiting time is every second Sunday from 2 to 5 p.m. If he behaves badly, your visit is cancelled. You may go now." This behaviour of his was a great shock to her and she started crying again. How I hated that Direktor from this moment.

After my mother had gone he turned to me. "You have heard what I said. Remember, any misbehaviour will be severely punished. Do you hear me?" "Yes", I said. You had to say yes: "Herr Direktor" remember!

That was a poor beginning, I thought. Then he called one of the boys and told him who I was and to take me to the sleeping quarters on the first floor, and explain to me everything I needed to know. He said "Yes, Herr Direktor", and off we went.

He was the Head Boy, thirteen years old and knew all there was to know in that place. His name was Muller. He explained to me that we called each other by our family names, because there were so many with the same first names. "So you are Silber, and I am Muller." He was very friendly and I had the greatest respect for him.

He explained to me many things which became very useful in the future. "First of all, get out of the Direktor's way whenever you see him. I have never seen him in a good temper. Just behave quite normally and don't ever show him that you're afraid of him. Some boys never learn. Let's hope you are different. The next thing is something which you have to learn to understand. There are sixty children here. Most of us have one or two relatives only, but many boys have none. So we have decided that all the gifts we get when relatives visit us have to go into a basket to be distributed amongst all the boys, so nobody gets left out. Now, I hope you will take part in this scheme and not exclude yourself."

Although I was only eight years old, I understood this very well, especially since we children in our street always shared whatever we got. After a few seconds of hesitation, I gave him my packet of sweets - bar one. He laughed, thanked me and made it quite clear that this must remain a secret. We must not tell the Direktor, the Staff or our own relatives - for obvious reasons. They might stop giving us anything. Not everybody was happy about this scheme, but it worked for years and we were all good friends. Later, events occurred which were of great importance for our and the director's future.

Not everyone was punished. We learned that those boys who screamed and cried were beaten more often, which seemed to give the Direktor great pleasure. I had my share as well, but I never cried or shouted. This had never occurred to him. So he stopped beating me, especially as he could use me when he had several performances every year, because of my good voice. So he left me alone. The school was ten minutes walk away. We always had to walk there in twos.

These years in the orphanage were where my true character developed. Events which happened there influenced me immediately. I learned how to mix with sixty other children, the wrongs and the rights. No more playing in the streets with horse apples stuffed in old stockings and the dogs taking part. No more pinching apples from other people's orchards. And certainly no more jumping into dirty pools and being brought back by the police. I caused my mother a lot of trouble. What would have become of me if I had stayed with her?

How the Herr Direktor was thrown off his high horse

As soon as we came home from school, we put our books and copy books away, washed our hands and had our midday meal. It was poor and tasteless. We swallowed it, as there was nothing else. Then we went to our rooms inside to have a compulsory two hours sleep. But this time, we only pretended to sleep and just waited until the Herr Direktor made his usual round. Once he had gone, each room became a beehive of activity. We were all fed up, and decided to act the same evening.

Muller and others went from room to room to make sure that everybody knew what to do. After the "sleep", we all went to the main room where we did our homework and read books or played various games. I had just started to learn to play chess, which became my favourite game. Others went into the yard to play handball. We were all excited about our action. Some were a bit worried. The evening came, and we marched into the dining room. The Herr Direktor was already there. He sat on his chair like a pompous frog. We could not detect anything in his behaviour to show that he had any knowledge of what was to come. This was a very good sign. So the two cooks came in with some sliced bread and that horrible herring soup. Each boy went for his plate of soup and bread and went to his seat. But nobody ate it. "Why don't you eat your soup?" he shouted. All the children with one voice shouted "We don't like the soup!" He got up and shouted again and went all red in the face. But we didn't answer any more. "Alright then. Say your prayers and go to bed!" he screamed. And we answered in one voice, "We haven't eaten, so we do not pray." He sent us to bed and swore that he would settle with us the next morning.

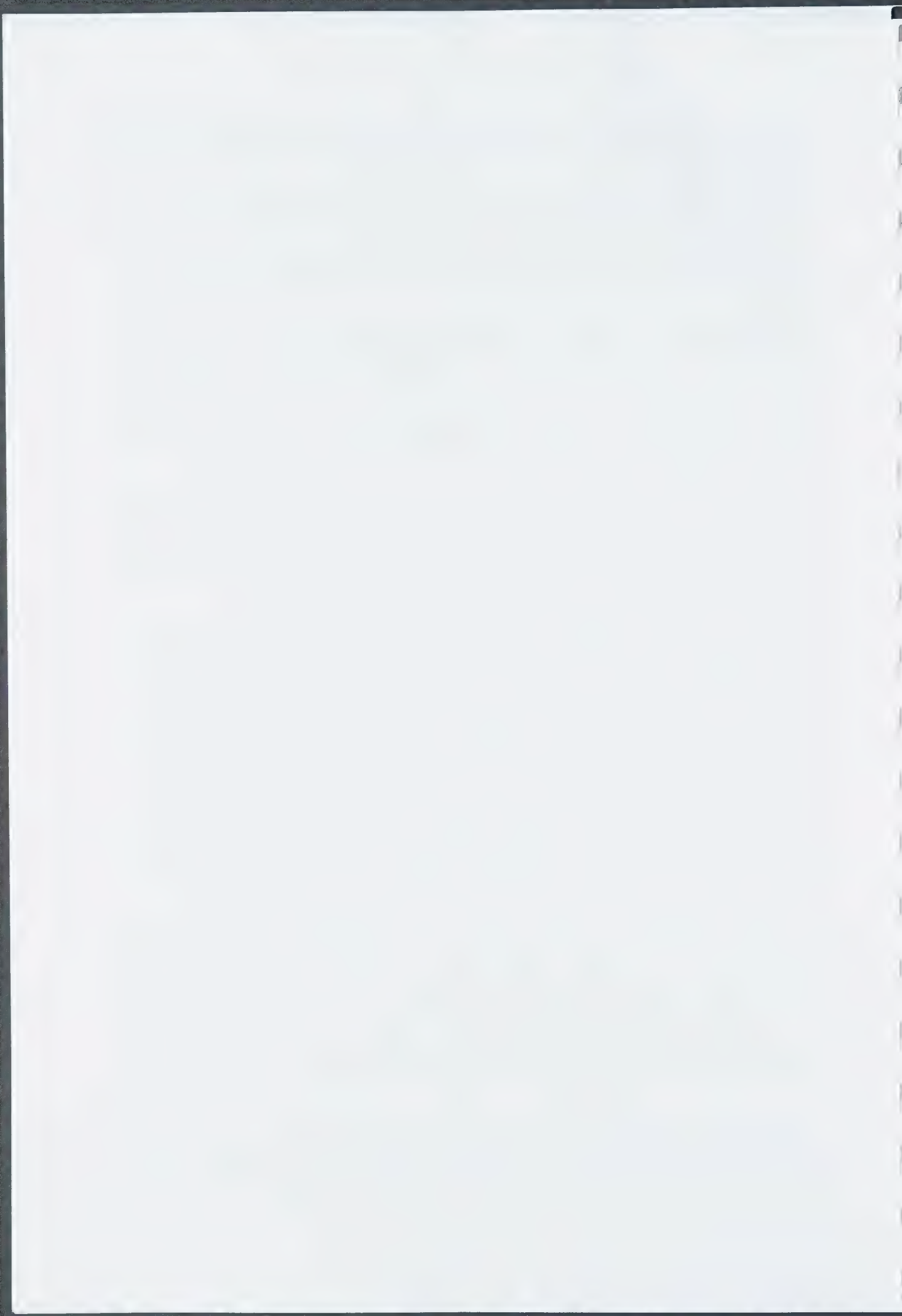
We all stuck together and not one of the boys let us down. The Herr Direktor did not know what else was waiting for him. We went upstairs, washed ourselves, then went to our bedrooms, opened all the windows and shouted "Hunger!" After a few minutes we jumped into our beds and stopped shouting. Only one boy carried on shouting, not knowing that the Herr Direktor was in our room because he had his blanket over his head, poor boy. So the Direktor tore the blanket off him shouting "See you tomorrow!" Then he ran upstairs to Room 2, so we and the boys in Room 3 shouted, and so it went on. We didn't know at that moment what we had achieved. None of us could fall asleep for a long time.

In the morning, we had our wash and went downstairs to have our breakfast. We couldn't believe our eyes! There was lovely hot coffee, the famous rolls with butter, cakes and jam. But not for everyone. Some of us got nothing. But the boys shared with us as soon as he was not looking. The

porter told us that the neighbours, although they hadn't much themselves, collected all this food and brought it to the door.

When we got to school as usual, the whole school was in uproar. The papers were full of it and naturally the Jewish Council as well. What the Direktor had been doing was misappropriating a big slice of the money provided for the upkeep of the orphanage. When we started this action we didn't realise or dream of the consequences of it. We found out later that the Herr Direktor finished up in prison.

Soon after this event our friend Muller left the orphanage as he had reached his fourteenth birthday. We thanked him for what he had done for us and wished him a happy future. A new director came, but only for a short time, and our orphanage was closed down. Thirty of us went to another place not far from Herklotsgasse and the other thirty somewhere else. We never heard any news of them. But this new orphanage was a heaven for us in many ways. All the children's parents or relatives were informed of the new address and came to visit us at the first opportunity.



CHAPTER 5: OUR NEW ORPHANAGE - 1921-24

Before we left the orphanage, a member of the Jewish Council came to see us. He wanted to express very strongly that such behaviour as had occurred in this orphanage would not be tolerated again. We should have told our relatives about it and they in turn would certainly have contacted the Council. They would have been able to deal with the matter straight away. Now the whole Viennese press was only too keen to write about it and give the Council a bad name. "This time, however, you will go to a different place. A very rich Jewish gentleman had, several years ago, donated a huge house with garden and trees, to be used as an orphanage. There is plenty of room for sixty children, a proper swimming pool in the cellar and a great library. The food there is excellent. There is no reason why you should misbehave. Troublemakers will be instantly removed."

Only thirty of us were taken to this place, but the other thirty boys were sent somewhere else. We said good-bye to each other, and especially to Muller, whom I met again several years later. When we arrived at our destination, we could not believe our eyes. At this moment, we thought, that our Councillor did not have to worry. None of us had ever seen a place like this before and we looked forward to enjoying it. At the gate there was a thirteen-year-old boy waiting for us. He ordered us to put our things into a passage, and then go to a long row of tables and benches. The local boys were already sitting there very quietly, staring at us as if we were some sort of animals from the jungle. We were told to sit down on the empty half of the benches and not to speak a word until the Herr Direktor would come and make a speech.

As soon as he arrived, the big boy took out his whistle and blew it very strongly. Everybody had to get up and stand like a soldier until the director gave us permission to sit down again. He welcomed us and wished us a happy time here, but warned us to behave, or we would be in deep trouble. Then he pointed to the boy whom he called Ernst Kohn. "This young man is responsible for the discipline here because I am very busy in the office", he said. If you have any problems, tell him and he will see me or help you to solve them himself. He knows the place inside out." Then he left, but first we had to do the same procedure as before.

Our lot were astonished. We couldn't believe it. Soon we had to get used to it ourselves. At last we got our first meal, which was excellent. After our meal, Ernst Kohn got up again and made his own little speech. It was mainly for our benefit. "Remember", he said, "this place here is not Herklotsgasse and you are to behave like everybody else here. I am responsible for the discipline here, and anybody breaking our rules will be punished. Then he explained that there were three bedrooms, A, B and C, and our lot would be split up ten to a room, and mingled with the other ten. Then we had to take our belongings to each bedroom. Mine was on the first floor and the others (B and C rooms) on the second floor. We gladly agreed to that. After all, we were orphans and wanted to be friends with the others and get to know them and also to find out what was going on there. We soon found out.

When there was an opportunity, some of the boys approached us and told us that Ernst Kohn had formed a club which he called "XYZ", and the members were his bully boys. They were distributed to each bedroom to see to the "discipline". One of their duties was to rob the boys of gifts which visitors brought them. These were distributed among themselves. The children were frightened to complain because they knew that they would be beaten up. When we told them what we had done

at the Herklotsgasse they were astonished and hoped that one day that could happen here as well. I was ten-and-a-half years old by then.

It was necessary to find out who the bully boys were. Once this was known we could spread our influence among the others. This took a while, because E.K. and his gang watched our movements.

Now it is necessary to say a few words about Ernst Kohn. His parents came from a theatrical family and he had the theatre in his blood. When he talked, it was always in a theatrical way. He was Julius Caesar or Nero - always somebody great. When he discovered the wonderful library in one of the rooms, it gave him the chance to learn more about the theatre and plays. So he started to stage plays for various occasions. The first one was for the Direktor's birthday, which pleased him very much. There were more plays for various other occasions and these were always successful. In appreciation for these activities he was made prefect. In this way the Direktor killed two birds with one stone. He made Kohn happy and at the same time put part of his duties on Kohn's shoulders.

From that moment on, Kohn's character completely changed. He became overbearing and arrogant. In order to keep a grip on the boys, he surrounded himself with some of the tougher boys and started a new regime. Then he created his XYZ club. He exercised his power mainly where the children did their homework - a special room with benches and tables and a podium with chair and table for himself. Here he ruled supreme. Anyone wanting to go to the toilet had to put his hand up and ask for permission. He did not allow the boys to go to the garden and write and read outside when the sun was shining. There were plenty of tables and benches, but he could not control the boys there.

So his rule became very oppressive. He could do all this while there were only thirty boys, fifteen of whom were his gang. Once we arrived, there were thirty more, and we had to find out who was who before we could change all this. He, in his arrogance, did not realise that he provided plenty of material to plot his own downfall. Our strength came from the boys themselves who kept complaining to us about what was happening. We could see it ourselves. He smoked secretly. He robbed the children of their gifts. There were his bully boys and his Club XYZ and - worst of all - the boy who always played girls' or women's parts in his performances. Nearly every night he was forced to go upstairs and be misused. And on top of this, all his bending of the rules which stipulated that we must have the opportunity to go to the garden and enjoy it.

We never had the opportunity to see the Direktor ourselves, so we had to think first how to handle Kohn on our own without destroying him and to see to it that there is no fight. We knew that most of the boys were on our side, but if we would have had a fight, we would all have been thrown out as troublemakers. Muller taught me a lot, and I still remember his saying, "Think first, then act. Make sure that your facts are right and remember we are all human beings with our own weaknesses." And with these words in my mind I suggested to the boys the following, which we discussed thoroughly to make sure that we have the vast majority behind us. This was easy because they were all very unhappy with the state of affairs.

Kohn and his gang were completely isolated. It started with Kurt, who was second-in-command, to fetch the "girl" upstairs for his usual dirty game. We surrounded him - Robert was his name - and did not let him go. I said to Kurt, "Go upstairs and tell Kohn that this boy will never go to be your play-girl." When the five bully-boys tried to intervene, they were only five against our fifty, and Kurt quickly ran upstairs to tell Kohn what had happened. Kohn came down with the rest of his gang, but not alone, because all the other boys from rooms B and C came down as well. In other words,

fifteen of his against forty-five of ours. He could see that he was finished and went all pale in the face. He shouted "Everybody to bed!" but nobody went.

This was his last order. He could not believe that this could happen to him. This was the moment that we had chosen to conclude the matter in an amicable way. I was asked by all the boys to be spokesman for them all. Having learned from our friend Muller, I addressed Kohn quite frankly that we did not want to destroy him by telling the Direktor what he was doing behind his back, because he would then be thrown out of the orphanage in disgrace and this would certainly destroy his future. "Go to the Direktor and tell him that you would like to resign, because you want to concentrate your full energy towards your schoolwork during your last six months in the orphanage. We hope that you will still be able to stage a play before you go, because this might be the last one until someone else can follow in your footsteps. Rest assured that nobody here will betray you."

He thanked us all with tears in his eyes - as actors are able to do. He did what we asked him to do. His XYZ club was dissolved and from that moment on we started a normal life and the orphanage became a better place to live in. When the weather was fine we had our meals outside under the trees, even when we suddenly found caterpillars in our soup trying to share our meal! We fished them out, but carried on eating. Sometimes a sudden shower forced us to run for cover with our plates or books, but altogether we were very happy there. Kohn became a normal boy again, and our "girl" Robert was just a boy like all of us. When we played nine-pins he often beat us.

A few days after these events, the Herr Direktor acknowledged Kohn's resignation. Then he asked me whether I would be the next prefect. I declined, but was prepared to be the spokesman for the boys if they would have me and a necessity should arise. At a special meeting, the majority agreed that I should represent them if such an occasion arose. Only a few bully-boys were against me. Many of them had no relatives at all. When I suggested that we should distribute all gifts among all the boys, everybody was in favour. From that moment on, life became normal, and from then on a new phase in my own life started.

Later, I became very interested in books and the basis of the German language. Our German teacher was very interested to find that the boys from the orphanage spoke German exactly as it was written in books, whereas the Viennese spoke in a very strong dialect. So it was easier for us to understand poems and stories and the grammar, or write letters. Even now, it is difficult for me to speak in the local slang. We always got the best marks in German. Now our teacher, Herr Schmidt, asked me if I would also like to attend his afternoon classes. This surprised me very much. But he immediately explained that there are days when he is unable to come and he thought it would help some of the boys with their grammar. He said "I have watched you when you thought that I wasn't there: how you explained to them difficult grammatical points. So I asked your Direktor for permission to keep you here on certain days when I have to attend meetings. I don't live far from here, and I would like you to come to my house afterwards. My wife will look after you until I come." And that happened quite a few times. The lady prepared some drinking chocolate for me and some wonderful cakes. We chatted quite a lot until the teacher arrived. I told him exactly what had happened at the school and he was highly satisfied. Sometimes he came a little later and found me in the best room singing with his wife playing for me at the piano. That is where I started to learn my favourite Schubert songs. The Direktor at the Orphanage was always informed by telephone where I was.

Apart from visiting days, we spent Sundays in the Vienna Woods - unless it rained. On Saturdays, we had to go to the Synagogue which was only about thirty minutes away. The Direktor had a daughter - ginger-headed Elsa. She was about twenty, and we were all in love with her. But we were very

naughty, especially when she had her bath. The window was a bit high, and of course we lifted each other to see her. She knew it but allowed us to have the benefit of watching her!

Sometimes when the ladies in the kitchen prepared sandwiches for our outings, I got up a bit earlier to help. There was Elsa, supervising. She would come and kiss my forehead, and her red hair would cover my face and head. I got all flustered, and the whole staff would have a really good laugh, shouting "Don't be afraid - she won't eat you!" I quickly disappeared, but later on I got used to it. Elsa usually worked in the office, and knew everybody's history. When my mother came to visit me, I told her about Elsa. She said, "Don't go near her - she is dangerous." None of us boys thought so.

The last three years in the orphanage became hectic. Besides taking part in the activities there and at the school - which I really liked - there was a new one, which gave me a lot of pleasure. I was asked by the Direktor to do one more job, and that was to take a bunch of letters and distribute them to the Jewish bookshops, which were right in the centre of the city - mainly in one long street. (As a matter of fact, when I was last in Vienna, the same shops were still there.) I had to see the owners, who were mainly Jewish. In order to make a good impression, I had to be well-dressed. Some of the owners called me into the office and had a little chat with me and promised to send us several books. A few only said that business was bad and they could not promise anything.

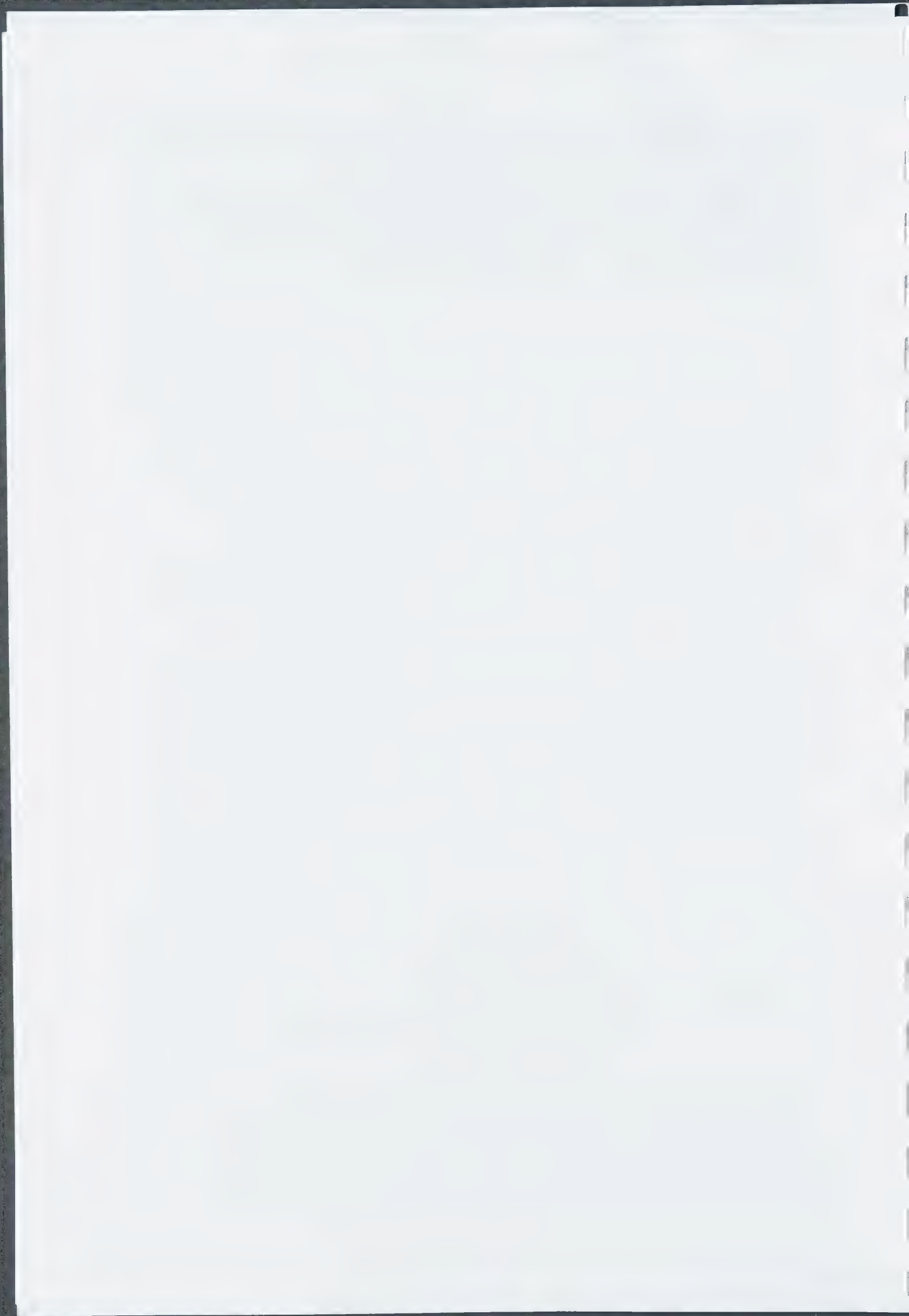
All in all it was quite a success. Although I was not told to enter Catholic shops, I took a risk and went in. I thought I would try. I thought, they can only say "No." It turned out that they did send us some very interesting books and some highly religious ones. I remember as if it was yesterday how astonished our Direktor was when all these books arrived.

My mother used to work about five minutes away from this street, so I used the opportunity to see her. When she saw me, she got a terrible shock. "What happened?" she cried, "Have they thrown you out of the orphanage? You know I can't help you." Luckily enough, Mrs. Wimmer was there as well. "Look at him," she said, "he looks quite happy. Come and tell us why you are here." Then Mother was happy again, when I had explained all about the books. Then I went, caught my tram, returned to the orphanage, and went straight to Elsa's office to tell her the good news. Our Direktor was very pleased when the books arrived after a few weeks.

My last days at the orphanage were spent saying good-bye to everyone there and at the school. When I got my School Certificate from the headmaster, he told me he was very satisfied with my results and wished me a successful future. He hoped I would get a job fit for my abilities. But the best thing would be to carry on studying at a grammar school. I told him that my mother hadn't got the money, then I went back to the orphanage disappointed. In the meantime, my mother had arrived there and told me the "good" news that she had a wonderful job for me which would solve all the problems about where I should live. "You know," she said, "you can't come to Diana Gasse (street) with me because there is no room there. But the place where you go to work is a fashionable hotel near the Opera. You get your food there and sleep in one of the rooms with three other boys. Today you will be a lift-boy, but tomorrow you will own two hotels!"

Just so! After she had told me all this she went to see the Direktor, but I went to see his wife with whom I had spent many hours singing while she played the piano. She taught me the beauty of Schubert's songs and many other gems of music, which I preserved in me for later days. When I told her what my mother had in store for me, she was very sad and had tears in her eyes. But she said nothing. I said goodbye to her and she gave me a kiss on my forehead and wished me all the best. Afterwards, I went to the kitchen staff who already had prepared a big parcel of food, including apples

and a nice cake. They all wished me good luck. Then I went to see the Herr Direktor and thanked him for all he had done for me and all the other children. But my main interest was in seeing all my friends who shared with me all the ups and downs of the past years. I was not worried for them as they were sheltered there and never wondered what the future had in store for them. I left the new boys in good hands. They learned a lot from me and others, just as I learned from Muller. That will bear good fruit for the future. At the end I went to see Elsa to say goodbye to her. She gave me a warm-hearted kiss and said good-bye and visit us.



CHAPTER 6: HOTEL ASTORIA - 1925

The Hotel Astoria was quite fashionable, but still second class, mainly because it was in a side street, and for that reason its clientele were second class as well - although it was quite near the Opera and other famous places. In front of it all along the street were a lot of taxis. Opposite was a shop where one could buy material for magicians and all sorts of masks and fancy dresses for people who borrowed them a ball. That was in 1925. That's when I became a lift-boy.

When my wife and I went to this street in 1990, that shop was still there with exactly the same masks and other materials. Nothing had changed since 1925. Even the outside of the hotel was still the same. I had a uniform with three rows of brass buttons, and a hat with two brass letters "HA". I could see the same boys coming out of the hotel and shouting "taxi", carrying the same type of suitcases. The only worry I had at that moment was that the Secretary would come out and shout "Why have you left the hotel without my permission?" My wife and I had a good laugh about this. Imagine! 1925 and 1990 mixed! Unfortunately we couldn't see the inside as we were not looking very presentable.

I can still remember everything that happened there, right from the beginning. First, the Secretary: medium-sized, slightly gingery hair, and very unpleasant-looking. He was in charge of the whole staff - a very important man! When my mother presented me to him, he said, "Your son is not very tall. He won't be able to carry those heavy suitcases." My first mistake was to open my big mouth and say, "Oh yes, I'm strong enough to carry heavy loads. We were always wrestling at the orphanage, and I was the third strongest." He gave me a dirty look and told me off, saying, "How dare you speak without my permission!" My poor mother was worried that I would lose the job before I even started. He told her not to worry, he would curb my tongue and bad behaviour. Then he sent her away and started to explain my duties. My only asset at that moment was that I was able to speak pure bookish German without the dialect which is spoken in Vienna. Then he pointed out to me that I would not get any wages until I had proved to him that I had learned enough to deserve them. But I would get plenty of tips from guests if they were satisfied with my service. "You will get a new uniform and hat, which you have to clean, otherwise you will pay a fine." He stressed the fact that I should have a midday meal and a supper, but no breakfast as there was nobody available to make it in the morning. Everyone had to provide it for himself. I asked him what happened if I had no money. "Use your tips sparingly", he said.

This was a sad affair, and I started to feel worried and dissatisfied. Every morning at 8 a.m. all lift-boys had to report to the secretary's office, where their buttons would be checked to see if they were shiny and their uniforms clean. Anyone found with spots on his clothes had to pay a fine "which will go straight into this box for charity. Remember you must be polite to our guests. We do not want any complaints. Understand?" Yes, I said.

One of the boys took me up to the fourth floor to our bedroom. He said to me, "No matter what you do, how well you clean them, he will find a way to get your money. It's for himself." So that was a poor beginning. The two hotels which my mother had forecast for me disappeared in the blue heaven of Vienna.

I learned the trade fast enough. Soon I had my first big trouble. I took a lady in my lift to the first floor and greeted her very politely: "Good morning, madame." She went all red in her face and shouted, "I am a Countess, and you should have addressed me as such!" "Sorry, I didn't know", I said. "You

should have known! Take me immediately to the manager!" I took her and apologised and then she went. Although I had little money, I had to pay a fine. That was not fair, I thought, and from that moment I began to think how I might get away from that place.

And then there was this affair with the Hungarian actress. Her eyes and her hair were black and most beautiful. She flirted with everyone and the boys were fighting for a chance to take her to the second floor in the lift. In the long run, everybody had the opportunity, but not I. She would ring the secretary and ask him to send Frank or Charles to her room to fetch a parcel or an important letter and post it. Usually he stayed there quite a while. When he came back, he would only have a piece of paper in his hand, which he threw away. Everybody had a chance, until the secretary called me and said "Go to the second floor, number 332. There is a person there who wants an important letter to be posted immediately." I took the lift and went to the door of room 332. I knocked and a woman's voice said, "Come in." When I opened the door I saw her in a beautiful fur coat. She said, "Come here, boy." I went nearer, and suddenly she threw down her coat and there she was, all naked. I turned round and ran to the door and the lift. I was so disgusted and at that moment she became ugly in my eyes.

When I arrived in the main hall, the secretary said, "You have come back quickly. The others stay much longer upstairs." So he knew what was going on. He supplied her with young boys, and I had to be another victim. I determined to leave that horrible place.

CHAPTER 7

In front of the hotel were all the taxis, and the drivers with whom I used to have many a chat. Among the taxi drivers was one with whom I had a special friendly relationship. We usually talked about all sorts of things when he was available. I told him what had happened and he was disgusted and said to me, "You did the right thing. Apart from everything else, you could have got a terrible disease and suffered all your life. I think it is time for you to leave this place and find something which would fit your intelligence. I listened to his advice, and funnily enough, the opportunity came.

I used to go swimming in the famous indoor swimming pool, the Dianabad. There I met some of my old friends from the orphanage. I told them about my horrible life at the hotel and my dilemma about having somewhere to sleep if I left. "Don't worry about it," they said. "We are all in an apprentices' home run by the Jewish Council. Only those who are learning a trade can live there. But the manager who runs it is very helpful. He has a list of jobs available for new apprentices. Come with us - it's only ten minutes' walk from here. It's worth a try!"

So we went there with great hope, chatting about past experiences. The place was called "Zukunft" (Future). I met the manager and told him about my problem. All the boys vouched for me and told him about the orphanage. He immediately looked at his list and among the various places available was one which I immediately liked. This was an apprenticeship available at a famous electrical firm. He rang the firm up, and luckily there was someone available in the office. An interview was arranged for 10 a.m. the next morning. The manager, Mr. Fisher, said things were going well for me and if I was accepted he could give me a place in the home. The problem of payment could be settled once I had started my apprenticeship and got my first wages.

Then he asked me if I always did things on my own. "No," I said, "but this time I have to. I don't want to be a liftboy for ever, inventing little tricks to get a tip from guests, like a beggar." I also told him a little about the Hungarian actress. "But when everything is settled and I have a place to sleep and can learn a proper trade, my mother will have to accept the established fact and be happy about it." He congratulated me and promised to keep a bed for me.

Then I returned to the hotel. Next, I asked the secretary whether I could have two hours off to see my mother, which he permitted. I then had a long interview with the manager and foreman at the electrical firm. They were both well satisfied, especially since Mr. Fischer had guaranteed for my good behaviour and a place at the apprentices' home.

Only then did I go to see my mother at the office. When she saw me she got a shock and went all pale. Mrs. Wimmer came as well and said, "What have you done this time?" Then I told them the whole story.

Mother was very pleased to hear all this and agreed with me that I should leave this horrible hotel immediately. She got permission from her employer to accompany me to the hotel secretary and ask for my instant release, as she had found for me a proper apprenticeship as an electrician. But he did not allow me to say goodbye to the boys. There was no need to worry about that, as I was now able to see my new friend the taxi driver to whom I told the whole story - including about the actress. "It is better for you to become a real tradesman" he said. "I'll tell the boys about it and warn them that they should stop having anything to do with that woman. They could get some terrible diseases and

you just escaped this danger." Then he congratulated my mother for having an intelligent son: "He will go places yet - don't worry about him." As usual, Mother had tears in her eyes, but this time, happy ones. We shook hands and he wished me a happy future. (Little did we know what was waiting for us all!)

My dear mother was very happy at this moment and I took her back to her dreary office. I promised her that as soon as I was organised we should have some Sunday meals together. That pleased her very much.

Afterwards, I went to the apprentices' home and told Mr. Fischer that I had followed his advice and that my mother settled everything very satisfactorily at the hotel. When the boys came back from work, we had a happy re-union around the bottom corner of the street. There was a little shop with a front garden and a few tables and chairs. We could always get there some hot sausages with mustard and a bottle of sweet apple wine, some crispy cakes with cream in them and topped with chocolate. And below, we could see the Little Danube floating by. (The Little Danube is really the canal which takes all the rubbish from Vienna onto the Danube.) Those were happy days. Mr. Alter, the owner, became like an uncle to us.

Early in the morning, I entered the workshop from the back, where some boys of various ages were already assembled. The foreman was busy instructing some of them, slightly older than I, to go to various parts of Vienna and do some jobs. In the meantime, other apprentices had arrived. I introduced myself and shook hands with them. One of them, an extremely friendly young man, lent me an overall and offered to show me a shop where I could get one very cheaply. The atmosphere was very relaxed.

Later, during a 10 a.m. break, a boy called Karl came to see me and said that everyone here is a member of the Metalworkers Union and asked me to join the apprentices' section. I naturally did. So, that was a good beginning. I was shown what to do and quickly learned the trade. Then I had to enrol in the apprentices' school, which was a must. Slowly, I was integrated with all the others.

One day another young man came to see me. I could see he was very enthusiastic. He told me of the thousands of young people who have become members of the Young Socialists, a section of the Social Democratic Party. I joined and became one of them. His optimism was so infectious that it was not difficult for him to convince me. We became good friends, and later the others called us the two W's - William and Walter.

There was a little restaurant nearby where we could have a cheap meal. A lot of us went there every day. In the evening, when I returned to the apprentices' home, they all wanted to know how I was getting on. They were pleased to hear that I was quite happy.

The weeks went by very quickly and I felt that instead of becoming a beggar I had become a useful citizen. On Sundays we went to a restaurant as in the past, and Mrs. Wimmer had to come with us. On the First of May and 12 November (Austria's Freedom Day) 100,000 of us marched on one of the Boulevards (the wonderful broad roads of Vienna) singing "Vienna belongs to us". Only two days in a year!

CHAPTER 8: APPRENTICESHIP - THE BLUE DANUBE BECOMES WHITE

I was now well-established at the apprentices' home. There were plenty of my mates from the orphanage but also many new faces. Some had girl friends whom they were meeting occasionally at the gates of the Jewish girls apprentices' home. They were in the same position as we were. They had no parents or relatives. They learned cooking, typewriting, hairdressing or other trades for females. We often went to the Vienna Woods together, but they had to return sooner than we boys. At that time it seemed to us that the sun was always shining. But soon thick clouds came which destroyed all our hopes.

Most of us were members of the Social Democratic Party simply because we agreed with their policies but also that this was the only party which allowed Jews to join them. The Christian Democratic Party was strongly anti-Semitic. It was natural that we were part of the SDP and we were always enthusiastic in all their activities. A good example was when at the end of 1927 the Danube and the whole city was covered in ice and snow. We all put our names down to help the City Council in their endeavours to clear the city. We helped old people, distributed bread and hot coffee, shifted snow into the lorries.

How the Council managed to solve this big problem in a city of two million people is still a wonder to me. But nothing could be done to help the Danube. It looked like the North Pole - ice and snow everywhere. All the snow in Vienna was put into big lorries and thrown onto the ice on the Danube. That was also the time when unemployment spread slowly into the whole country. I was one of the first victims, mainly because my name being Silber was tainted as Jewish. No matter what praise I got for my abilities at work, I was sacked - especially when they found out I was a member of the Young Socialists.

Wine and happiness

My uncle Bela rescued me by employing me in his newest endeavour - an automatic buffet. You put your coin in the slot and out came a hot sausage. My duty was to see to it that there was always something in each compartment. Hot meals one could get from the kitchen - i.e. Hungarian stew (Gulasch). My main job was to see to it that all gadgets were in working order, that there was enough wine in each jar and that the kitchen staff replenished all the food.

There were ten different barrels of wine in the cellar. I had to refill the jars and take them upstairs. When I had to do it the first time, I did not quite listen to my Uncle's instructions, being too excited, and so I got myself into trouble.

Every barrel was marked type and country, so were the jars which were placed underneath each barrel. So it happened that I sucked some of the wine to make sure that the system was working, and put the pipe into the jar afterwards. This procedure had a wonderful effect on me. I felt very happy and as I was keen on singing, I gave each country the benefit of my voice. Hungarian songs, waltzes from Vienna and other parts of Austria and of course the Marseillaise when I filled the French bottles. My Uncle came down into the cellar and shouted "What's up with you?" I said to him in a jolly voice, "Oh Uncle, I am very happy." He knew what I had done and sent me home to have a good sleep. I slept for twenty-four hours. When I returned he gave me a real telling off and I had to

promise him always to listen and do things the way he wants it. What surprised me though was that each jar had been properly filled according to the name and country of origin.

This endeavour did not last long. It became out of fashion. People put wrong coins into the slot and the wine was flowing all over the place. People stole cutlery. I could not be everywhere at the same time. At the end he had to close the place down. Then he started a little factory making buckles for belts, and that was a disaster as well. So, I became unemployed again.

Vienna by night

In 1930, when I was nearly twenty, I only had an income from the unemployment benefit, like so many others. It was my friend Walter, whom I met accidentally, who suggested that one could earn a little bit extra by selling newspapers by night in the various cafes. There were plenty of them all over the area, which was like Blackpool but much more spread out. He explained to me that the newspapers came out at midnight. You had to pay in advance for a hundred copies, but you couldn't bring any back. This was the only snag. The newspaper was called "Das Kleine Blat" (a Daily Mirror type of paper). "Remember," he said, "You have to be very fast because you won't be the only one."

The next day I went to the place where the papers were printed and got my hundred copies. On the way to the playground I sold a few at some small cafes, because other sellers went to the bigger ones further on. I went to one café which was full to capacity with male prostitutes all painted like women. It was a horrible sight. I ran from there as quickly as I could. Somebody shouted after me but I didn't stop until I came to the next café. There I sold a few.

At about 4 a.m., I observed something very interesting. There was this café, and all the people who were inside came out including the waiters. One of them locked the entrance and they all went home. Then the next shift of waiters came, waited for two minutes, unlocked the door, and all the waiters and guests went in. The people carried on playing chess, cards and reading the papers. The reason for this was that there was a law which did not allow a café to be open more than twelve hours. Neither were the staff to work longer than that. So this was a way of beating the law. In the meantime, more people came in whose work started at 6 a.m. not far away from the café, and I had the chance to sell some more papers.

Whatever I had left I sold at the huge market in the city, called the Nashmarkt. Then I went to sleep for a few hours and then got the midday papers which were very popular: the Midday Telegraph, Die Stunde, etc. My customers were mainly people who had a stand selling vegetables and fruit. They were very nice to me and never bought a paper from anyone else. Sometimes they gave me some fruit slightly bruised, and there were even some who gave me a lettuce or tomatoes. There was one lady who had a stand working for a famous cake firm. She made various cakes and gave away slices for people to taste. She always wanted me to come to her stand when she was ready to go home, to give me a few slices to take away.

Once there was a lady who was 25 or 30 years old. She asked me, "Where did you last have a really good meal?" I said, "I sell my papers on the main road, the Landstrasse, where there is a cheap restaurant and I have sometimes a good meal there." She said, "What about having a good meal with me?" "Yes", I said, "that would be very nice." She gave me her address. After I sold my midday papers, I had a few hours sleep and went to her flat which was in one of Vienna's famous council buildings. I had a good meal and thanked her, of course. When I wanted to go, she said, "Just stay

for a while and have a rest. You can always get the last tram to the newspaper building." So I stayed there nearly every day. I must say I had a good time there, until one day she said, "You can't come for a while because my husband is coming back from Africa where he has been working. But afterwards it will be alright again." I got a terrible shock. I said, "I didn't know you were married. I would never have come here." And so my good days ended. But all the women knew about it, and had a good laugh at my expense!

I had enough time to spare to find places near the market where I could sell. There were some wine restaurants where a lot of people were still drinking and singing and having a good time. They were buying the papers although I saw quite a few lying about. I still had some left for the market people. There I sold quite a few as nobody else had been there so early.

These people became my regulars as I promised them that I should be coming so early every day. At the end I had only about five copies left. Then I went home to sleep until 11.30 a.m., when I sold the midday papers which were quite popular. I never shouted the name of the paper. I always asked nicely and in this way made many regular buyers. This I did also on the Main Road. There were plenty of shops. Very often I got a cheap meal in the smaller restaurants. At 1 o'clock, I was already in bed and had a well-deserved rest.

One day I went to the barber to have my hair done and I became quite a regular customer. I saw a lot of pictures on the wall of his shop and asked him "Who is this fellow? He reminds me of various operas I have heard." "That's me", said the barber, "I used to be an opera singer, but now I am too old for it and so I became a hairdresser." He originally came from Roumania. Then he said to me "I have got the feeling that you have a good voice. Come into the back room and sing something for me." When he heard my voice, he said, "You are committing a great sin to yourself if you carry on running about with newspapers. Now listen to me. At the Vienna Conservatoire there is a former great opera singer. He teaches now. He knows me well and I shall tell him about you. Give me your address and I shall get you in touch with him."

Two weeks later, it was arranged that I shall have an appointment with Professor Lirhammer. I went there with hope, wondering whether a completely untrained singer would have a chance. But then I thought, if one does not try, one cannot win. And so I entered that wonderful building in spite of not being nicely dressed.

At the entrance stood a huge porter. He looked down at me and asked, "What do you want?" I showed him the letter with my appointment to see the professor. He looked at it, probably thinking "What is the world coming to?" But he had no choice and sent me to the room where others were already waiting.

Then I met Professor Lirhammer, a huge man. He looked at me and said, "Don't worry. I looked like you when I came here for the first time." Then I had to go into another room. After about half an hour I was called into the main room where there were six professors. All former singers or musicians. My professor asked me whether I had brought some music with me for the pianist to accompany me. I said, "I'm sorry. I can't read music." "Oh," he said, "you unhappy raven! How can you come without music? The pianist won't be able to accompany you." The pianist saved me by asking me what I wanted to sing. I said, "The aria - from the opera....." "Rigoletto," he finished for me: "La donna e mobile!" And they all had a good laugh, because every singer wants to show off with this aria. Then I sang with all my might and he accompanied me. The professors listened very seriously. When I came to the end, my professor gave the pianist a wink. I could see that, but didn't

know why. The professor said, "Can you sing it again?" I said yes, and I sang it. But I observed that this time it was played on a higher note. It was more difficult, and was more shouted than sung. The professor just wanted to know the range of my voice. The pianist was very friendly and said that I had done quite well under the circumstances.

Then I had to wait in another room, where the professor came to see me. He was very serious and said that I had a very good voice, but rough. "If you follow my training method", he said, "you will be able to achieve something, and your voice will become smoother. But don't be under any illusions. You will never be able to sing heroes' parts - certainly not Siegfried, because you are too small. But there are plenty of other operas that need singers of your size. Remember what I am telling you now. There will be no more singing until you get my permission. I shall recognise the difference in your voice when you come for the next lesson. I am very strict on this point, as I do not want to waste my time, and somebody else would take your place."

Soon I started my scales, and nothing else. Up, down; up, down! I also had to learn how to read music. This happy but strainful time which lasted a year came to a rapid end. My professor called me to his office one day and told me that he was not allowed to teach pupils who could not pay the full fee as there was a big economic crisis. "I would have gladly paid for you, but our salaries have also been cut" he said.

Then I went to my mother and told her the bad news. She said, "You seem to follow my fate" and as usual started crying again. At this time - Christmas - I could go with my mother and sing for the people in the hospital again.

My customers in the cafes and the market were very sorry for me when I told them the bad news. They themselves also suffered in the economic crisis. My Rumanian friend was very sorry to hear my tale. He thought it was probably that my name had something to do with it. The authorities at the Conservatoire were using the slump as an excuse to get rid of me. Most Austrians were, and still are, anti-semitic.

At the opera, the pupils would get free tickets, but there was a condition attached. The chief of the clapping group would tell when to clap or boo. I got a ticket. He told me "There are two lady singers. When the first one enters you have to clap, but when the next comes on, you boo." I never boo-ed. I just clapped for them both. He watched me, and said, "This is the last free ticket you got." But my principles did not allow me to act so disgracefully.

CHAPTER 9: THE FALL OF AUSTRIA AND THE DISASTROUS CONSEQUENCES

This part of my story covers the grimmest part of my life. From 1918 to 1938, I was just a little player in the coming tragedy, but I was involved and am able to tell the tale as I saw it, and from what I was told or read in the newspapers.

Austria after the War was a poverty-stricken country and had to struggle for its survival. The eastern and south-eastern part was strewn with all sorts of weapons which were left behind by foreign soldiers making their way back to their own countries. But a new set of people invaded the eastern and south-eastern parts of Austria. Hungarians, Yugoslavs and Italians gathered most of the weapons and began to settle on Austrian territory. In order to defeat them and send them back home, two main Austrian groups united to fight the invaders. Once their aims were achieved they split up again. One group was called the Heimwehr, which was a strictly Catholic organisation, and the other was the Republican Defence Corps or RPD - the armed unit of the Social Democratic Party. Both parties were gathering as many weapons as they could for future use against each other, but they had to hide them because Germany and Austria were supposed to be completely disarmed. The head of state in Austria was a fanatical Catholic: Cardinal Seipel. His aim was to create a totalitarian Mussolini type fascist state. In order to achieve his aim he had to destroy the SDP, and force them to hand over their weapons to the Heimwehr. Once he succeeds with this, the next step would be easier. But first he had to get more influence among the starving Austrian people. And so he devised the following plan.

He got in touch with the British and French governments and warned them that if there should be a plebiscite in Austria, the hungry Austrians would give an 80 per cent vote for unification with Germany. But if the Allies were prepared to invest in Austria, well-fed Austria would give them (the pro-Nazi party) only 20 per cent. He at the same time warned them that the gateway to the eastern and southern countries is the bastion Austria, with its high mountains. It is easier to conquer these countries from Austrian territory. This bastion must be kept intact.

The Allies took that hint, and invested plenty of money and increased their trade with Austria. They could not lose, as they made Austria dependent on them. Not only that: by accepting all this "help" Austria got itself into deep debt. But nothing was said about it at that time, in 1927.

Naturally, Cardinal Seipels' influence rose, especially in the agricultural areas. He felt now strong enough to demand from the SDP that the Republican Defence Corps should hand in their weapons to their deadly enemies, the Catholic Heimwehr. This the SDP was not prepared to accept, because Dr. Seipels' side would be so strong that he could take over the country and declare Austria a Mussolini-type fascist state and dissolve parliament. In Austria the police (which consisted mainly of farmers' sons and was strictly Catholic and anti-SDP) were and still are armed with revolvers, and those on horses have sabres. What the Cardinal needed was to create an opportunity to use all these forces against the SDP.

This opportunity occurred in a little village (Schattendorf) where two Heimwehr people who were hidden behind a barricaded inn shot and killed a cripple and his child. These two killers were brought to trial and acquitted. That particular event was, when one looks back with hindsight, the tiny spark which started off a fire which ultimately ended with the Second World War.

Next day, when we went to work, we bought the Arbeiter Zeitung - the working man's gazette - and read what had happened. It was decided by the SDP that in Vienna we should stop work and make our way into the inner city and march in peaceful procession along that wonderful broad road where all the important buildings, shops and hotels were situated. There were 100,000 people. We shouted slogans in connection with the trial and sang our revolutionary songs. My mates from the shop and many other apprentices marched together. The Republican Defence Force saw to it that nobody got out of line.

It was planned that at the end of the road we should turn left into the next street, and then disperse. Suddenly, we could not go any further. We heard shots fired by the police, which started to create panic. - especially when police on horses arrived and started hitting and wounding many of our comrades with their sabres. We could not go back, as there were so many thousands behind us, neither could we go forward because of the police. It was impossible to get to the next street either. Suddenly there was a lot of smoke, and we could see the Palace of Justice burning. The fire brigade was unable to get through, and the Palace burned down to the ground. Next we heard some more shooting and it was the Heimwehr. Our leaders told the RDP not to shoot because there would be a civil war. We asked ourselves, what use is it to have the RDP if they are not allowed to defend us? Then the voice of a loudspeaker was heard. It was Cardinal Seipels: "Shoot and have no pity". Since then, he was called the "No pity Cardinal".

That day was 15 July 1927. I was only not quite 17 and shall never forget it, especially since one of my mates was killed and two were injured.

That was not the end of all the trouble, because the Palace of Justice was burned down to the ground and it was never found out who the culprits were. That day was the beginning of the end of Austria's liberties and also the start of the growth of the Austrian Nazi Party.

When Dollfuss came to power in 1933, he wanted to dispense with parliament. He was helped to achieve this aim by a curious incident. A very important vote had to be taken, but as parliament was equally divided, only the president's casting vote could decide. He was a social-democrat and would have voted for his party. Now one of the deputies - a social democrat - had a sudden urge to go to the toilet. He gave his voting card to a fellow deputy and asked him to use two cards. This had happened often in the past, and had always been recognised. The government was defeated by one vote. The vote was contested on the grounds that there was no proof that the absent deputy had authorised his vote to be used. The president resigned in protest (something which he should never have done, as the two vice-presidents did the same). So, the other side won.

With the help of some lawyers, Dollfuss was then able to abolish parliament, and from then on ruled the whole country with an iron grip. Trade Unions, various political parties - especially the social democrats, the communists and the Nazi Party were banned. The prisons were full and many hangings took place. Dollfuss declared a Holy Catholic State. In later years, when these events were discussed, the social democratic party was criticised, not only by their members, but also by many other organisations for not using their weapons when it was necessary. They hesitated too much.

Just at this time, my mother married a Christian, which upset the whole family. Her best friend, Mrs. Wimmer, died and she was lonely. Unfortunately she wrote to my father to tell him the news. After a few days, he came to take me to Poland. I went first to my friend Walter and told him the news. He was sorry to let me go, but hoped that I would return one day.

CHAPTER 10: MY LIFE IN POLAND AND MY RETURN TO VIENNA

After a very sad parting and many tears, mainly on Mother's side, Father and I entered the train. She stood there, a lonely person. I nearly jumped out of the train but it was gathering speed. Had I known what was waiting for me, I would have risked that jump. But it is not given to us to know the future. And as I am by nature optimistic I hoped for a better future. After all, I escaped great danger from the Nazis.

During our long journey from Vienna to Stanislau, my father and I used the opportunity to get to know each other. Although my mother had told me quite a lot about him, it was mainly negative. She admitted, however, that he was an excellent locksmith and mechanic. People came from far and wide to have complicated jobs done by him. He told me about his workshop and the people who worked for him. He was also very proud of his important customers. Even the Greek Orthodox Church wanted only him to do their complicated jobs. What ruined him was alcohol and gambling. He admitted his weakness and promised me that now I was with him he would do his best.

Then I told him I was an electrician and had a certificate having passed my exams in the technical college. He was very excited about that and said he would try to get me a licence so that I could work under him and that he could expand his activities and improve his standing in the town. So with talking, eating and sleeping we came nearer to each other than I had hoped.

But when I asked him whether he had a house or flat for both of us, he became evasive. This made me suspicious and I started worrying. At various main stations en route we got some hot food, and he would get himself some spirits - mainly vodka when on Polish territory.

When we came to the city of my birth, I was very much excited. There at the station, my father pointed out a group of people and said, "There, look! There is my sister and the whole family Rubin, your relations. And they came running towards me. The fastest was their mother, who had helped my mother to bring me up. She cried and laughed and kissed me as if I were her best-loved child. And then there were the children: Sofka, Minka, Tonka, Edka, Lonka, Isak and Jakob. My aunt told me that her husband was still working in his smithy, and the eldest girl and her husband were still at the market, selling clothes. We had to take two droshkies to take us all home.

One of the girls started making tea and warmed the potato cakes which had been baked before they came to meet us. Everyone got only one piece of sugar with the tea, which they let dissolve slowly in the mouth until they had drunk the tea. The reason for this was that sugar was so expensive that they could only afford two pieces per person per day. Mother had to lock up the sugar so that the boys should not pinch any. Only rich people could afford more sugar.

Whilst we were having our simple meal, somebody suddenly observed that my father had gone without even saying good night to me. He left only a message with my aunt that he will come and fetch me in the morning. I said to my aunt, "This is strange. Am I not going to be with him in his house or flat?" Now came the first shock. My aunt told me that he has neither. He is a lodger with some people with whom he has been for years. And he left very little money with my aunt to find a lodging for me. I could not understand that. I told my aunt that he boasted in the train how busy he is and how many customers he has, so he must have a lot of money.

Then she started crying and the truth came out. "He does have a lot of money", she said, "But he drinks and gambles it all away. I cannot have you in my house, but I have found you a place where you will have to stay for a while. And I promise you that when some of my girls get married - so God will! - I shall take you in and you will pay me a nominal sum."

Then she took me to my new lodging which was very primitive. The old lady was very friendly and I immediately liked her. Then came my next shock. I looked for the bed, but there was only a very long box with a lid. I asked her where the bed was, and she pointed towards the box. Then she took the lid off and inside was a palliase filled with straw. I asked her "Where is the bed?" She said, "That's the bed. I said to my aunt, "Why did you bring me to this place? What have I done to deserve such treatment?"

Now I know why my father did not tell me about the house or flat - he never looked for one. And what hurt me most was that he did not have the courage to say so and disappeared without saying good night. He left my poor aunt, who had plenty of worries of her own, to deal with this unpleasant business. I was so upset about this that I was ready to make my way back to Vienna on foot.

Poor Aunty! She cried her eyes out and begged me not to go. In the meantime her husband arrived. We shook hands and he washed himself while his wife was preparing his main meal. So I sat down and when he returned we had a little chat. He looked very tired, much older than his age. He had only one person to help him in his smithy and it was a very hard job. (I always think of him when they say they have never seen Jews in an overall yet - as it happened in front of me when I worked at English Electric. I told them: there is one standing here. And I am not the only one: millions of Jews were working in Poland, and they could not even afford an overall!)

The old lady at my lodgings gave me some milk and bread and showed me where the toilet was, and the pump in the middle of the yard. I washed myself under the pump and it was very refreshing. I also did some Swedish gymnastics and went to bed. I slept extremely well. In the morning I had bread and milk again, which I enjoyed. The old lady told me she had prayed for me.

The next day, when my father came to take me to his workshop, I asked him why he made this journey to Vienna so that I should live and work with him, when he had not got a home for himself. I told him straight that I would go back to Vienna if he did not provide for a decent home for myself. He had plenty of excuses but did not promise to stop drinking and playing cards. I had to bide my time because it was impossible for me to change his habits within a few days.

We arrived at his workshop. There was a shield with his name and underneath "locksmith" painted on. We went into the yard. There were four people working. I could hear the clanging and banging, which were familiar sounds to me. Then he introduced me to a Polish fellow - Stanek by name. He was an excellent worker, but very proud. When I wanted to shake hands with him, I could only touch his fingers. But he worked for my father only because his name was very famous for excellent workmanship. Then there were two Ukrainian apprentices and one Ukrainian for any job. I immediately took to him. He was about forty and lived in the next village. More about him later. Stanek, the Pole, got his wages regularly because Father could not afford to lose him. The others had to wait for weeks for their wages. They grumbled but stayed as they would not get any jobs anywhere in 1933 because of the slump.

One day I reminded my father that he should get a licence for me so that I could start doing electrical installation, and that Kaliczuk the Ukrainian could work with me. He went promptly to the licensing

office and got it very quickly, as my father knew these people well. That made us both happy and he really changed his ways for quite a while. He stopped drinking and gambling. I also managed to convince him that I would collect the outstanding debts from our customers and pay our little staff their wages regularly. Only Stanek, the proud Pole, would be paid by my father, because it was beneath his dignity to be paid by me.

A terrible calamity happened in my aunt's house. The eldest daughter, Sophia, ran away with a Christian and married him. It was bound to happen sooner or later. She had no money and lived a miserable life at home. Soon she would be too old, which happens in many families and she would become an old maid.

Then the girl next in line, Minka, got married to a very nice young man. He came and asked her mother for permission to marry the daughter, which my aunt reluctantly allowed, because Minka was one of the two girls who had jobs which brought money into the home. For the time being I stayed with the old lady. She was known by all the people around as a healer. Women would come to her and tell her about a poorly child who wouldn't eat and was frightened. "Ah", she would say. Then she would take a pot and put some candles in and heat it. Then she poured water on the slightly melted candles and looked into the pot. Then she would say, "Oh yes, I know what the trouble is. A dog has frightened the child. When you get home, you will see that the girl will be alright." She would also say some prayers and would be given some eggs and a loaf of bread. Her visitor would go home happy.

I carried on washing myself under the pump and doing Swedish exercises. But one day a man came to see me and told me that I was being watched from all the windows around by the girls. He was a marriage broker and told me I could marry any of them. One had 800 dollars, another 700 dollars. I told him they were wasting their time and that I would only marry for love. From then on I only washed myself quickly and did my gymnastics inside the house.

Then my aunt asked me to come and live with them. She reminded me very strongly that we were blood relations and hoped that I would not start any trouble with the girls. "I watched you eyeing Tonka," she said. "That's how I used to look when I was her age." I promised that I would not touch Tonka unless to give her an ordinary kiss. And so I entered that house with all its troubles.

I paid in advance for two weeks, and all went well for a while. I also got to know my uncle a bit better, especially on Saturdays and Sundays. On Saturday he went to the synagogue to pray and had a proper rest. On Sunday he was not allowed to work because all shops had to be closed. He grumbled about that, because he thought that a six-day week should be allowed. But the Polish laws had to be obeyed. Shopkeepers, however, still sold things through the back door. The police knew about it. They came and knocked, the door was opened and they got a few Zlotys. This way of bribery went on all Sunday morning. After the ordinary policemen came the sergeant. He got perhaps five Zloty. Then a high-ranking officer. He would get ten Zloty or more. They were greatly annoyed when some of the shopkeepers decided not to sell on some Sundays. Bribery and corruption went on all over the place in every sphere of life. There is an old saying, after rain comes sunshine. But in my case the opposite happened. One Friday, when I made my round to collect money from our customers, my father had been there already. There were only a few customers who had not been seen. This was a big blow for me, because I had hoped to achieve a wonder. My aunt and I looked for my father in every café, but couldn't find him. I told the men what had happened. Stanek the Pole took all the best tools and disappeared. I was able to give the others some money, hardly anything for myself!



CHAPTER II: MY LIFE IN POLAND - 1933-35

In the 'thirties, when nearly all the world was suffering from the economic slump, Poland and all the other little countries could not extricate themselves from this disaster, and so it was natural that there were hunger demonstrations all over Europe, including Poland. Today, however Poland is one of the highest ranking countries in Eastern Europe, and therefore there is hardly any trouble.

After a long search my father was found lying in the woods under a tree completely exhausted. He must have been terribly drunk to have been in such a state. He was taken to a hospital where he died after a few days. I did not know him well, especially as he lived on his own. Lately I had seen him only when he came to the workshop to supervise. Then he went his own way when he found everything in order. But he was my father, and his death was a great blow to me. The whole family came to his funeral, and we all met at my aunt's house.

The burden of running our little workshop was not great, as the two apprentices left to work at bigger and better establishments. Only one person stayed with me and that was Kaliczuk. We became good friends, especially when we found that not only were we bound by our common jobs but also by having the same views about a socialist society. Not only that. He was against the Polish occupation of a very big slice of the western Ukraine, which the Poles named Eastern Poland. He hoped that one day this would be united with the rest of Ukraine and become part of the Soviet Union. (This happened after the Second World War.)

One day we got a big job for each of us. He had several jobs to do which were in his line, and I had to see a lady who knew my father and sent for me to re-wire her house, which she had just purchased. The house was on the outskirts of the town and stood in its own grounds. I knocked at the door and a lady opened it and invited me in. The first thing she said was "Are you Mr. Silber?" I said yes. "I am pleased to meet you", she said, "First let's discuss the job. I want you to re-wire the whole house and put lights in different places. I especially want a lamp outside over the entrance door. Can you do that?" I said I could. "The other thing I want you to promise me is that you tell me all about Vienna." I promised that I would, and also wrote down that I would do the job as she required it. But then I reluctantly asked her whether I could get some money in advance because my father had left me nothing apart from the tools in the shop. I promised her that she would be satisfied when the job was done. She gave me a certain sum, saying that she did not usually do it, but she would trust me.

Next day Kaliczuk and I borrowed a handcart and bought everything that was required. The job went on very smoothly as we were able to use the holes from the previous installation.

Later Kaliczuk had to go home as it was getting dark and his village was on the other side of the town. So I carried on for a while and then prepared to go home. She said "You can't go home now. It's raining very hard. Have something to eat and tell me all about Vienna."

The next morning I had a lovely breakfast and then Kaliczuk arrived. He was surprised that I was on the job already and not a bit wet. Later when we had finished the job she paid me more than I had asked for, gave Kaliczuk a good tip and sent good wishes to his wife and children. To me she said "My door will always be open to you, as I shall want to know more about Vienna." Kaliczuk went home,

and I to my aunt. I immediately gave my aunt a month's money in advance and a bit extra so that she would not ask any questions. I told her that as it was raining so heavily I was allowed to stay overnight.

The next day Kaliczuk told me that I should meet another friend, a Polish comrade, at his house who would like to get to know me. I told my aunt that I should be staying with Mr. Kaliczuk for one night. She was not enamoured of this, and a little worried. But at the end she let me go.

When we arrived at Kaliczuk's house, his friend was already there. His name was Jacek. We shook hands and knew immediately that we had something in common. We trusted each other. He told us about a meeting to take place in a week's time. He knew all about me from Kaliczuk and suggested that I should come along. He would vouch for me. We should meet many comrades from different strata in the country who were all united with one aim in mind: to defeat the fascist dictatorship in Poland. Jacek was able to translate some points which I did not understand. Then we were told where the next meeting was and dispersed. The next Sunday was luckily dry and warm, but we met somewhere else. This was policy. Each group came from a different direction in couples or singly to be quite inconspicuous.

In the middle of the wood was our meeting place. When Kaliczuk and I set off, his wife was a bit worried, but said that as she had been praying in the true Orthodox church, she knew God would protect us. So we went cheerfully to the special meeting.

Among the different groups were Poles, Ukrainians, and a Jewish left-wing socialist group. (More about them later). The main speaker was a Polish communist. He was pleased that so many had turned up and that so many came from different strata and nationalities, all with one aim in mind. At that time we could only distribute leaflets and fight for better conditions in the factories. We had enough of priests sitting in our union meetings writing down what is said and who the speakers were so that they finished up in jail. A few others also had a word to say. I was surprised to hear one of the Jewish group say some bitter words about their oppression. Later, I was asked to say a few words about happenings in Austria. I compared the situation in the two countries, and found that here in Poland they wanted to fight but had no weapons, where as in Austria they had the weapons but were not allowed to use them by the leadership. The outcome was that in Austria the fascists murdered many workers and leaders. Austria became a most vicious fascist state. I could have told the meeting much more but it was time to disperse.

Then we got a little parcel of leaflets which we had to distribute in our areas. The main speaker thanked me and asked whether I could tell them a bit more next time. I promised to do that but reminded him that my Polish is not very good. He said that it was good enough for us.

On my way back to my aunt's, I was grabbed by two plain-clothes policemen and taken to prison. It was obvious that sooner or later I would be caught distributing leaflets. I was charged with being a danger to the Polish state, and got six months in prison only because it was my first offence. Every week a parcel of food arrived sent by MOPR, an organisation for the help of political prisoners. My aunt was also coming over once a week to bring me some food.

I must admit that food-wise I was better off inside than out, but we always had to share everything we got. This was only right. Every morning we had to walk round and round in the yard, one-and-a-half metres apart, and were not allowed to talk. That didn't do us any harm. Visitors were allowed only once a month. My aunt and the lady where I did the electrical job always came to visit me and always brought me a nice parcel of food. But the best part was our political education. Marx, Stalin

and Engels were the main topics. There were no books. Our tutor knew everything by heart. We had long discussions which are still in my mind. There was also a very good library still from the days of the Austrian occupation. Good Austrian and German literature. A lot of time we spent in playing chess. The fact remains that when we came out of prison, we were politically and educationally well-trained and new persons.

I went first to the workshop and found Kaliczuk still there working. He was pleased to see me and to report that he had been able to keep some customers and earn a living. He even gave me some money which he had saved. What a wonderful friend he was!

The problem was where to sleep. And it occurred to me that the old lady where I stayed when I came to Stanislau would probably take me in again. So Kaliczuk and I agreed to meet again in the workshop the next day. Yes - my old lady was still there. She knew of course where I had been and told me that she had prayed for me every day. That made me cry. I asked her whether I may stay with her again and she said yes, of course. And so another problem was solved.

One day I went to see my aunt and told her that I was free again and thanked her for what she had done for me. She was so pleased to see me but she could not keep me because the police would continuously watch the house and that would be bad for the family. I understood and told her that I was still with the old lady. She is so nice and friendly and needs some company. My aunt was very happy about that.

One day I went to see my good friend the lady who was so helpful to me. Luckily she was at home. When she saw me she started crying and pulled me into the house and kissed and hugged me as if I were her most beloved husband. I had to wash and shave, but before I started she said just wait a second, I have got something for you and she gave me a packet of the newest razor blades - the first they had ever produced, straight from the Soviet Union.

Was I happy! A razor blade from the USSR! The newest achievement! In the past I used Gillette blades, but now, I said to myself, there will only be Soviet ones! So I started, but although I have a very soft beard, the blood just ran in streams. I said to her, "I love the Soviet Union, but I shall carry on shaving with Gillette blades until they are able to create better ones."

Then I saw a picture of a man on the wall. I asked her who it was, and she said that was my husband until he died several years ago. I said I am sorry - what else could I say? And then she cried and I stroked her hair and was so sorry for her. After that she prepared a nice meal for me. She was so rich and yet so poor. This time we were not talking about Vienna. I made it clear to her that I am now in constant danger to be re-arrested and would not like to get her into trouble. I told her also about Kaliczuk - how he carried on looking after the shop and saved a few Zlotys for me. She was astonished. She said wherever you go, you make friends. I told her an Austrian proverb: how you shout into the wood, that's how it returns.

Then I asked her whether I may come to see her and stay for a night or two, so that I can escape when necessary. She said yes, you can stay here for ever, I will look after you. That was not my aim. I wanted to be useful. After I had eaten I thanked her for everything and promised to see her soon.

Then I returned to my old lady. When I arrived, there was a girl about twenty years of age waiting. I remembered her from our first political meeting. She had to perform a special function. She always knew when a new round of political arrests would take place, and my name was on the list again.

How she knew that I could never find out. She said , "It won't be today or tomorrow. Here is some money and a list of places where you can go and stay overnight, and there you will be told where to go next. The opinion of the Party is that you should return to Austria where you can be of better use. Here you will always be too conspicuous and useless because of your accent. Your first place is Lvov (Lemberg). Do not start your journey from the station in Stanislaw. Make your way to the next station because nobody knows you there. Your address in Lvov is on your sheet, and also the tram number and stop. The friends in Lvov will look after you and send you on to the next place."

The girl made it all so clear to me. One could see that she was very experienced and very intelligent. I stayed with the old lady just one more night and made my way to my friend the lady (Paula by name). She was very pleased to see me again. I explained to her what is going to happen and she agreed that this was the only way. We stayed two days together and one morning I was on my way with a little rucksack with some good food. I promised her that when I arrived in Vienna I shall write her a nice letter. On the way to the station I found quite a sum of money in my pocket. What a wonderful woman. She knew that I would never see her again and yet she did so much for me.

I did what was planned and arrived in Lvov. I did what the girl suggested and arrived at the bus stop. Some people were waiting where they had been for the last few hours. One asked me "Are you Willi?" I said yes. "Good, come with me." So there I was. He spoke Yiddish, and I immediately knew that I was at the right place.

When I entered the house it was full of people. Everybody shaking hands with me. I felt that I was at home. What a jolly crowd. I had a bath and something to eat. All properly refreshed, I entered the main room and heard them singing. I quickly joined in singing revolutionary songs. Afterwards they all dispersed and I was left with my host. We sat down and had a nice chat about conditions in the area and the strength of the Movement.

Then I asked him about the origin of the Yiddish language and luckily enough he knew all about it, having studied the whole development. Jews were persecuted 1000 years ago. They wandered from one place to another but mainly to the west. Wherever they went they could not settle. They had the Thora where the prayers were inscribed with them wherever they went. At last they settled in Spain. But as soon as the Inquisition started thousands of them were murdered or burnt at the stake. Many were able to escape and make their way over the Pyrenees and over the Austrian Alps into Germany. Here they settled for several hundred years and adopted the German language mixed with some Spanish and Hebrew words. But the dialect of the Germans in this southern part was very strong and remained as part of the language called Yiddish.

They were not allowed to start a trade, like smith or tailor. Only a real smith was allowed this name. A farmer for instance was called Bauer. His eldest son had to carry on this trade and the other children had to find another. So Jews had to find other German names, like all the colours - Green, Berg, Silber etc.

There was a time when Jews had to be traders, selling little items or medical pills. Some developed into money-lenders. There came a time when they were chased out of Southern Germany and fled to the eastern European countries. There they adopted Polish words or other Slavonic words around basic Yiddish. Most of them landed in Poland or Russia. The basic Yiddish-cum-German remained. But once they landed in America and Britain, the parents carried on using Yiddish. But the children soon spoke English only. The names were changed whenever an opportunity arose - like when I joined the British Army, or with the permission of the Home Office.

I want to stress here that everybody had to learn the language of the country in which they lived, and Yiddish was only spoken at home or with other Jewish people. In Vienna, Czechoslovakia and Germany and in the whole of the western world, each one spoke only the language of the country. What made Yiddish a recognised language was their literature which was written with Hebrew letters. They had great writers like Shalom Ash, Shalom Achem, and others. It seems now that all the Jews who lived in Poland and neighbouring countries have been murdered by the Nazis, Yiddish as a language has disappeared. In Israel they all speak mainly Hebrew or English or both.

The next morning, after a good breakfast, my friend gave me a parcel of food and took me to the station, but left me just at the corner. He said it would be better like that as he was too well-known. I mingled with the crowd and got my ticket for Rzeszow, a dirty town, halfway towards the western end of Poland.

Again some people were waiting for me to take me to their house. There were also some people gathered to meet me. It was a schoolmaster's house, and again there was a very jolly and optimistic atmosphere. I could see these people were more poverty stricken than in Lvov. They insisted that I should go to a special steam bath - they had these all over Poland. The room is full of steam. There are steps. The higher you go, the hotter it is. You take a pail of cold water with you and pour it over yourself. I could only go to the third step whilst others went up to the sixth. And you sweat and sweat so that the dirt comes out of your pores and you are a new person.

Little snippets of life in Stanislau

People here were very superstitious. When a beggar woman was pregnant, it was considered to be a sin not to give her anything. She would go from house to house and everybody would give her something, even when they did not have much themselves. One day one of these beggar women came round. She got very little, as others had been before. But she was especially persistent, having a big belly. She swore at them all out and used very bad language. In her excitement she lost the pillow she wore under her skirt and the women saw she was not pregnant at all. So the beggar woman had to run, because she was caught cheating and she forgot even her pillow. She was never seen in this area again.

If you want a pair of trousers or any clothing, you never pay the amount which the shopkeeper demands. I watched one day this curious way of selling and buying. A man wants a pair of trousers. He asks "How much?" The man says, "10 zlotys." "I will give you four." "Four! No I can't do that. Look how lovely these trousers are. All right, nine zlotys." "Nine zlotys? I shall pay five." And so it goes on, until the shopkeeper says, "Look, let the earth swallow me on the spot if I can sell them for six zlotys", and he quickly jumps away, lest this really happens, and then sells the trousers for five.

People there loved dollars. There were some who sold dollars in the street. So I watched the following procedure.

A: Have you any dollars? I want them for my daughter who wants to get married.

B: Yes, I have got plenty of dollars, but these dollars cost more than it used to be. It's in the papers, the Gazette.

A: Yes, how much are they now?

B: 15 zlotys per dollar.

A: OK.

B: 1.,2,..... till he reaches 12, then asks A "How old is your girl?"

A: She's 18.

B: 19, 20... And so it goes on. A has been cheated and B quickly disappears.

People in this country were very poor, especially families who had many children. So the atmosphere was very tense. They were frustrated and vented their feelings by arguing and swearing. This happened very often in my auntie's house. They would shout "Let the devil go into your father's father's father. Or Mother." This was ridiculous and at the same time nasty and yet without any meaning. The only girl not swearing like that whilst I was there, was my favourite cousin Tonka. Maybe she did the same. I always felt like running out, especially when the parents were swearing the same way. All this happened in many families.

CHAPTER 12: MY LAST DAYS IN POLAND AND NOW INTO CZECHOSLOVAKIA

When we arrived at the schoolmaster's house there was a meal waiting for me which reminded me of my childhood polenta! An Italian relish, ground maize cooked. You add either hot milk and sugar or eat it with fried or roasted onions, but as there was hardly any sugar (because of the high price) I asked for the polenta with the fried onions. Suddenly I thought of my mother and Mrs. Wimmer. She used to cook both ways, but mostly with milk and sugar. And at this moment I knew that I had to go back to Vienna and Mother as soon as possible.

Next day I was on my way again, having thanked them all for the wonderful hospitality and wishing them success in their endeavours.

I arrived in a town called Biala Bielsko. Here a completely different atmosphere awaited me. There was a huge farm full of boys and girls at the age between 18 and 24. They were learning how to grow vegetables and running a farm in order to prepare themselves to go to Israel. They dreamed of a socialist Israel. They also learned the Hebrew language. I have never seen so much enthusiasm in all my life. I liked the food they grew, especially their tomatoes and potatoes. They were all 100%. They baked their own bread, white and brown. One didn't even need butter on it.

In the evening we were singing together. There were pairs who were already married or were planning to get married. And then there were some girls left without a boyfriend. So naturally some of them turned their attention to me, but I had other plans, especially that I did not want to go to Israel and help to force the Arabs out of their country. But I did not want any arguments with such happy and enthusiastic people so I told them that I have to go back to Vienna and do my share to fight against Fascism and also be near my mother. They agreed with my argument and let me go. Next day I got a parcel of tomatoes and some of their home-made bread. Also a letter to the librarian at my last Polish town, Czechin.

When I arrived there I asked for the library, which could be easily found as it was on the main road leading to the bridge over the river dividing Poland and Czechoslovakia. In front of the library sat two people playing chess and arguing about some political problems at the same time. They were over 60 years old. I knew from experience when you play chess you have to think hard what next move to make and especially what the other fellow is going to do. Anyway, when they saw me coming towards them, the Librarian asked me whether he could be of any help. I said 'Yes, could I go inside and help me chose a book.' He said, 'Yes, I understand,' and he immediately took me to his office. Then he made some Russian tea and gave me some homemade cake. The other man brought in the chess set and put it all on the board as *he* remembered it. The Librarian looked at the chess board and said 'This is not as we left it when we stopped playing, what happened to the queen?' 'Oh,' the other man said, 'you did not have it any more. I took the queen.' And it went on and on. At the same time they argued about Engels and Karl Marx and then turned to the farm policy in the Soviet Union. And it went on and on like that. As a matter of fact, I have not laughed so much for a long time. At last he turned to me and said 'All right, we go to my house when we close down the library.' The other one went and wished me all the best. He knew what it was all about.

At home the Librarian introduced me to his wife, a nice old Jewish lady. She immediately went to the kitchen to prepare a nice meal. They were both left-wing socialists and hoped for a better world. He explained to me the following. The town Czeschin is separated by the river. One is called Polski Cesin

and the other Češki Cešin. In between is a bridge which is closed during the night. In the morning at 6 a.m., people from both sides cross the bridge. Most people go to the Czech part at about 8 o'clock in the morning, that is the best time to cross because nobody bothers. They are so used to this, that the guards do not even come out.

Once you have crossed the bridge there is a huge square with some lovely shops. Here in the Polish part you will see a lot of beggars and poor people. Some of them are walking without shoes or wear bags on their feet. But there in Czechoslovakia you will see only nicely dressed people. It is time that we have some changes here.

When you cross the square you will see a bus stop. This one will lead you to Moravska Ostrava. From there you will have to find the offices of the various parties and Trades Unions. I could give you a letter, but if you are caught it may get us here into trouble. You understand? The whole system of helping people could be destroyed. So I promised that I shall try to forget what happened on my long journey. 'By the way,' he said, 'you give me now *all* your Polish money and do not keep the smallest coin. Destroy all papers and addresses which you have in your pocket. It is for your sake and for those you have left behind.' That's what I did in front of him and it was burned straight away. Then he gave me Czech money in exchange for the Polish I gave him. I promised to do as he suggested. I was only sorry that I could not have a game of chess with him without talking.

Next day I went across the bridge without even looking back and found the bus stop. And as luck would have it there was a girl waiting for the bus. I asked her whether the next bus goes to Moravska Ostrava and she said "Yes." Then she asked me where I wanted to go and I said to the Trades Union building. She said that she worked there and she would take me there. That may seem far fetched but that's how it was.

I met the Secretary of the Czech C.P. and told him my story. He suggested that I should not rush at the moment as it is very dangerous in Austria just now. Some Jewish people and socialists and communists are entering the C.S.R. from Austria and are being helped to find homes in the countryside and in towns. I should concentrate on learning the Czech language which should be easy for me and helpful for our task ahead.

Helena, the boss's secretary, took me later to her parents' house and asked them whether I may stay there for a few days. It seemed to me that it was not the first time that they were helping people, especially when the border with Poland was so near. So I made friends with the grandfather, who used to be a miner and he told me about the bad days under Austrian rule. Helena had to translate because there were many words I could not understand. She spoke a bit of German but when the father came home from work his German was nearly perfect. Of course Bohemia was part of the Austrian Empire. I only stayed for a few days.

Helena took me then to the famous Vitkovice Ironworks which is the industrial part of Moravska-Ostrava. Then she knew of a place that I could lodge for a while. The idea was that I could improve my Czech language and have the opportunity to mix with the people. This was possible because the local pub was owned by a member of the party. Meetings were held there. There they played billiards and chess, which interested me very much. Helena suggested that I could earn money by selling the Party papers there, mainly at the entrance of the Vitkovice Ironworks. This would help me to get some money and make me independent of the office because it needs money as well.

This proved to be a very good idea as I was able to save enough money to make a good start in Vienna until I had a proper job. After I had done this for 3 months I found that my Czech language had very much improved and when I next saw the Secretary he was very much surprised and suggested that I should make my way home. "It looks very much that sooner or later Hitler will march into Austria and if the allies, Britain and France do not stop him soon, our country will be next. But we shall fight if our neighbours will help us", he said. He stressed very firmly that if I should come to this country again I must first make my way to Prague and "meet our Parliament Representative, Hodinova, and they will send you to me personally. This is important for organisational reasons."

CHAPTER 13: SPRING 1936 - RETURN TO MY BELOVED VIENNA

Now that I was forewarned that Austria may be invaded I felt a greater urge to be there in order to take my part in the coming struggles. Whether I should be able to return to Czechoslovakia I did not know. I packed my little rucksack which I had purchased, with apples and sandwiches and a few other things. Helena had in the meantime exchanged my Crowns into Shillings, although I kept some Czech money in case I needed something urgently. Then I had a last chat with the Secretary, who warned me to expect a lot of trouble in Vienna and that I have to be very careful as a lot of Jews have been beaten by Nazis. Then I said goodbye to Helena and thanked her for all she had done for me. But she stressed very strongly that whatever she does is for the love of her country and the Socialist Movement.

She also told me that she is going to get married soon. I saw him there once, tall as a tree. He was also involved in the Socialist Movement and very active too. I thought that they were a pleasant couple. Before I left she gave me a railway ticket which was for the other end of Czechoslovakia, the town of Bratislava. A most beautiful city. The Danube flows through it touching many other countries until it reaches the sea. I remembered when I was in Vienna, right opposite the Opera was an electric tram like a train coach which took visitors to and from Bratislava. People from both cities went to each other's cities to do some sightseeing or shopping. This was a very popular tram. When I arrived at Bratislava I saw that tram standing there ready to go. I suddenly thought, 'If I buy a single ticket the chances are that I will be asked to show my passport, because they will be thinking that I want to leave the country for some reason or other. But with a return ticket and my little rucksack the porter or driver won't even ask me for a passport.' I risked it and I succeeded. After about 1 ½ hours' drive I arrived in the middle of Vienna, 2 minutes away from the Opera. There is a moment in life where you have to make a decision. In Austria we called it 'He who dares, wins'. And I won.

My first steps were to find my mother at her last address which was in the 3rd part of Vienna, No. 30 Landstrasse Hauptstrasse. I knocked at the door and an old lady came out and asked me what I wanted. I said that I am looking for my mother, Mrs. Schrenk. She said that my mother does not live here any more, but that she had moved to the second part of Vienna. Then she told me that she was her mother-in-law and that her son had disappeared 6 months after they had married. Apparently he joined the French Foreign Legion and was killed in action. A letter had arrived from the French Government with some money in it and with the sad message of his death. She wanted my mother to stay with her but she chose otherwise. She also told me that the flat where my mother lives is very tiny. Then I said that I would go and live with her, but the old lady suggested that I could stay in her house for very little money, like a grandson. She gave me some coffee and a piece of her own cake, which I devoured within a few minutes and so I decided to stay with her. I made it clear however that I was looking for a job and have little money at the moment. It then occurred to me that I drop my true name of Silber and take my mother's name Schrenk. This idea proved to be very helpful, especially later on. She said that my mother is still working at the office where she used to write the addresses. So I went there and saw a very, very old lady, all ragged and poorly. I could hardly recognise her. We went to her flat a bit earlier with the permission of the supervisor. I could see it was too small for 2 people to live in and I told her what I had arranged with her mother-in-law. I promised to see her more often than in the past and went to meet my friend Walter. Luckily enough he had just arrived and we were able to chat and to discuss past and future of our struggle against Nazism and Mussolini-type fascism. I told him where I am going to live and that at the moment I could only sell newspapers again if it is possible.

A short review of the tragic events during my absence

During the years 1934-36 Dollfuss used his power to make sure that Austria becomes a complete Mussolini-type catholic state, purely Fascist. In order to succeed he had first to ban the Nazi party and disallow swastikas to be worn. For a short period he was successful. Although the SDP supported him in this, lulling themselves into a false sense of security, Dollfuss now turned against the SDP with all his might. Police, Army and his well armed supporters in order to destroy the SDP for ever. Without any warning they bombarded those famous working class buildings with all weapons available. The workers answered with rifles which they had hidden in their houses. They could only defend themselves but not starting an offensive. Thousands of people were killed when the SDP leadership turned to the League of Nations to stop Dollfuss from carrying on this slaughter. The answer was we do not interfere in internal affairs of any nations. The slaughter ended with the total military defeat of the SDP party and all their allies. The workers came out from the sewers where they were hiding. Nine of their leaders were hanged and many finished up in prison. Although the SDP was completely banned they still had half of the population behind them. Under pressure by Hitler the Nazi Party who remained neutral in this battle, was again allowed. But Hitler never forgave Dollfuss for banning the Nazis and he was duly murdered by the Austrian Nazis on the 25 of July 1934. The next Chancellor was Schuschnigg, who certainly was not a strong man. He was now under a very strong pressure by Hitler and had to see him more often as he liked. Schuschnigg knew that the greatest part of the Austrian national was in favour of being an independent state. The leaders of the SDP which were left were still in favour to support Schuschnigg against giving in to Hitler but under the condition that he would restore the freedom of the Party and the unions. He promised but never did keep his promise, only persecutions stopped.

Spring 1936 - Vienna in turmoil

When I got out of the Bratislava-Vienna tram my first thought was happiness. Back in Vienna, what greater happiness can there be than to stand in front of the Opera where I have spent so many joyful hours. And then I opened my eyes. People with grim faces, teenagers with Swastikas on their armbands. Running about shouting Heil Hitler, down with the Jews and other horrible phrases. I quickly made my way to the 3rd part of Vienna where it was very quiet. It was only 15 minutes walk to the house where my mother was supposed to live. Landstrasse Hauptstrasse, No. 30 or higher up. But I recognised the house. I knocked at the door hoping that my mother would open it and we could embrace. Instead an old lady opened it reluctantly and wanted to know who I am. I asked whether Mrs. Schrenk lives here - I am her son. Then she opened the door widely and asked me to enter.

It turned out that she was my mother's mother-in-law. Then I had to sit down and she brought me a glass of soda water with raspberry juice in it. How I enjoyed it! Then she told me what happened. After 6 months of a happy marriage, her son disappeared and nobody knew what happened to him. One day a letter arrived from France with some money in it and the sad news that my mother's husband died a 'hero's' death for France in the Foreign Legion. Of course both women were heartbroken, but that did not bring our hero back to life. Then my mother decided to move to the 2nd part of Vienna, which was mainly the Jewish area. Her mother-in-law begged her to stay with her, but she had made up her mind to leave.

Old Mrs. Schrenk asked me whether I would like to stay with her as long as I pleased, because sooner or later her house would be my mother's if her son would have stayed at home instead of

being a dead hero. I asked her if she has my mother's address because she might want me to stay with her. She said there is no chance because there is only room for one person in her flat. It occurred to me at this moment that my mother should have stayed with her mother-in-law because this area is a quiet one, and Schrenk is not a Jewish name, but I adopted it from that moment on.

As Mrs. Schrenk was so friendly to invite me to stay in her house, we arranged that I first see my mother and find out what she has to say and if she agreed. I would gladly accept her invitation but under the condition that I pay her like a lodger. I made it also clear that I have very little money at the moment and promised her that I shall pay whatever she would charge if and when I get a job.

Then I made my way to my mother's house over the little bridge where the narrow river Vienna joins the Danube Canal. That was the shortest and the *quietest way* towards my mother's flat. It occurred to me on the way that if I stay with Mrs. Schrenk that I could adopt this name as the son of my mother and the grandson of her mother-in-law. I stayed with the old lady until I had to leave Austria.

When I saw my mother she looked very poorly and haggard and frightened. She told me that she was still working for the firm which advertises all over the country, but with slightly better methods. I asked her whether her boss would employ me because my writing has now improved. As usual she was very pessimistic but after long deliberations she agreed to ask Fraulein Stadler next morning whether this could be done. If possible I would rather do this type of work than selling newspapers by night and day. I said to my little mother, come and let me cuddle you, and I promise you that as long as possible I shall look after you. For the time being we agreed that I should stay with her mother-in-law and I stressed it very strongly that I am now Herr Willi *Schrenk* (your son).

Then I left my mother and took the number H2 tram which led me straight to my friend Walter. I stayed only a short time. I only wanted him to know that I am back and when I am properly settled, I shall be prepared to do my share in the battle against fascism. Then I returned to my new "grandmother" and had a nice "kosher" pork sausage with mustard and a glass of lemon tea. She was glad to have somebody to talk to. I told her that my mother is trying to get me a job at her office.

When I returned to Vienna I faced a big problem. How to earn a living? My mother's firm did not employ men because women were much cheaper. So that was job number one I couldn't have. Next job I tried was even more difficult to get because the Nazis were roaming about in the Prater, destroying all cafes and beating and maiming the customers. The café owners were not all Jews but they were beaten for allowing them to enter their cafes. After a few days nearly all cafes were destroyed. So I had to try my luck somewhere else and here again came my friend Walter with a good idea, whom I told of my new name. He said, now that you have adopted the name of your mother you can try to find a job in the outskirts of Vienna. The 15th, 16th and 17th part of Vienna are much quieter. The Nazis are at the other end of the town. You are lucky you have got a trade and luckily enough you have blond hair.

I found a place very quickly. My new boss did not ask many questions. What he wanted was good workmanship, punctuality and reliability. I was able to do that! After work I was able to use the tram home, which was going sometimes above the ground or underneath along the tiny river Wien.

My friend Walter never talked about his job, but only once did he mention that he was involved in commerce and foreign trade. I knew he was very intelligent and could speak English and French. He asked me very emphatically not to mention this to anybody. As I lived near the Nash Market (the largest market in Vienna) I was able, while the city was half asleep, to distribute leaflets amongst the

market people for a united fight against the Nazis. Of course I was not the only one. The ordinary people knew well that only a united fight would help us to stop Hitler from invading our country. When I did my stint I went to the electric trams and to work.

During my dinner hour I went to the smaller restaurants and bought a nice meal, not far away from my first orphanage.

One day I decided to visit my uncle for whom I worked several years ago. He still had his shop at the famous shopping centre in the Maria Hilferstrasse 109. He was pleased to see me, but he was very worried because his shop windows were smashed and people were stealing his wonderful leatherware. I helped him to take all his things to his house. They were secure there but he could not sell them. As his house was only a few minutes away he sold a few handbags and other little things singly. When some Nazis were in sight he quickly ran to his flat on the second floor. His wife, Paula, was one of the five sisters who married all the other relatives.

His daughter was the only one (apart from myself) who was saved because she chose to go to Mexico with her husband and opened a leatherware shop there. When I was in the orphanage I had the opportunity to visit her. We spent some lovely times together. She played the guitar and we were singing folk songs. I especially remember the song 'Enjoy life whilst there are still violets blooming. Pluck the roses before they die.' I met her with my wife in London when she made a European tour.

One day Walter said to me, we are going to have a little party with some of the boys from the orphanage; you'll meet amongst others Baumgartner. You remember him, he used to sing with you quite often. He now goes three times a week to a singing teacher. He was once an opera singer all over the world. Apparently Baumgartner told him about you and this man wants to see you.

So we had this party and were singing some revolutionary songs together. Baumgartner asked me then whether I am prepared to meet Mr. Golz. I was delighted because my voice was getting rusty. So we went to Mr. Golz and his wife who always accompanied her husband on her piano. I sang one of the opera arias I knew. Both of them said that it would be a pity if I give up singing. And so I had three sessions a week. Although I told Mr. Golz I had no money he said it does not matter.

One day two young people came to visit their parents. Their son Paul and their daughter Martha. Paul was very nice and friendly and Martha gave me such a warm smile that I immediately fell in love with her. I especially liked her voice. I asked her whether she sings alto parts in operas. Her mother said it's pity she doesn't, her voice is wonderful but she had enough by just listening to us. Martha told me later that she works in a girls' home and sleeps there as well, but she comes to visit her parents occasionally. We observed that she started coming more often and soon we became lovers.

What happened before Martha came was completely forgotten. There was only one person for me and that was Martha. I always accompanied her to her kindergarten which was quite near the Vienna woods. When we parted in the evening I was a lost soul. Her father was against me but her mother was solidly in favour. When we talked about marrying her father did not allow it, but her mother said sooner or later she will have to get married. He is 26 years old and she 25. But soon the time came when I had to go and leave her behind.

Now, I must add the following. When Martha's father was singing at the New York Opera, her mother knew that she was going to have a baby so they said they must get married quickly and they would tell everyone that this will be a seven-month baby. Now it happened that she was a seven-

month baby, so when Martha was born her parents had been married for only five months.. That had a bearing on the story because she became an American citizen. Later when the Nazis marched into Austria, they were able to go back to America and were saved.

When I was interned in Canada, Martha found out through my great-cousin Hanna, with whom she was in touch, and came to visit me.

The last day of Austria's freedom - March 1938

The pressure on Austria in Spring 1938 became serious and it was at this moment that Schuschnigg decided to listen to the Labour Movement and to start to resist the Nazis. The Parliament which was closed for 4 years was re-opened. He made his famous speech, which he should have made after his colleague was murdered by the Nazis. It should have been Schuschnigg who at that time should have restored democracy and re-opened Parliament for the whole nation but it was better now than never. He knew that these 100 members in Parliament could not do the fighting and so he turned to the Labour Movement on whom he could rely. He declared that from this moment all liberties of a true democracy are restored.

We did not forget the past and our thousands of comrades but in spite of this memory we did not want to spoil this opportunity. Then we all sang Red White Red until our death. Some of the Austrian and German Nazis did not like it at all because they were worried that on Sunday the 13th of March we would be voting in favour of a free Austria and the Plebiscite. When Hitler was told what had happened he ordered 200,000 troops to invade Austria on the 11th March.

This was the end of Austria. From that moment on there was panic amongst the Jewish population. Many people were murdered on that day alone. What happened after the whole world knows now.

I could not find my mother nor my uncle so I made my way to Mrs. Schrenk who lived far away from the main trouble. She had heard on the radio what happened and suggested that I should leave. Firstly because for her own safety and then for myself. I took my little rucksack, my shaving tackle and some underwear. She in the meantime prepared a nice large sandwich with butter and sliced sausage. She cried all the time.

Before I went she said to me, good luck my adopted grandson. And then I went to see Martha's parents. I told them that I have to go to Czechoslovakia now. They hoped that with the help of the American Embassy they would soon be in the USA.



CHAPTER 14: BACK IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA - 12 MARCH 1938

Then I said goodbye to Martha. She was in tears. I embraced her and expressed my hope to see her one day again. Even her father was sorry for both of us. He got used to seeing us together with the aid of her mother. She gave me something to eat and some salad which she made with a little bit of sugar and salt. I am still preparing it the same way. Then we parted and I went on my way to say goodbye to Walter. Unfortunately he was not at home. My last visit was part of the way towards the Vienna woods, to see my boss.

He pulled me quickly inside the shop and warned me to leave the country very quickly as some suspicious characters were asking for me. He told them that I do not work for him any longer. So they went again and he hoped that they would never come back. He went inside the house to which the shop was attached and then we sat down and he explained to me how to get to Czechoslovakia.

He warned me to keep away from the Austrian villages because the Austrian farmers may betray me. Walk by night through the woods and sleep there as well. I have done that before he said where I met a lovely Czech girl. I never regretted my hard journey. Now here I still have some Czech money which will be of no use to my any more and you won't need Austrian money. So we shook hands and he wished me good luck. So I left another good friend.

I followed his advice and was able to enter Czech territory very tired and hungry. I made my way towards the first house. The door was opened before I even reached it and a man came out and invited me to enter quickly. He said I know why you are here, I can see you are a refugee. Go next door have a good wash and shave. When I came back there was some coffee on the table and some of their wonderful bread and cheese. I knew the quality of their food and it disappeared very quickly. Then I had to tell him about the happenings during the last days of my stay in Vienna. Then he wanted to know how it was that I spoke the Czech language so well. He certainly was keen to know, for obvious reasons, all about Moravska Ostrava and how the Secretary of the Party knew two years in advance what is going to happen in Austria and after that to the C.S.R.

I also told him that I have to see some important person in Prague first before I go to Moroska Ostrava. He was very much impressed by what I have told him and explained to me that the people here in the area have to be very careful because Hitler had warned the Czech Government not to allow refugees to enter Czech territory otherwise he will treat this as a hostile act. So you understand, you may have been in deep trouble if I had judged you otherwise. And then the door opened and three men entered and shook hands with me. Then one of them who had a cart offered to take me to the further train station, so that I am far away from this area.

I said good bye to the first man and to the rest of the family who suddenly came out from nowhere to say farewell to me. I was really touched by it all. The person who took me to the station got the ticket for Prague for me so that I could just jump onto the train at the last minute in case some nosey person sees me. Once I was inside this train I was secure. Only too late I found out that they have paid that ticket. In my little rucksack was bread and sausage and that wonder, Pilsner beer, made in Pilsner, CSR. This time I did cry. I found a note in the rucksack which said, when Hitler tries to conquer our country, he won't have it as easy as in Austria. Little did they know about international politics and treachery! I had to change into another train which brought me straight to Prague.

Prague and Moravska Ostrava

When I arrived in Prague I was so impressed by the beauty of the city that I nearly forgot the purpose of my journey. Then a man came to me and asked me whether he can help me - in the Czech language. I immediately awoke from my enchantment and told him that I am a refugee from Austria and I was told that there is a special office in Parliament where people have to report. He was so impressed to hear me speak in Czech - although less than perfect - that he offered to take me there and to show the right person whom to address. I thanked him, we shook hands and then he disappeared. I waited in the queue until my turn came. I said that I speak the Czech language, which pleased them very much. I told also about Moravska Ostrava and what happened and that the Secretary there had advised me if I ever have to come back to the CSR from Austria that I must first come to Prague to register here because all the names, reasons, politics etc. must be here (for certain reasons).

He was a bit suspicious and rang the Secretary of the Party in Moravska Ostrava, Svoboda, with whom he had a long chat where all that I had told him was confirmed. I was allowed to speak to the Secretary (Svoboda) where he told me that I shall be sent to M.O. in a week's time, where a lot of work is waiting for me. The problem was that the refugees to the CSR cannot speak the language and the local population does not want to speak German. Perhaps few do! The Secretary in Prague asked me to help here for a few days.

There was one hostel which was established in the outskirts where some translating was required. Lists of food were made in both languages etc. The German refugees got Czech-German dictionaries and easy to learn basic Czech booklets. I stayed there for one week and dinned it into their heads that the Czechs would help them more if they tried to learn. After a week I got my fare to Moravska Ostrava and some clothing and underwear.

CHAPTER 15: MORAVSKA OSTRAVA - 20 MARCH 1938

Before I continue this part of the story, it is necessary to explain that the government of the CSR could not help the refugees openly because it was under strong pressure by the Nazis. All help came from the voluntary organisations and political parties. Any help which was given by the Government was free train tickets or the distribution of German-Czech dictionaries, or the free entrance of swimming baths etc. Foremost were the political parties of all shades. Usually they had meetings where they discussed all the problems and amenities which were available in each town and village. It was a pleasure for me to observe how all the parties and voluntary organisations worked together for one aim.

In circumstances which I already told in a previous chapter, I finished up in the office of the CP. I did not go anywhere else because I knew these people already and they were keen to use me for the purpose with which I agreed and where I could really be helpful. So when I entered the office I really felt at home. I first met Helena who gave me a hearty kiss but immediately warned me that she had a boyfriend who is a head taller than I and that they would get married soon. Then she took me to the Secretary of the office where we shook hands and immediately started to discuss the plans which he had worked out. Whilst we were talking Helena brought some piping hot coffee and her own home baked pastry. For these alone, never mind anything else, one would have fallen under her spell.

The Secretary said, don't call me Svoboda, just Franta. Then he laid out the map of the area. First, the little town, Fridek Mistek. "There," he said, "is a house available for 10 people. At the moment there are no beds, but only mattresses and blankets and pillows. Only cold water until all the repairs are done. There is a gas cooker, cutlery, cups and plates. It has been arranged that the refugees will have midday and evening meals at the local guest house until they will be able to cook for themselves if they feel like it. Breakfast they can have at the hostel. The gas cooker will do for that purpose. Bread and anything in this line will be provided daily. The big problem was beds. They had not arrived yet. The refugees would have to sleep on the floor on mattresses but covered with plenty of blankets. Coffee, milk, sugar and bread or rolls will be provided by the local bakers. Now, I know that they will be upset when they find that there are no beds but it will be up to you to explain our difficulties. You can rely on the Burgomaster, he will do his best to provide all the necessary things. Now you go to your Helena and come back in the morning by tram so that we can be at the station before the refugees arrive."

Of course we were there in good time and just had to wait for 15 minutes. Then we saw ten worried faces looking round so we raised our arms and moved towards them. Then we met, shook hands and their faces lighted up. Now it was up to me to lead them towards the train which took us to Fridek Mistek. In the train they were chatting about their experiences. At F.M. we got out where the Burgomaster was already waiting. He shook hands with everybody and led us towards the local restaurant where a wonderful meal was already prepared. No need to explain that after a quick wash and clean they enjoyed this meal.

In the meantime our Secretary discussed with the Mayor the situation in the house where the new arrivals would stay and I had the awkward task to prepare them for the shock which awaited them. So, when we finished the meal I took them to the house whilst the Secretary went back to M.O.

The Mayor came with us so that I could lean on him when I had to show them round the house, but the first thing they observed was that there were no beds, only mattresses. One man behind the backs of the crowd shouted, where are the beds? Then I had to explain to them that we were informed too late that you would be coming but the beds would be delivered in a few days time. You will have plenty of blankets to keep you warm. I told them also that at the moment there is only the cooker which can be used for their breakfast but there will be plenty of fresh bread and butter, coffee, tea and milk but not much sugar. Another moan from somebody at the back, the same man. The others were cross with him; one of them shouted back to him, what do you want? these people are doing what they can, be glad that you got away alive! And then they apologised for him.

The Mayor explained in Czech to them that the people here are doing their best. They were very pleased when I told them that tomorrow they will also be able to have a good bath and swim in the local swimming hall and two meals a day. Also the heating in the building will be repaired. Chess sets will be brought and other amenities.

Then they asked me whether I shall come and see them again. I said yes, at the moment but that I shall soon be busy in each village surrounding us finding room for more refugees. In the meantime I shall gladly have a game of chess with anyone here. I also told them that the local Burgomaster will want the names and some details of each of you. They were not against this because they had nothing to hide; only our grumbler shouted, why should we? This outcry made me very suspicious of him and I had a serious chat with the Major. Next day I went to M.O. in order to tell the Secretary about this man. I had a strong feeling that he was smuggled into the country with the aid of the Nazis. He had to be watched.

Summer and Autumn 1938

My next job was to try getting at least one refugee into each village. This proved to be a great success, not so much because of my pretty face but with the popularity of the Mayor. Of all the eight villages, every local Burgomaster was prepared to take the responsibility to have one refugee. It was understood that they would be helping on the allotment or doing other little chores. Occasionally they would repair his shoes or buy him a pair of cheap trousers. There was hardly any trouble.

Most of the local people worked at the Vitkovice Ironworks. They left early in the morning, had their main meal at the factory and then had another meal at home. The only trouble arose when some of the boys were after the girls and vice versa. But these problems were solved in one way or another. None of us was sure what the future had in store. Where I stayed, the village was called Baško. That was right in the centre of this area. I got a bicycle which took me everywhere and occasionally to F.M. I saw the Mayor quite often and told him all about the activities in the villages. I got to know the Mayor's whole family and was always well treated.

Once a week I reported to the office in M. Ostrava and told him all there was happening. I was particularly worried about Paul, the grumbler. He kept disappearing for a full day and I wondered whether something could be done to stop him. He promised to think of something. This was also the time where there was a lot of trouble in the west of the country where the Sudeten Germans lived.

One day Paul tried to have an affair with one of the women in Fridek and he was caught. This was his undoing. He was beaten by the local people and the husband of course and put into prison. What happened to him I do not know but the atmosphere in this area deteriorated.

In the meantime circulars were sent to us telling us that in view of the dangerous situation, that Germany could occupy the country, we should fill in forms to state to which country we would like to go because we would be the first victims once the Nazis occupy this country.

13th March 1939 - Goodbye to CzSR

Of all the refugees, the Austrian Schutzbund, which had to flee Austria when they were defeated by the Austrian Mussolini-type fascists, decided to go to the Soviet Union in order to be incorporated into the Soviet Army. At first the Rumanian Fascist Government refused to let them fly over their country, but a bit of sabre rattling by the SU made them give in. We, the others, had to make up our minds. Many Jewish and German refugees chose France. The rest of us chose England. Later when the war started and France was occupied all these refugees who chose France were put in a concentration camp by Marshal Petain and were murdered by the Nazis.

For some reason or other we were last on the list. Some were able to get through Poland to England before the Nazis occupied the CSR but quite a few others were stranded in the villages and in Prague. Once the Germans in our area were gone, I was left all alone, but I was not forgotten. My luck was that the Nazis were not yet properly organised and so I was able to move about. I left Baško and went to live in a little house near F. Mistek where I could stay all on my own if I wanted.

One day when I wanted to go to this house I saw two Gestapo men going towards it. The local people also saw them and quickly took me to their house. I had to stay there for a few days whilst the husband of the family got in touch with the Secretary. One day he came to fetch me. We both thanked the family and off we went. On the way he explained that "They will have been after you and somebody will have told them. Now you have to go to Prague, but you will enter the train stop after M. Ostrava. This train always stops there, also on the way back. You must keep this in your mind because when you return somebody will be waiting for you to take you and others to the woods which will lead you towards Poland. But first you must go to Prague which everything will be arranged according to plan. You will know by now that the Nazis are in Prague already but still trying to find their way - without the help of the Czech people."

I took all this in because I knew danger was waiting but also that this was the last stage of our journey to freedom. I arrived in Prague and after a few minutes a young man asked me, do you know Frantisek? I said, yes, I know him very well, he is a good friend of mine, probably yours as well. That's fine, he said, come with me. In this way he knew that I am the person whom he expected.

I met the organiser, a very intelligent and energetic man. First he gave me something to eat and drink but at the same time he explained what he expected me to do. He explained to me first that many people have already gone to England, but many still have to wait their turn. "We are doing our best but some of you will have to wait a bit longer. I want you to take three refugees to my allotment on the outskirts of Prague. You will stay there a few days until we shall call for you. When you arrive there somebody will show you which of the huts you may use. I want to warn you strongly not to leave the hut because these huts may be watched. As soon as your time comes you will return to me."

When we arrived at the village we got out of the little train and somebody was already waiting for us. He gave us a smile and pointed in the direction of a big hut. As soon as we opened the door there was already all sorts of food on the table. I always enjoyed the healthy type of food which the Czech

people liked. Next morning when we opened the door there was more food left by the villagers. I shall say it again and again, the Czechs were just wonderful.

After we had eaten and drunk some coffee which we were able to make we had a chat about our experiences and I found that others were not as lucky as I was. One of them lost his way and found that he was going round in circles until he met a Czech who walked with him until they came to this man's village. They gave him food and drink, a little map on a piece of paper so that he could find his way to the next village. Everywhere he came they helped him until they reached a bus stop where he got a bus which took him to Prague. I felt humble when I heard everyone's story, so I did not say much about myself, but afterwards we thought the Czechs will have nowhere to go and especially those comrades and friends who were helping us now.

After three days we were told to return. The other three were taken somewhere else but I had to see the organiser again. When I arrived at his office there were six people, amongst them a woman who was the wife of one of the refugees. I got something to eat and some coffee, they must have eaten before me and we all got a parcel of food for the journey.

None of the six could speak the Czech language and so I had to translate all what he said. "This man", pointing at me, "speaks our language, apart from German, He will take you to the border of Poland and if you do as he tells you then you will be able to sleep peacefully in a big hotel in the city of Katowice. About in a week's time you will be in London. We have got great confidence in him so please do as he says." To me he said, "Vilem, Comrade František thinks the world of you; I hope that you will do this important job well. You will meet him one stop before Moravska Ostrava where somebody will take you to the woods and will show you the way to Poland. He will take you only a short distance and your instinct ought to help you to reach the Polish side. Here is his name and address. One warning - nobody is allowed to talk because every word can be heard in the woods. You have two enemies there, on the right hand side are the Polish gendarmes. They are poorly paid and if they catch you they will sell every one of you to the Nazis. On the left hand side are the Nazis themselves. You must stress it very seriously in your mind not to talk and try not to stand on broken branches on the path. All your lives are at stake."

Last days in CzSR - England, here we come

I put the papers into my pouch and told them what the organiser had said. They promised me to do as instructed and we were off, but we shook hands first. I said to him that for you it will be worse, but I am sure that the whole nation will fight the Nazis.

In the train everyone was excited but I was worried about some of those who were with me and I decided to paint a picture of happiness which they would enjoy in England if they follow the organiser's instructions. At the train stop before M. Ostrava I could see the Secretary and Helena. We all shook hands and said goodbye. They were very good friends. Then the boy came and took us to our destination in two separate lines.

Before we entered the wood I stressed it very strongly to them, not to speak until we are in Poland. We watched every little branch so that we don't stand on it. After about a quarter of an hour I looked back but the boy was gone. That meant that we were now left on our own. That couple said, he has gone. That annoyed me and I went to see him and told him very quietly but firmly that I would leave them behind if they say another word. They followed me quietly until we were at the other side of

the wood, then we could see quite a few people coming out of a little church. We were on Polish territory! Saved!

I went to a man and asked quietly in Polish, whether he could tell me where that man lives whose address I had. He showed me his house and I knocked at the door and a man let us in. He told us to sit down and await the arrival of the train to Katowice.



CHAPTER 16: 26 MARCH - FROM POLAND TO ENGLAND

The man was one of these people whom I met in the mainly southern part of Poland who spoke Polish and Yiddish. He could understand German and so we were able to converse with him. There were quite a few of this tribe in this area and they were worried too, especially since Czechoslovakia was occupied by the Nazis, but they helped us to reach our destination. He gave us food and drink and allowed us to wash and shave (apart from Magda, the wife of one of our group, of course!).

We had two hours to spare for our train and so he was able to prepare us morally for our future experiences. Then he exchanged our Czech money for the Polish zloty in case we needed some when we arrive in Katowice. In the meantime some of his pals came to have a chat with us. We felt very much at home with these people and also very much protected. When our time came to get our train one of them had already purchased our tickets and came with us. We thanked our friends and entered the train. After a few stops we had to change for the main line train to Katowice. That's where our friend left us, having made sure we were on the right train.

When we arrived we were taken straight to the hotel where our identity papers were checked. A porter took us to our hotel rooms, two in each room. After a good wash we had to come down to the main hall where we met about a hundred refugees. We were telling each other our experiences and found that these were nearly the same for all of us. I thought of many others who were still fighting their way through and wondered whether the gap where we had slipped through was still intact. We were astonished at that wonderful organisation and the many helpers which were involved. We left Prague at 10 am and we were all in bed by 10 pm in Katowice.

Katowice 27th March 1939

In the morning we were told that we shall leave Poland from Gdynia in a few days time by ship but we have the opportunity to get some clothing etc. free. It so happened that a lot of Jewish emigrants (mainly shop keepers) were leaving Poland for South America. They will be on the same ship as we but in the meantime they were trying to sell their goods as quickly as possible. We the refugees will be able to get clothing and underwear also a pair of shoes free. We have to write on the lists what we wanted and these will be stamped first by our organisers. The local people will have to pay at a much reduced price for most of the garments. This was a very good idea because the shop keepers could not take the shops with them. As most of the owners spoke Polish I again was able to help my group and some others. The day arrived when we went by train to the ship and after a few hours we were on the way to England.

After we were out in the middle of the Baltic Sea we started singing and were very happy but when we approached Denmark there was this Skaggerak, a huge rock which made the sea very rough and, poor me, I was terribly seasick. My pals came to me and said, "Can't you organise another sing song?" "No," I said, "I'm going to die."

After we had passed that rock I was much better but I did not feel like singing. A day after we arrived in London the emigrants changed their ship for Argentina and other South American countries. In London everything was arranged to take us all to the various hotels. I shared a room with one of those who was on the ship with me. The rooms were very small and there was only a cold water

tap, so this man starts moaning, how can I shave myself when there is no warm water? I rang the bell, a girl came in and asked, what do you want? So I said to her, "Warm water pliss!" She brought the warm water and I said to him, you see, never worry!

London and Manchester

The emigrants who went to South and North America and naturally those who remained here in England were the only ones who survived the Holocaust. We were well looked after. The next day after my arrival in London I received a letter in which there was a note to invite me to see a gentleman on an urgent matter. There was his address and that was all. Why he did not come to see me at the hotel I did not know.

There I was in the middle of London with that piece of paper in my hand. I felt stranded. A man watched me and came to ask me where I wanted to go. I showed him this piece of paper. He read it, called a taxi, showed him this address and paid him the fare back to my hotel which I told him where I was staying. I was so impressed by this gesture that I still think today about it. I told everybody the English people were wonderful and I even found this generosity in Manchester.

I went to this address, knocked and a lady let me in, asking me of course whether I am W.S. I said yes (another word I had learned). Then I saw the gentleman in his room, completely crippled. He was the person who dealt with all Jewish refugees (a great task). I had to show him my papers and he then gave me a sum of money for which I had to sign and also a railway ticket for Manchester, Sale. He apologised for not coming to the hotel but I hoped that I will understand. He also wanted to give my money back for the taxi but I told him that a man whom I have never seen in my life had paid it for me. I told him also that I have never seen so many wonderful people. Remember, he said, there are more good people in the world than bad ones.

Then he asked the lady whether she has anything to offer me. She had prepared some coffee and a home-made cake which I enjoyed immensely. I stayed half an hour with him whilst the taxi man was still waiting to take me back.

CHAPTER 17: 1939-40 - SALE

All this made a great impression on me so that even today I think of it and tell others. We did not stay long in London, the hotels had to be emptied because of the great football match of the year between England and Scotland. Some were sent to the various cities. I landed in Sale, Manchester, Sylvan House, Broad Road. A big building with plenty of room for forty people.

When we arrived there was a lady called Mrs. Walker. Behind her followed her husband. She spoke English only and most of us could hardly understand her. She was very energetic and immediately decided that I should run this hostel. I asked her, why me? But I cannot speak any English. I pointed at a couple. Magda, who came with her husband and could speak the language very well. No, she said, I have decided that you will do it.

And so, once again, I had a job forced upon me which I must admit did me a lot of good. I learned the language faster than most of the others because I had to do the shopping and report to her the outlay and bills. But I still discussed with the Magda couple about the food and other matters. She was pleased that she didn't have to do the job and was very helpful otherwise.

Most of our refugees came from Vienna and I observed that those who spoke with a strong Viennese dialect had difficulty with the English language. We got used to this type of life and started with the idea to get in touch with the local population. There was a piano in the house (not 100% grand) but it was useful. So we organised a party and invited people to visit us. One of these was the head of the local Grammar School and he brought others along. Magda played some music and then I sang my favourite Schubert songs. The whole thing was very well organised and so began a very happy relationship with the English community.

The Head of the Grammar School wrote me a letter which I still have and asked me whether I could sing some of the Schubert songs at the Grammar School in Sale.

We got used to the more organised life here. Soon the invitations started. I was invited to a Fish Merchant. Here I found out how little I knew of the world and the customs of people. So I knocked at the door and the lady opens it and says how do you do and I said, I do well. She looks at the husband behind her. Then she said, if you want to wash your hands it is upstairs. I said to her, Madame, I have already washed my hands and showed them to her. She said to her husband, go tell him, so he takes me upstairs and says quietly, if you want to use the toilet...

That was my first lesson. At the table, she asked me whether I have seen Hitler. I said no, I am glad I have not seen him! That was not interesting for her and the halo over my head must have disappeared. I could feel that she was disappointed. There was more to follow. We had our meal and there was fish on the plate. Remembering the orphanage I said I am sorry but I don't like fish. Saying this to a fish merchant is like putting a red rag in front of a bull. She put some fish and some other things on the plate and I ate some and it was delicious. She was delighted to see me eating it. Then she asked, would you like some more and I said oh, yes, please. She gave me some more but told me to say please and afterwards thank you. I got all red in my face and felt like a little boy.

And then I made a fatal mistake. I asked for another helping. She was very amazed and said first you said you don't like fish and then you want a second helping. Shocking. One will understand that I was

never invited to this house anymore. And to be quite honest I would not have gone there, neither for love nor money. But I learned something new. You must be able to adapt to the customs and conditions in the country where you are bound to live without being a slave to it. This is one of the reasons why I was able to make friends.

There was a time when we were allowed to work. That means only in agriculture and greenhouses. So I found a place in Sale where I learned to water the flowers. There were most wonderful flowers but they started to grow vegetables. Obviously that was necessary towards the war effort but my job was not for food, so one day my boss asked me to water some delicate flowers. He said make a good job of it. I was so keen to water them that I destroyed half of them. When he came back he saw the damage I had done and was very angry with me but he realised that I didn't know anything about flowers and taught me how to do it properly. I learned it and was also able to earn some money.

One day I was invited by the Headmaster of the Grammar School to sing some of my songs. His wife accompanied me. After some of the songs he asked me whether I can sing some English songs. I said yes, Rosemarie! So I started singing, "Oh, Rosemarie, I love you, I am always dreaming on you." Everybody was shocked - not the boys and girls, they had a good laugh. The Headmaster came to see me and said, what have you done? you made it into a rude song. So I explained to him that these words mean the opposite in English. On means of and of means on. So he explained this to the audience and they all had a big laugh.

One day the Anglo-Austrian Friendship Society organised a great concert in Manchester. I was asked to sing amongst other songs, some Schubert songs. That was a great surprise for me and I was very proud of this honour, but I did not know that some of the organisers had invited Lotte Eisler to sing the same songs. Now, she was one of the finest singers in the world and a specialist of Schubert and all the great composers of Lieders. (She came from Vienna, and landed in New York before the Nazis could catch her and her composer husband.)

When she heard about that stupid idea, she said, "If he sings, I won't." So there was a great upheaval. I decided that I am going to see her. I knocked at the door of her room in the concert hall, she shouted to come in and I entered. She shouted "Who are you?" and I said, "I am the person whom some stupid fellow wanted to put next to you as a Schubert singer. Naturally I shall not dare to sing next to you, of course I won't sing, I shall only be pleased to listen to you and learn. Somebody has made a mistake when he heard me sing in Sale at the Grammar School, so please forget this incident." She had a good laugh about it and everything was all right. Then her husband entered and she laughingly said, "Hans, this is Willi Silber my greatest competitor." And she told him all what happened. She was interested to know where I had studied singing and when I told here about Professor Lirhammer she was amazed because she knew him well and congratulated me. Anyway, she sang like a goddess and I listened very carefully and learned. There were passages where you felt like crying when Schubert was at his saddest and Lotte was able to bring it all out. I went back to Sale a new person.

In 1940 after the fall of France, the Government thought that we were a danger to Britain and decided to intern us. Some women were interned on the Isle of Man but most of us were sent to Canada and Australia. The hostel in Sale was closed down and we were led to our ships. Luckily enough I was on the ship for Canada and others were on the way to Australia on the Donnera. That ship was bombed by the Nazis and everybody on it died. Our ship landed safely in Canada. Only there we heard the bad news of the Donnera.

CHAPTER 18: CANADA! OCTOBER 1940

Our ship was much bigger than the one we had when we came from Poland and so we had a much quieter passage. But I must admit that I was very quiet and slept most of the time. How glad I was when we arrived in Quebec. There we changed into a train which took us for many, many hours to a small place called Niagara Falls. On the way we saw thousands of trees, all dead and rotten. What a shame that nothing could be done to save them.

There is was very cold, especially when quite a lot of us slept in tents. I got kidney trouble and had to go to a hospital. When I came out I was allowed to sleep in the hall. Shortly afterwards we were sent back towards Montreal near a town called Sherbrooke (they had to prepare this place properly to make room for us). The Camp Commandant, an extremely nice person, made a speech to welcome us and hoped that we make the best of a very unpleasant situation.

All our papers were in the office where these were perused by the clerks working there. Some of us had to work in the kitchen, most had to make nets for the army and I was very lucky to become the Camp Electrician. That was much better than sitting for hours making nets. The food was excellent and plenty. I especially liked the Canadian honey of which I still dream today.

All went well until the British Government decided that we are enemy aliens and therefore it would be right to send proper Nazis into our camp. As soon as these arrived we started a hunger strike. The Camp Commandant was very annoyed at this stupid decision. He knew that there would be trouble and he would not tolerate it. The Nazis were sent back to the Prisoner of War camp as proper enemy aliens!

It must be explained that some of our members in the Socialist Movement had called the meeting which decided about that hunger strike and influenced our Camp Commandant to act. This was a great victory! My tools were downstairs in the cellar where all the gadgets, water pipes and electrical meters etc. were located and it was here where we met to discuss events in the camp. I had also a lot of opportunity to meet our Camp Commandant, mainly to discuss what had to be done, repairs or new installations, but soon we also had private conversations.

So I had to tell him a lot about my life and he got to know me more. He was keen on improving our life in the camp. This opportunity came very soon. Every day after work I used to walk along with one of the many intellectuals we had, Professors, lecturers, teachers and people of all trades, and naturally many students. It so happened that one of these students tried to commit suicide. He was unhappy that he could not carry on studying and would never have a chance to achieve something. One can imagine that the whole camp was in uproar.

One lecturer who was very much upset started moaning. He said to me, there you are, we are Jews and are always persecuted, and he was moaning and groaning. So I looked at him and said, why are you not trying to have a chat with these students and teach them here? So he looked at me said, yes, of course I can do that! But he said we have no material. I said to him you get all the other professors and lecturers together and you could easily start a mini university! He said, yes, that is a good idea but we have no material. I said to him, look, I have a very good relationship with the Camp Commandant, I shall speak to him about this problem. After all there are quite a few Universities in Canada, he may be able to help us. He is very friendly and approachable.

Now, you have a chat with all these people and find out whether they are prepared to do that, and I have a meeting with the Camp Commandant about some more work here and I shall approach him.

That's what happened! He was very keen to do that and called all the Professors etc. together and asked them to write some lists out which could be used in teaching. Privately he said to me that it was a good idea and that he would try to get something for the other inmates. He asked me what else do you think would be useful? I said, there are many things which would be appreciated. First, chess sets - we could have chess tournament. Footballs and musical instruments. There are musicians as well here. There are two great pianists and a very famous violinist. So he had a good laugh and only said, I will see what I can do.

A month passed and they grumbled: "All these fancy ideas! I always knew that nothing is going to happen." They were very pessimistic. But unfortunately we Jews have to be like that because of the bad experiences of the past. But, suddenly, one day, everything came and more. Teachers here as well! The professors were in heaven and all the students were happy. They were able to pass degrees by the Canadian Universities, so that when we went back to England they were able to carry on at the universities without having to start from scratch. This was a great achievement, and we certainly had to thank the Commandant for it. Football teams were formed and they had a chance to play and organise chess tournaments. My favourite game! The musicians got a piano for the two pianists, there was also quite a good library and everybody was satisfied. If I have done nothing else in my life I was proud of having been able to be of some use.

On Sundays we always had a concert and some of our cooks made some of the most delicious apfelstrudls (apple pie the Viennese way). Amongst us there was also a great footballer who played for the Jewish Football Club, Hakuan, in Vienna. This club won the Austrian Championship twice running. I also joined one club in our camp but must regretfully report that my team usually lost between 10 or 5 nil. Once only we lost 1-5, that was a great 'victory' and everybody was cheering, but I was compensated in other ways when I played chess in our championships.

One day something special happened. I was informed by our Camp Commandant that I have a visitor and I would be pleased to see that person. It was Martha. So her mother was right. She forecast that I would meet her again and there she was! It was my great cousin who was in touch with her mother and together they found out where I was. One can imagine how happy we were to see each other again. The person who was supposed to watch us, closed the door and left us alone. Nothing nicer could have happened to me. So we embraced. She was then 30 years old and I was 31. But as she always was practical and down to earth she told me that as soon as I am set free there will be a job waiting for me in Ottawa. Then she said we would be married and there would be no more gallivanting for me. Of course I agreed (what else could I do?) but what we did not know that when we were released we all had to return to England. That was the rule and nobody could do anything about it.

Goodbye Canada - back to Europe

Our stay in Canada came to an end, when it was decided by the British Government that we were not dangerous after all. On the contrary, we could be very useful in the war effort. I was sent to Leeds as Manchester had their quota of refugees already. What I did first was to apply for a visa to go to Canada or USA. Both consulates refused me permission to enter their countries. I sent Martha these letters but she did not feel like coming to Europe and so ended our relationship.

CHAPTER 19: 1942 - LEEDS

We soon got integrated into the Leeds community. We got our ration cards and reported at the police once a week. We were not called enemy aliens any more but refugees from Nazi oppression. I soon got a job as a maintenance electrician and became a member of the ETU. I quickly made friends with my mates - some of us lived in an old building for a very cheap rent. In the meantime we became member of the Anglo-Austrian Club which at that time was only a type of Friendship Society. The Secretary was Greta, a lady who has been in England for several years already. She worked as a supervisor in the huge kitchen of the CWS factory. This by the way was a real boon because the women who worked there had good food and paid very little. I am not sure whether they had to leave some of their stamps of their ration cards. Her aim was just to make friends with the English people but when we arrived we discussed the matter of our future work and decided that there are more important things to be done than just to make friends. We wanted that all our able-bodied youngsters should join the British Army and fight against the Nazis. This idea spread through the whole country where refugees lived and we were able to get over 200 volunteers together. We had a Journal called 'Zeitspiegel' - The Mirror of Time - which was also sold in other towns.

Having mentioned our journal I must mention as person who became very dear to me. She was the youngest sister of Greta who has been working for a high ranking police officer in Weybridge. She used her free time to learn shorthand and typing. When she finished her course she came to Leeds to live with her sister. She worked for a famous chemist, Timothy Whites and Taylors. It was she who wrote that poem and called it The Mirror of Time. She stuck a lot of newspaper slips around her body and then she started to recite. "As you can see on my attire, I am a paper. You can set me on fire."

What really happened was that she set *me* on fire. She looked so sweet that from that moment on there was nobody else any more. Her sister was very much against me and tried every trick and lies to separate us. In her eyes I was a down and out etc. Trude was looking after the youth and I after the rest of our members.

We decided that our young men should join the British Army, but were told that we could only be in one unit - the Pioneer Corps. This we refused to do, because that was not a fighting unit. After several letters and discussions, we achieved our aim and were able to join fighting units. This is how I finished up in Glasgow with the KOYLIES.

We had to change our names so that if we are captured we would be considered English or Scottish soldiers. So when Trude and I got married we were still Silber, but when I joined the Army we chose the beautiful name of Sheridan. Trude, because she loved his poetry and I because I admired the beautiful actress Ann Sheridan.

My life in the army - Started 28 October 1943 - Finished 28 October 1946

I got my uniform and believe me I looked like a down and out, or like the Good Soldier Schweik (a Czech soldier in the Austrian Army in 1914). But soon I fitted in with the young recruits. In our hut there was a whole platoon. Apart from our breakfast we got cocoa at 10am, that was brought in a big kettle. We all had a mess tin to get our share. There were two bullies who pushed their way in

first and filled their mess tins to the brim. Everybody was grumbling because there was less left for the others. I didn't like that and next morning I said to the others, this cocoa is for all of us, yesterday there were some who did not get any cocoa, so I shall pour out enough for everyone. The others were pleased apart from these two bullies and so it lasted because I had the others on my side, but two enemies. They hated me.

A few days later our Sergeant trained us in unarmed combat. He explained, imagine you are on duty at night. It's dark and you can't see the enemy. You have to listen carefully and when he gets nearer you have to get him down on the floor. I want two volunteers who will be blindfolded and have to get the others on the floor. Any volunteers? Silly me raised my arm. As soon as that big bully saw this he put his hand up and everybody was worried for me. The Sergeant blindfolded me and then the other fellow. At this moment I remembered the good old days in the orphanage when we were wrestling instead of going to sleep. I was standing quietly and just listened, whereas he stormed towards me in order to do me some harm. But I had the advantage to hear him and got his arm, turned round and threw him on the floor.

He was so annoyed that he pulled his band off and wanted to hit me, but the Sergeant stopped him and said don't touch him, he had done it as it should be done. You don't go like a bull because that is the best way to be killed. They all worried for me since then, but those two bullies were caught stealing and sent to the glasshouse (military prison).

My next adventure was a self-inflicted wound. We had this horrible porridge, burned and full of salt. Everybody was moaning about it. The captain who was on duty comes round to every table. He says, any complaints? Silly me gets up and says, "Yes, Sir." "What is it?" "That porridge, Sir, do they have to put so much salt into it and burning it every day?" And the others are all ready, waiting for what's coming. The Captain says, "See this door? That's the way to the kitchen and you go in and see the Sergeant in the cookhouse and tell him how to cook it for a full fortnight, and you can start now!" So that was my punishment for opening my mouth. The others had a good laugh about this and warned me - never to complain. But I could not understand why they ask us whether we have got any complaints. There was always some silly victim.

Now, I entered the cookhouse and there the Sergeant was already waiting for me. He showed me a large bag of potatoes and said, can you see these potatoes. I want you to peel them so quickly that they boil in your hand. After a few days he says to me, where do you come from? I said from Vienna, I volunteered to join the British Army to fight the Nazis and here I am sitting and peeling potatoes.

After this all slowed down and he became very friendly. One day he said to me, I have told my wife and my neighbours about you. They all want to see you. As soon as the fourteen days are over I will take you to see my family and friends. He lived on the outskirts of Glasgow.

The day came and one can't imagine how nice these people were. They all shook hands with me and wanted to give me bottles of whisky which I hardly drink. Then there were biscuits and small loaf of home made bread. At the Sergeant's house there was a lovely meal awaiting for me. You told me once, he said, that you are keen on music. I said, yes, I like classical music and operas. He said, next week I have got a special treat for you. The Scottish Orpheus Choir. The singing was so beautiful that I can say that I never heard any singing as well as this particular concert. So it was worthwhile to complain, otherwise I would not have had such a wonderful treat.

Every Tuesday a Lieutenant came to our hut to give us a talk about 'Why we are at war!' This was a booklet printed by the War Office, ABCA, short for Army Bureau for Current Affairs. He knew so little that the soldiers were falling asleep while he talked. Then he asked whether there is anyone to ask a question, or say something. So I put up my hand and said I would like to say something, having been involved in the underground movement I learned a thing or two.

When I started speaking everybody became interested and listened to what I had to say, how Austria and the other countries were overrun and we in the underground movement had to fight a losing battle. Even the Lieutenant became very interested. Then I answered questions and the hour was over. The Lieutenant thanked me and went straight to the Camp Commandant to tell him about it. He called me to his office (luckily I learned by then how to salute properly). So we had a long conversation about myself and then he asked me whether I would be prepared to use the ABCA pamphlets to speak to every platoon in the camp and to add also some of my experiences. From then on, to whatever camp I was sent, a letter was following to the next Commandant to use my experiences to tell our soldiers. I have still copies of these letters.

The next day I got my first stripe and I became a Lance Corporal. Then, unfortunately, I had an operation after which I could not do military exercises or any hard jobs. I was medically downgraded from A1 to C2 but I still was able to give lectures to the soldiers. This time, however, on a higher level.

I was sent to a special camp in Scotland where soldiers and officers were sent to recuperate from wounds they received in the war. My speeches were not only about the war but also about the peace to come when I received from the camp commandant Lord Beveridge's plan for a better future. The listeners were very enthusiastic and hoped that the next Government would adopt this plan.

After this I was sent to Leeds to attend an Army Education Course to become a teacher. This suited me well because I could visit my wife very often, although I had to live in an army camp near Otley. As I still had my single stripe as a Lance Corporal they tried to make me train the soldiers but I was not good at that, so I was sent back to Leeds to complete my course, after which I was sent to Portsmouth.

Portsmouth and Peterborough (Yaxley)

It seemed that the military authorities did not know what to do with me so I had to do a course on store-keeping. Before I completed this course I had to report to the Commandant who had a letter from the War Office appointing me to be Staff Sergeant in a Prisoner of War Camp near Peterborough. I got a new uniform with the insignia badge on my arm and a railway ticket to Yaxley near Peterborough.

There I reported to the Lt. Colonel who introduced me to the other officers and explained to me my duties. My job was to write regular reports to the War Office, translating, being present when there were some complaints on both sides, translating at any occasional trials of prisoners for misbehaving, etc.

The prisoners had to work on the fields for the farmers near Peterborough or Yaxley. Each week I was driven to the various farmers by one of the officers for various reasons. I usually saw the

spokesman for the prisoners and had to write down any complaints which I reported to the Camp Commandant. The officers usually stayed with the farmers, probably for a drink etc. It seemed to me that they all liked to be on the roster. Even our Camp Commandant wanted to be on it.

Once in winter when there was snow all over the countryside, one German soldier disappeared. He had an affair with one of the farm girls. Eventually he was found. At his trial his excuse was that he was looking for flowers in the snow. The Major who had no sense of humour, sentenced him to several weeks of prison.

One officer, whose duty was to control all the vegetables grown by the prisoners, had a map of the area and marked it with pins. Red pins for beetroot, potatoes with yellow pins, cabbages with green pins etc. Of course everybody was making fun of him. One day I said to him, if those pins disappear one day, will you know who had pinched them? The next day all pins had disappeared. When he had to leave the camp he gave me two little boxes of those pins and said, here they are, now you will be happy. This man misunderstood my joke, he certainly had no sense of humour.

The Major did not like me because he could not understand how I could become a Staff Sergeant without going through the ranks, like everybody else. He asked me once when he was in his bad mood, what have you got what other's have not? I said, "I speak five languages and the War Office uses my ability. You know when I was away for two weeks I went to Preston. There was a POW camp for Italians. The interpreter there was poorly and I had to do the job for a while. Besides, this is usually a Captain's job what I do but as I am at the moment not a British Citizen I can never become an officer, but here in this camp I must have some authority because the Jerries like authority, especially the British Crown. I represent Britain here. I get all the answers from them which our War Office desires to know." Then he said, "Why do you go to Peterborough with *oursoldiers*? You are fraternising with them." "On duty they have to respect my rank," I said, "Off duty we are all doing our best for the country and enjoy ourselves." I also reminded him that I nearly put one of the soldiers on a charge when he had to take some POWs to the Cambridge hospital and did not post the documents I gave into the proper place. This man quickly obeyed. "I knew you would have had a case against me for being soft with the lower ranks", I said.

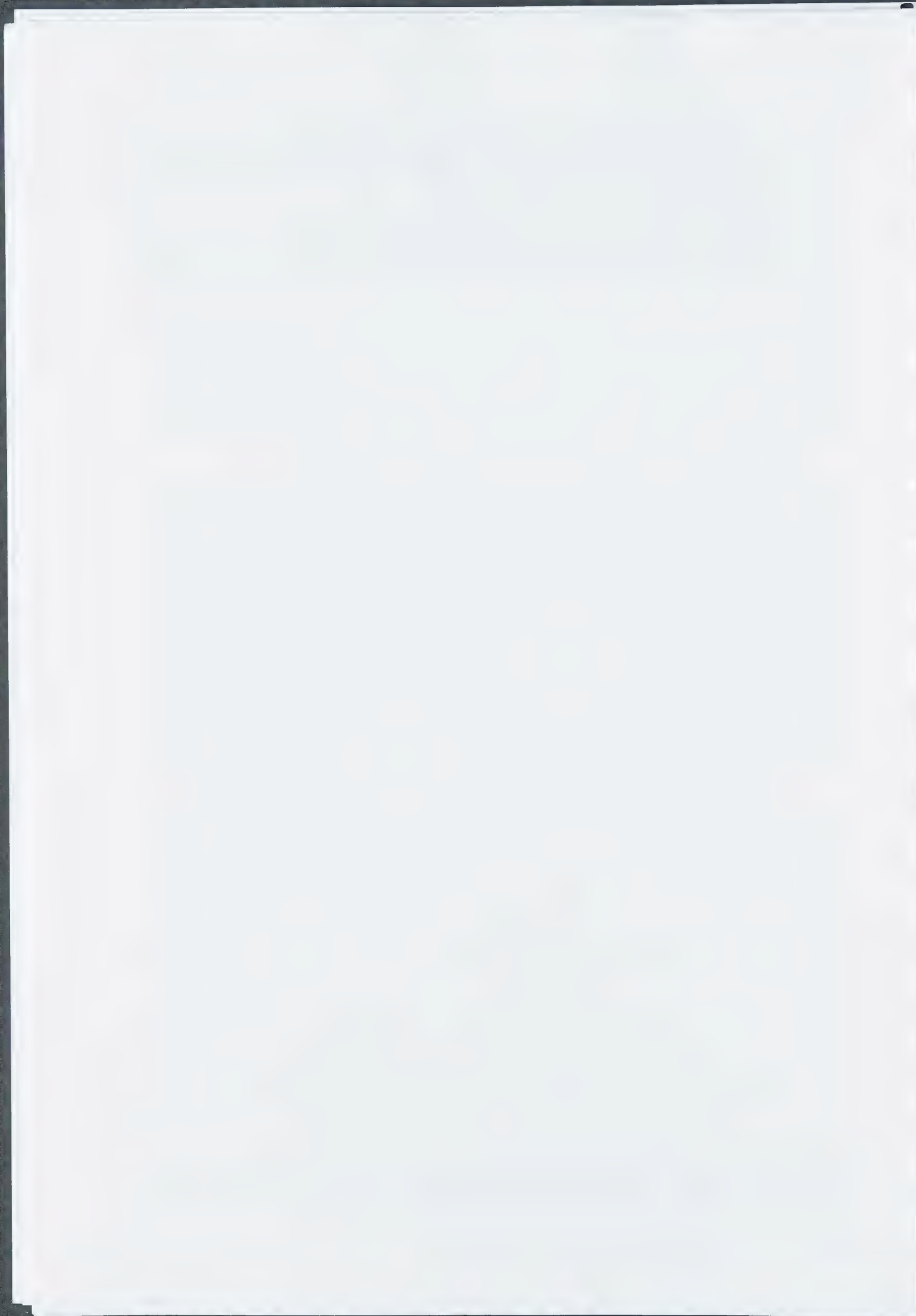
One day the order came from the War Office that the British Doctor and I should write a list of all those prisoners who were poorly or had special reasons to be first to return to Germany. The war was over. Our English Doctor conscientiously did as demanded but the German Doctor made a list of his own and gave it to me. It was a list of prisoners who were in very good health, but known Nazis. Our Doctor did what his conscience dictated him and sent his list of those who were really poorly. Soon after the German officer came into our room full of wrath and said, "I bet it was he", pointing at me, "the Bolshevik!! who told you not to send my list." Our military doctor was very angry and told him to leave the room and first to apologise. He said that easy little word, sorry, and left.

The camp was soon to be closed down. Then I had a letter from the War Office asking me whether I would like to stay a bit longer in the Army as an Interpreter in Vienna. I asked permission of my Commanding Officer whether I may go home to discuss this letter with my wife. He said, yes, but come back on Monday because there will be a lot of work awaiting for you. I promised that I shall be back with the first train from Leeds.

At home we were both pleased to see each other. Then I showed her the letter. She said, if you like to go back to Vienna, I shall follow you but reluctantly. Let's see about the conditions. I wrote that one of my reasons why I would like to go back to Vienna is to find out what happened to my mother and

all my relatives. The answer was quite simple: We are sorry we cannot have a person working here who would not have his mind 100% at such an important job. I rang through from our camp and read this letter to her. She was very pleased and relieved.

Soon afterwards we both got our British Citizenship and when her sister came to visit us we said to her, there comes the bloody foreigner. She laughed and said I shall get it as well. We never regretted that step but we went to Vienna and the Austrian countryside very often.



CHAPTER 20: BACK IN GOOD OLD LEEDS - 6 OCTOBER 1946

When I arrived at the railway station in Leeds, there was my little wife waiting for me. I could easily recognise her because of her size. She was so sweet looking. As a matter of fact I called her my child or just Trude. We both had a lot in common because we both lost all our relatives apart from Greta, her sister, who was 10 years older and myself who had a great cousin in Mexico. So we understood each other well and never argued. She would have liked sometimes to have an argument but I was not keen on that because it is so easy to fall out and hurt your partner.

At home there was an official last letter hanging underneath the lamp, demoting me to a miserable Private and promoting herself to General and reminding me that all the gallivanting would now be over. We embraced each other and had a really good laugh.

After a few days I got myself a job with the CWS as an electrician. I had to travel, mostly by bus, to all the CWS factories, rewiring the old electrical installations. I tried to be at home by 7pm but it was always impossible, especially when I missed buses and had to wait for an hour or two. So I left the CWS and got myself another job.

This one lasted only 5 minutes. What happened was that the owner of the small electrical shop sent me to Chapeltown to have a look at the house to be rewired. The owner of the house asked me to have a good look round. There was not much to see in the rooms but when I went to the cellar there was a right mess. The wires were loose and rotten and the gas meter was next to the electric wires. There could have been an explosion any minute. When I said this to this man I made it clear to him that I would change all this and that there would be no more danger, he ran upstairs to the telephone and shouted into it, "You, my own brother, have cheated me. I shall go to a proper big firm etc." When I arrived back at the shop I was paid some money but got the sack. That was a lesson for me.

My next job was at Burton's the famous clothing manufacturers. My job was to check the whole electrical system and then to service those installations which needed doing. There were many Jewish tailors working there, who originally came from Russia in 1905 where they had these horrible pogroms. Many of them handed in the USA but most of them came to Britain. They spread right from Glasgow to Leeds and London, their language was a mixture of Russian, Polish, Yiddish and English. Nearly all of them preferred working in clothing factories, and here at Burtons they congregated, but later most youngsters went to University and married Christian girls and spoke the true Scottish or Yorkshire language.

I stayed at Burtons for a few months but left the firm because they wanted to send me to London as there was a shortage of electricians. There was a time when I worked for the YEB where my first trouble started.

A new electric power station was built at the outskirts of Leeds. Most of the building was already covered but we had plenty of fresh air. We had some problems with the Foreman. Now, unfortunately there was a lot of trouble because of the petty attitude of this Foreman. Some men were in the Union, others were afraid to join and the worst of it all was there was no Shop Steward. So this foreman could do anything he liked. He made difficulties when we had a tea break, he continuously shortened our mealtimes, gave us our wages in the last minute, etc., etc.

I had a chat with some of them who were still in the Union and asked them haven't we got a shop steward? They said no, nobody wants to do it! So I said, let's have a meeting after work so that the Foreman has no excuse to stop us. We had this meeting after work whilst the Foreman disappeared with his little car. Nobody told him about this meeting. Then I got up on a little box and urged them, first to join the Union so that we are 100% and asked them to elect a Shop Steward who would represent all the men. "This man treats us as if we are all slaves, this must stop, I was always told that the British worker is a proud man, let's show him! First we need a Shop Steward and I hope that everybody joins." Then I jumped down and waited what they are going to do.

One young electrician jumped up onto these few bricks which were lying there and proposed that I should become the new Shop Steward. He himself would collect the Union money. All were in favour to rejoin the Union, only a few hesitated but joined the next day. The same evening I went to the Union meeting and told the Chairman what happened. Some of our lot were also there and they confirmed what I had said. I got a lot of Union cards and was able to hand them out during our tea break. The Foreman was fuming and swore that he will get me the sack but he could not do anything about the established fact. He knew that if he starts trouble that the boys would go on strike, which would slow down the process of building the new power station.

For a while there was peace but one day when he had to go to town, he looked at my installation, pipes and wiring and said, you are very good in spouting but you are a poor craftsman. I want you to take all this down and when I come back I want a completely new installation there. And off he went to town. Then I said to my work mates, "See this job, I think it is OK and I am not going to touch it and see what he says." When he came back, he looked at the job and said, "Now it looks much better. Look how much damage you have done. The other material will now be ruined." So I told him then, "My work mates are my witnesses that I have not touched this installation at all but if I had done what you ordered me to do there would have been some damage. And now I am going to telephone to our boss and tell him what happened." And off I went to his office in order to telephone. He ran fast to his office and did not let me in.

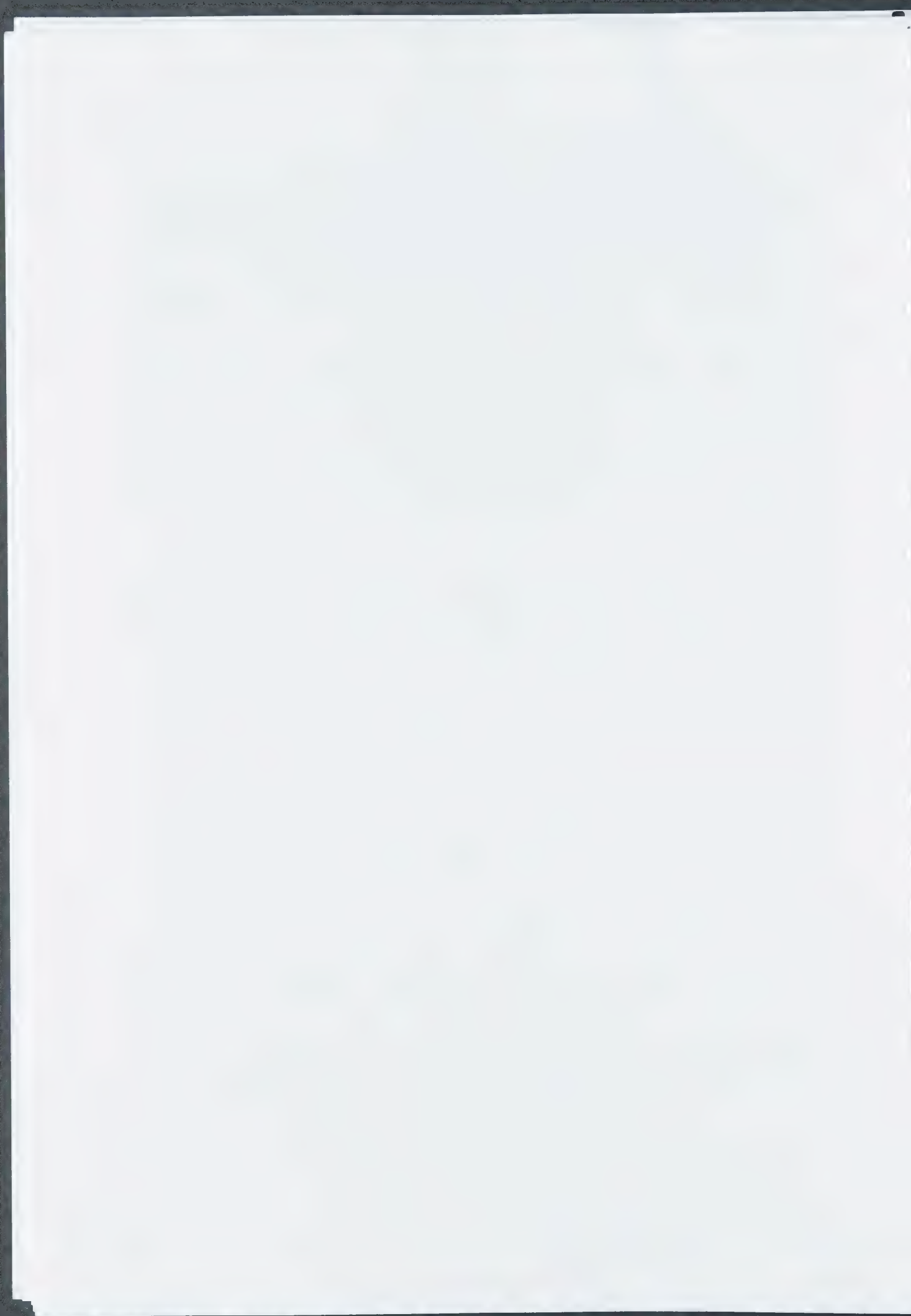
The next day the manager came and looked at the job, then had a quiet chat with the Foreman and I was allowed to stay. But a few weeks later, I was told that there are now less people needed at the power station and that I shall be able to carry on working in Leeds itself doing house to house installations. This was a poorly paid job. After a few weeks I left and started work for a very big firm - English Electric. This factory was between Leeds and Bradford.

Whilst I was working for all these places I carried on going to night school, improving my knowledge. This helped me to achieve a higher stage in my responsibilities and thus I got the job in the Test Department. We had to test ordinary motors but also bigger and more complicated ones which went to the Atomic Power Stations. All these had to be tested thoroughly. At that time we still used slide rules. The motors had to be partly dismantled and the wiring checked before we gave them a good run after assembling it again. Some of the large motors had to be run over 24 hours. Then the motors were, one by one, dismantled and thermometers stuck into various parts. If the heat was too high then the motors could not be used. So it was a very difficult and responsible job. Our wages were only slightly higher than those who assembled them in the work shop.

Bradford - English Electric 1956 - 1960

So of course our lot grumbled because the assemblers got a higher bonus than we, so that there was hardly any difference in our wages. The attitude of the management was that testing was a necessary evil and that those who assemble them should get the higher bonus. Up to the moment when I arrived nobody dared to ask for a higher bonus or, which was more logical, an increase in our wages. This grumbling went on until I was well established at English Electric. Grumbling and acting are two opposites. Everybody is afraid to tackle the Manager, although we call each other by our Christian names. Once again, during our dinner hour we discussed our woes but nobody volunteered to speak to the manager. Then suddenly they all said, what about you Bill. I told them straight: the last time you put me forward you let me down. This time I want you all to sign this paper that you support my approach to the management in order to increase our basic wage etc. They all signed and I went straight to our manager. When he saw me he knew what it was all about, so he says to me, how is it that it is never one of the others? I wonder whether you are not a Russian spy. That made me laugh. I said, if I were a Russian spy I would have joined the Tory Party, making anti-communist speeches and certainly would be against the Unions. As this man had a sense of humour he started laughing and said, if you were not such a good worker we would have sacked you long ago. Then I said, why do you still keep me on B grade since I started here if you are so satisfied with me? And so it happened that not only did we get a higher wage but I got my A grade after all.

I stayed for four years. I could have stopped there until my retirement but for the 4 weeks day shift and 2 weeks night shifts, also the buses to Leeds from Bradford were always full and I had to walk a few miles very often towards the Leeds terminus, summer and winter, and on night shift I often fell asleep and finished at the other end.



CHAPTER 21: LEEDS - MY NEW JOB

One Sunday afternoon my wife and I decided to have a little walk. Not far away from our house was the Ridge. There were plenty of benches and we could look down and enjoy the nature around us in all its glory. At the bottom of this ridge was the famous Yorkshire Switch Gear Company, all surrounded by green. I said to Trude, these people who work here must be very happy, they could sit there during dinner hours, have their sandwiches and eat in peace and listen to the birds singing their jolly songs. Trude said, why not try and get a job here. It's only 10 minutes walk from our home and you even would be able to have a short meal at home. You are on night shift the next 2 weeks so you would be able to see the manager tomorrow morning. I said, what a wonderful idea. Little did I know what was waiting for me.

So next morning I went to see the manager and asked him whether there was a job available for a skilled electrician. He asked me whether I have got a job and what my qualifications are. I said that I work for English Electric in the Test Department. When he heard that he said you can start tomorrow and bring your papers with you. Of course that was impossible because I had to give a fortnight's notice.

That's what I did. When I saw the manager he was very much surprised and said he was sorry because I was a very reliable worker. And then I told him quite openly that one of the reasons was the horrible night shifts and the bus service after work. The buses came full of passengers from Bradford and very often I had to walk to the Leeds terminus and that the firm did nothing to help to provide a better service for those who had no cars, or by getting in touch with the Bradford Bus Companies.

My new job: Yorkshire Switch Gear Co.

When I entered the Y.S. Co. there were two shocks waiting for me. One was a complete surprise. There was a woman who lived in the Woodhouse area. When she saw me she shouted, this is the man who brings me my Daily Worker every Saturday. I did not need to advertise my politics, and naturally the management heard it as well.

When I wanted to put on my overall before entering the proper work place I found myself transported into the 19th century. There were just a few hooks, a few buckets and some towels and the most horrible toilets one could imagine with square pieces of newspaper. But on the wall was a Government poster, the Factory Act, which distinctly made it clear that any firm which does not abide by the rules of this Act will be heavily fined and may also be closed down after a first warning.

When we had our first tea break at 10 am I went to see the Shop Steward and asked him whether he had anything done in the past about this and he said, yes, I have seen the manager several times, but nothing happened. then I had to go back to my job. Later at 12 o'clock I spoke to him again, he refused to talk to me about it. When the workday was over everybody was running towards the few buckets to get some hot water from the tap and snatch a few towels. It was anarchy. I did not wash my hands there, but made my way home.

There were several of my new mates who went the same way over the ridge towards Headingley Lane. We chatted a bit and somebody said it is a disgrace that we have to go home with dirty hands. So I said, I can't understand that nobody has done anything about it. The law is on our side. You have got a Shop Steward, he should have done something long ago. Anyway, I tell you this, I have been working at English Electric and they had to give in several times because we all stuck together and supported me. These here know the Shop Steward is soft and does not want a proper showdown. Here we are in the right and we ought to use the law. Then we parted and I went home to meet my dear wife.

While we had our meal, which was 100% as usual. (People say love goes through your tummy - how partly true this is!) Trude said to me, "You are very quiet." I said, "Don't worry, we have a lot to speak about and I shall need your help", and I told her what happened including the 'Daily Worker' episode. Then I said to her, "Do you remember when I was in the Army and I wanted to come home for a few days. I always asked the Captain or later the Colonel for a pass out for 3 days or so, never the sergeant who would have to go to the Captain anyway if he wanted to! So this time I would like you to write a letter to the General Manager of Yorkshire Switchgear in person. Not to the manager because he is afraid like all the others in the management of the GM. "

In the letter I explained that "I have only been at this factory one day and that I was shocked to find 19th century conditions for cleaning one's hands, very few towels and dirty toilets. Most people go home without having washed their hands. There is a huge Government poster on the wall which clearly and expressly insists that all factories have to provide adequate washing facilities and decent toilets. Any firm which does not provide these facilities will be very heavily fined. There is even a danger that in the worst cases the factory may even be closed. I hope that you will not misunderstand this letter as wanting to gain some benefit. It seems to me that nobody has drawn this problem to your attention. If I am sacked for daring to write to you I can only say that English Electric was sorry to let me go because the firm valued my qualities. Thank you for reading this letter."

The Managing Director never answered my letter, but I worked for them for 20 years until my 65th birthday, a day before Christmas. Within a week workmen came and started building the facilities which were required. The day after I had seen the General Manager the Manager came to see me and he was very angry. He wanted to know why I went over his head to the General Manager. I explained to him that apparently the Shop Steward saw him many times and nothing happened. He did not sack me, perhaps because he could not but he punished me by not allowing me to work in the Test Department. The next best job was wiring huge switch gear. This job was interesting but I would have preferred testing because this helped me to develop my knowledge of electricity.

When the next election for representing the work force came I became Shop Steward for the ETU members and he represented only the AEU which was a much smaller group. A year after I became the Shop Steward Convener. After another year a regular monthly meeting was held with the management, which dealt with various problems. We were able to solve many problems without having to use the last weapon. At the meeting were usually 6 or 7 of us and 3 from the management.

It so happened that when an apprentice got into trouble the foreman always sent him to me. He said if he doesn't help you nobody else will be able to. My attitude towards the apprentices was simple. When they were sent to me I did my best to help them. I treated them as equals. I showed them all I knew myself. They were never asked to bring me tea or do all sorts of unnecessary chores. They had to learn a trade and become useful citizens.

There was one boy whom I could not help because he was caught stealing copper but at the other hand there was one whom I nearly hit but changed my mind. He was the one whom I met years later at the Provincial Building Society. He was standing behind me and patted me on my shoulders and shouted in front of all, "Hello, Bill. Do you remember you saved my job when I worked with you?" When I looked back at him I hardly recognised him, nearly two heads taller. Everybody had a good laugh, only poor Trude had had a big shock. It could have been different she said. Later he told me that he had a very good job now and was married with two children. This was compensation for me. It was worth having this positive attitude towards the younger people.

One day the cleaning ladies came to see me complaining that the management had sacked 6 of 12 of them but never increased their wages. They started at 5 am to clean all offices and windows in the factory. Can you do anything for us, they asked. I was very sorry to hear this but I reminded them that I have asked them several times in the past to join the Union but they never wanted to join. Everybody was paying their dues, but they did not see the necessity to do this, as they don't use tools. I told them that they are part of the employees and their tools are the brush, warm water and ladders from which they could fall, especially when they are tired. Anyway, they decided to join and we walked together towards the manager's office. He stood on the balcony and saw us coming and shouted down, did you have to bring bloody Sheridan along?

The first words he uttered when we entered his office was, he won't help you because you are not in the Union and you cannot be because you do not handle tools. But he got a shock when they told him that everyone had joined and that Bill promised to stick up for them. In order to shorten the conversation I made it clear to him that their tools were brushes and everything else to keep the place clean and they have to carry buckets of water and ladders. They could slip and break parts of their body. On top of it there were only 6 of them instead of 12 which forces them to work harder at 5 o'clock in the morning as they have to complete their job before the main work force arrives. He knew all this of course and said he will think about it. One of the women said, all right, Sir, we shall not do any cleaning while you think and they all started to leave the room. Even in the General Director's office nothing was touched. They came to work at 5 am as usual but did nothing. But the poor Manager must have got an order, probably by the General Director, that they should get their increase and also two more helpers. It was not just the Union which won them this victory, but they themselves who courageously stood up for themselves knowing that they had support.

Shortly after, the General Director called for me in a different matter. Yorkshire Switchgear Co. decided for the first time to take part at the International Trade Fair in Hanover. He asked me first to translate our pamphlet into German so that they could use it at the Fair. Of course I would get extra pay for this. The next thing he wanted me to do was to go to the Fair and act as a translator for the firm with one of the Directors (Mr. Rumfit). When I came home I told Trude about it, but stressed very strongly that I only go to this Trade Fair if she agrees. She said, yes, of course you go there. You must not miss this opportunity.

I was able to translate most of our pamphlet with the aid of a technical dictionary which Mr. Rumfit got for me before he arrived at the Hanover Fair a day before it started. In the meantime, before he arrived, I found our stand empty, no electricity laid on or a list of the Directors of the various power stations. I telephoned the manager of the Industrial Fair and complained about this fact very strongly, especially when all the other companies had everything done for them. I purposely spoke in German so that he had no excuse to pretend that he can't understand me. I also asked for a telephone directory to be able to get in touch with all the Directors of most of the power stations to inform them that we are here with a modern type of switchgear. None of them knew about our existence.

I did this because our Director had not arrived yet. We only had three more days before the opening of the Industrial Fair.

When Mr. Rumfit arrived I told him what happened. He was very annoyed with the German organisers but thanked me for my initiative.

In the meantime our switchgear was fixed in position and all worked well. We then made our way to the Head Manager's office and complained about the unfair treatment which we got and also about the accommodation which we got, three hours drive from the hotel for one group. It was a small but pleasant hotel and extremely good food. Mr. R. stayed with us and did not isolate himself. He could not do it otherwise because I had to translate or order the food they wanted.

At the Fair itself Mr. R. wanted me to be always with him so that I could translate anything connected with business or just ordinary talk. Amongst various managers I met one who came from Vienna who was the head of the power stations there. I introduced Mr. R. to him and they did not need me there because this man spoke perfect English. Mr. R. told me later that this man was very interested in our type of switchgear because we had more safety devices than the Germans and was cheaper.

I never found out whether Vienna ever bought any switchgear from YSE but a Swedish Director ordered some. He could speak well English. He said to me, you English are funny people, it seems that we have to beg you to sell us your machines. The German ones have less protection gadgets, and are more expensive. The German salesman, a man just a few years older than I, said to me, your German's very good, and was very inquisitive, but I did not put him wise. I must admit I felt very uncomfortable in his presence. Then he wanted to know why we use so many safety devices. I said, that is natural in England because we do not want anybody to be killed and to have to pay compensation. He said, if anybody gets killed it his own fault. I was not surprised at him saying that. Besides ours were still cheaper than theirs. I can say that it was a wonderful experience having been there for a fortnight.

I have learned a lot but I was still glad to be home!!! As the saying goes 'East, West, home's best' and it was wonderful to be with my dear little wife.

Years went by and not much changed. At Xmas 1975 I had my 65th birthday. With permission of the General Director a wonderful birthday party was arranged in the big dining hall of the staff. About 200 people were there. I was presented with a lovely fountain pen which I still possess. The General Director made a speech and said amongst other things: I watched Sheridan when I walked along the balcony. He always had his nose to the grindstone or showed some apprentices how to do a job. He stuck up for you many times, even if you did not always deserve it.

CHAPTER 22: HOW WE SAVED 380 HOUSES FROM DESTRUCTION

One of my most interesting experiences in life was the battle with Leeds City Council to save our houses from destruction. It started with a visit by one of our neighbours, Mrs. O'Carol. She was very upset because she read in the Yorkshire Evening Post that 380 houses in our area will be considered a clearance area within 10 years. It meant a slump in the value of our houses to 30%. As I didn't read this paper I did not know anything about it. I asked Mrs. O'Carol whether anything has been done about it yet. Yes, she said, a South Headingley Residents Association has been formed several weeks ago. She is the Secretary and a Mr. Archer was Treasurer. I immediately joined and became a 'temporary' Chairman. And then a Mr. Parry joined us, who used to be with the City Council Architect. He advised us in many important matters. Then we had this meeting where we decided to invite the Council to explain why they are in such a hurry giving us only a fortnight to protest.

We immediately had several 100 small leaflets printed which were quickly distributed by our members. The leaflet was short - 'If you don't want your house to be destroyed, come to our meeting at Brudenell School. Our Councillors will also be there'.

Just before the meeting we gave several people a slip of paper with several questions on and stressed that there should be no shouting or swearing because this would only give the Councillors an excuse to abandon the meeting. At this meeting were 10 Councillors and they were astonished to see so many people in this hall. Some people had even to stand. I introduced the Councillors in a short speech: 'We have called this meeting in order to save our homes. but we also want this area to become a better place to live in. Improvement of houses, more trees, safe road crossings etc. Above all we want to press the Council to remove the stigma of the time limit 1976-86. At the same time we want this area to be declared a General Improvement Area. Our houses here are in a much better condition than other areas and could be improved at a much smaller cost than the destruction of perfectly good house. We also urge our Councillors to listen to the people who elected them and report their plans in time so that we can either approve or reject them. This would be true democracy!'

The Councillors listened. After this speech I asked those members who already had their questions prepared to start putting them to our Councillors.

1. Q: How many people in Leeds are without a home? A: There are 3 to 4 thousand people homeless.

Next Question: How many new houses are going to be built before *our* houses are going to be destroyed. 2nd Councillor: None at the moment, was his answer.

3rd Question: Where are we going to live when our houses are going to be destroyed. Answer: Start looking for houses in a different area!

That was a silly answer and it caused an uproar. I got to my feet and asked our people to restrain their anger. Our Councillors were not able to answer our questions satisfactorily but promised to study their own proposals and our reaction to them. In the meantime one of the Councillors came to my house and said that the houses around us were in good condition and would not be touched

and he would see to it that only 2/3rd of the area were destroyed. This made me so angry - that this man tried to bribe me - that I ordered him out of our house.

In the end our persistence won the day and all houses in Leeds 6 were left and are still there, apart from the school which was destroyed later and a new one more modern was built. The Council took our suggestions very seriously and the improvement started. But in our paper 'Headline' (some copies I still have at home) we urged people *for their own sake* not to let their houses deteriorate. Last year, when I visited Leeds again, I was pleasantly surprised to see most of them in good condition.

Our monthly journal was still sold in our whole area and even in other parts by other organisations.

I want to stress here that the person (Mr. Parry) who used to be with the City Architect helped us a lot when we were facing the Councillors. He knew what was going on there. We also had a shop where volunteers sold secondhand clothes and many other things, but the best and most useful success started when we were able to get eight lawyers who once a week gave free legal advice to anyone who came into the shop.

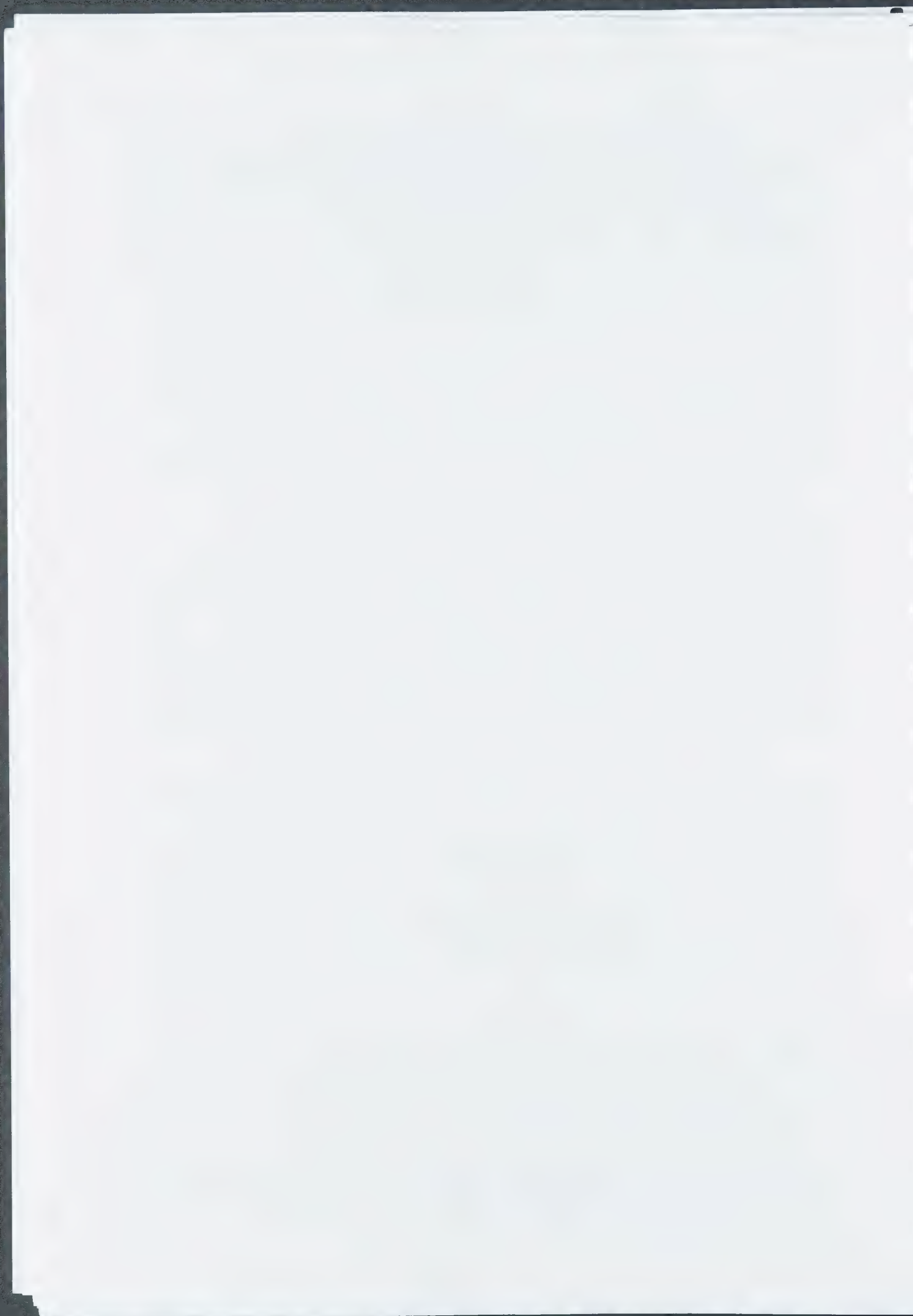
But our main activities were varied. This was possible because we had 20 members on our Committee. My policy was to encourage everyone to do what he or she liked best to do. One person for instance - a head teacher - surrounded himself with about 15 volunteers who covered the whole area to visit every pensioner. They made sure that the milk bottles were outside the door, they went shopping for them, brought them books from the library, took them to hospital when necessary, had chats with them and so on. One woman who has been living in India knew the Urdu language or other Asian languages and taught the Pakistani women to speak English. Others sold our paper 'Headline' from house to house, including Trude and myself. Some prepare our 'Headline' in their houses. Also in our house. I was not allowed by Trude to do that because I was very clumsy. It took me half an hour to put one letter a proper position in, so Trude said, you just make the tea and bring some cakes to the table.

Once a terrible thing happened. A little girl fell from the swings in Hyde Park and was killed. Her head hit the concrete on which the pillars were fixed. It was a sad affair and something had to be done. Some of our women got together and worked out a set of drawings, how to improve the playground and all the gadgets, including supports so that the pillars were fixed deep in the soil without the dangerous concrete. The Council was so impressed that their Engineers immediately used the drawings for the new safe swings etc. Even Meanwood Park, whose playground was three times as large as the one in Hyde Park got new supports for the gadgets. When Trude and I watched the children playing so happily and the parents not to have to worry, we thought how great it was having so much influence that the Council listens to us. At that time it was possible to have successes. It is different today.

Trude and I had of course more than one iron in the fire. We had an allotment not far from the factory when I worked. After work we used to go there and did a bit of digging or planting some seedlings or any job necessary. After an hour or so I went home and there was always a smashing meal waiting for me. She could cook, because she learned it in a place near Salzburg-Mond See where her parents had a hotel. She brought all her cookery books and some gadgets with her.

On Saturday morning I used to sell the Morning Star and some raffle tickets. It happened that one of the readers won £100. When I went to see her I of course gave it to her. She was so pleased to get it and said, now at last we shall have a fine holiday. I was pleased for her but next week her husband

was there and he was very angry. He shouted why the B.H. did you give that money to my wife, it belonged to me and not to her. I said, I am very sorry, I didn't know because my wife and I share everything, don't you want to have a holiday together? No, he said, I shall be bored stiff, and you don't come to this house any more. So I learned that not all families have the same relationship, unfortunately!



CHAPTER 23: JULY 1985 - AN IMPORTANT DECISION IS MADE

My wife and I lived a very hectic life. Apart from all the usual jobs which every family had to do, we were still involved in the Community Association, there was our allotment, then there were evening classes for Trude and I was teaching German three times a week. I really should have retired from teaching but I was asked to carry on until a substitute could be found. Apart from the income, which was useful when we went on holidays, it gave me a lot of pleasure to teach grownups because their main aim was to speak the language when they went to Austria or Switzerland on holiday. Then there was my Saturday sale of the Morning Star. After dinner, the allotment. Sunday, the thorough cleaning of the house and in the afternoon the allotment again. One day we decided that we sit down and discuss our future. This was triggered off by the death of Greta, Trude's sister. She died of cancer very suddenly, soon after her husband died and so we had no more relatives apart from our son who lived in Lichfield with his wife and two children.

We had been there several times and we always liked to go to this small but beautiful city with its lovely cathedral. It was clear to both of us that our future life should be in Lichfield. Trude rang our son and asked him whether we could stay for a few days at his house as we had decided to live in Lichfield if we can find a house which would suit us. He was in favour and his wife as well. A few days after we took the train to Tamworth where Peter was already waiting with his car. When we were nearing Lichfield we saw the Lichfield Cathedral with its three spires.

This always reminded us of Vienna because there they also wanted to have another two spires together with the St. Stephen's Cathedral which has a 138 metre spire. This happened over 300 years ago. The two spires were started with great enthusiasm until they reached the heights of over 30 metres. Then the Turks arrived suddenly with the aim to destroy Vienna in order to conquer the south-western part of Europe, but here they were stopped for many months because of the heroic defence of the Viennese citizens. Suddenly it looked like the Turks would achieve their aim when they were able to breach some of the defences through underground passages. It looked that Vienna would fall and the way to the south and western parts of Europe would be open. Suddenly help came from Poland. King Sobiesky came with a huge army through the Vienna Woods and destroyed the Turks. In their haste, they left many bags of coffee and so it happened that Vienna was the first city to open a café, but had no money to carry on building the two spires. And Lichfield, I was told, is the only city in the world having a cathedral with three spires.

When we arrived at Peter's house, a nice meal was already prepared which we very much enjoyed. As it was still light Peter took us round to a few streets, just to have a look whether there are some houses for sale, but these were all like Peter's house - one floor, high steps. Trude did not like any of them, mainly because of the high steps which she swore that she had had enough of in Leeds. The next day we went to the other part of the town where we found a cul-de-sac with ten bungalows. These attracted us straight away and there were two bungalows for sale. We stopped at one of them which had a beautiful garden. Trude was so enamoured with this one that she said I want this one. As soon as she had said it the door opened and a lady came out and asked, are you interested in buying this house? And Trude said, yes, we are. Like Queen Victoria!

The lady, Mrs. Bond, showed us round and pointed out to us that there is also a dining with special heating for the winter (Baxi gas fire and electric heating) for this she would not charge us anything. There was also a sliding double glazed door, leading to the garden. There were masses of flowers

growing and plenty of various fruits, including strawberries. A huge damson tree and at the back there was a greenhouse with tomatoes and grapes and to top it all a garden shed with all the tools and necessary gadgets. All this was surrounded by huge trees. When Trude saw all this she started crying for joy. She said, Willi, there will be a lot of work here for both of us, but it will be better than our allotment.

So Mrs. Bond took us to the main room where she got a cup of tea and some beautiful fresh strawberries. Then she showed us the two bedrooms and the bathroom all in pink condition. We did not haggle about the price when she told us. The next day we settled everything with the estate agent.

In the meantime Mrs. Bond telephoned the estate agent and told him not to sell the bungalow to anybody else, only to us. My son was worried, thinking we were too hasty but Trude reminded him that she has been working in this line for many years and had a lot of experience. We said goodbye to Mrs. Bond and to our family and hoped to see them in 3 months time. Then we returned to Leeds and told our friends the good news. A new Chairman was elected and the organisation had to get used to carrying on without us. Nobody is irreplaceable! There is always somebody coming up with new ideas. Before we left there was a farewell party organised. Photographs were taken and we were given a nice present; an original Leeds Pottery set made between 1770 and 1881. I thanked the organisers for this wonderful present which we cherished very much.

When we returned to Leeds we started our plan of action and there Trude was at her very best. She went first to her former boss, who was very pleased to hear the good news and promised her that he will arrange everything necessary for the sale of the house and the removal of all the furniture etc. left over. He also advised her to make sure that we leave the house a day before this first of October in order not to have to pay the next quarter or half yearly Community Charges. this was a very good advice.

Then we had to start thinking to prepare as much of our garden produce into our freezer, making jam etc. There Trude was at her very best. Before I stopped with my delivery of our papers I got myself in to real trouble. We used to sell tickets with football teams playing at next week's football matches. The man who guesses the proper results would win a certain amount of money. One of my customers won £100. When I went to his house next Saturday only his wife was in. Being used to our system where everything belongs to both of us, I gave the money to the wife. She was ever so pleased and said, now we shall have at last a nice holiday. She thanked me for it but not he when I came next week to his house. When he saw me he swore at me with the worst swear words he could find and very nearly wanted to hit me. But his wife held him back and said, he didn't know, be glad we have got it. He says that he shares everything with his wife and they can have a nice holiday together. Anyway, I started to go home and he shouted after me, don't you come here anymore or I will break every bone in your body. One can imagine that I never went there again. I learned that everybody has different ideas about marriage and habits.

CHAPTER 24: LICHFIELD, HERE WE COME!

Now began the main part of our preparations for the removal of our furniture and garden produce. We knew what we wanted to take with us and organised our duties accordingly. Trude saw to the furniture we could sell and to the removal people. My job was the freezing of various vegetables and fruit. All these went into the freezer chest. That was a continuous job. I made also various jams which were put in strong jars and then in boxes. But we also went, in between, to our various friends to say goodbye to them. Some brought us jam jars which we very urgently needed. Others came to the allotment in order to get a lot of red currants for making jelly for their next bazaar. The three months shot by like a flash. We knew that we could not take all the furniture with us. There would be no room in a bungalow. But we were able to sell a lot.

The removal people came in good time. Some of our frozen things went into a freezer compartment a day before we left. Our friend Bill Evans took us both to Lichfield in his car, where our son had the keys of the bungalow and garage ready. The removal people came half an hour later. In less than an hour everything was in position. Luckily enough there was room for the freezer chest in the garage and also in the dining room for furniture. Our friend wished us all the best and hoped that we would be happy there. If we should want to visit Leeds now and again, we would be heartily welcome. We thanked him for everything he had done for us in the past and promised to come to Leeds once we were settled. Then the first thing we did was have a nice cup of tea, a wonderful English invention.

Everything went smoothly. Nothing was broken. Trude was then sixty-five years' old and I seventy-five, but we looked forward to making the best of life as long as possible. Later our first neighbours came to see us, Mr. and Mrs. Bird. They immediately suggested that we should call them Bill and Jean. Naturally we agreed and told them that we are Willi and Trude (Sheridan). This immediately created a warm and pleasant atmosphere, then Jean asked, can we be of any help to you? So I said, yes please, we have got some trouble with the gas fire and are not able to light it. So Bill went down on his tummy and found the fault. After that there was no more trouble. In the meantime the ladies had a good chat and they quickly got to know each other. Jean told her about the Good Neighbour Scheme of which she is the representative in this area. Of course we joined for the yearly £1 which "ruined" us on the first day.

Then we met their daughter Amanda, an extremely intelligent young lady. Next morning she came across to our house and suggested that we should come with her to the Friary School where she is Prefect. We were there within five minutes. There she showed us their swimming pool which can be used by grown-ups as well. This was great news for us. We were very grateful to her for having pointed it out to us. In Leeds we had to go by bus, winter and summer and then over a bridge, then we had to wait for buses. But here! Five minutes walk! What great luck. We went three times a week and I am still going twice a week!

Our aim was to stop doing things and just have a rest. But resting was not in our blood. First we joined the English Literature classes, then French for me and Yoga for Trude. After that voluntary helpers at Oxfam and Cancer Research shops.

At the CRS there I met a lady who asked me to help her son in his German. He worked for a German firm which sold jewels in England in jewellers' shops. Occasionally he had to go to Germany where they had conferences. Of course only German was spoken. Here in England he attended

German classes but he needed more conversation. Of course, I gladly helped him, especially where he was very quick in grasping the basis of the language.

But our main job was the garden. There Trude reigned supreme. My job was digging and preparing the ground for the coming season and gathering the damsons which were left on the tree. I was still able then to go to the top of the tree. Trude was worried, but nothing happened. So, we were back to square one - busy and happy.

This reminded me of a colleague who retired at the same time as myself. I met him in Headingley and asked him how he is getting on. But he was moaning and groaning and wanted to go back to the factory to sweep the floor. Of course he was lonely. I asked him what do you do when you are at home and said, "Watching tele." I said, "Look, I have got an allotment, next to it there is one free, I'll lend you my tools and you can do something and be in the fresh air. I show you what to do and you won't be so lonely." But he did not listen. He just wasted away and later was found dead in front of the tele. This was a great shock to me and at the same time a lesson. Don't give in. Carry on doing things but rest in between, and take your age into account. And that's what we were doing here in Lichfield.

Trude and I made friends with all the families in the cul-de-sac. The occasion of my eightieth birthday was the catalyst. We organised a party and invited them all. My son and his wife Deborah came to help and it was a great success. From that moment on we started to know each other better after five years.

There were two more parties at the Adult Education classes which I attended and, unbeknown to me, the adult students had organised an eightieth birthday party as well as a Christmas party for me. This was a real surprise. In one of the classes there was a high chocolate cake and in the other a special bottle of Austrian wine. When they asked me to sing "Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht". I was reminded of the time when I, as a child, was singing this at the hospital in Vienna for the old ladies. It seemed to me that my wife had a hand in this plot. In the particular year we had more Christmas cards than ever - from Leeds, Austria, London and of course Lichfield.

But afterwards when it was all over Trude started worrying. It was all too good, this happiness can't last for ever, something bad is going to happen. (I was not surprised because originally her family came from Czechoslovakia and the Slav mentality was very often pessimistic, from past experiences.) So I said to her, come and sit on my knee and let's remember our difficulties. Have you forgotten all the bad and hard times we had together? The loss of our relatives, and how unlucky we were with our students which we had in order to pay for our house? We deserved a break and we must be proud and happy of what we have achieved. So be glad and stop being pessimistic.

But the blow came after two years - my little Trude died of cancer like her sister did. I could not get organised and so my son arranged her funeral and everything else. My neighbours were very helpful and friendly. Suddenly I found that I had more friends than I ever dreamed of. They invited me to their homes and gave me that wonderful, all healing, cup of tea. This, and my nature brought me back to a normal life.

Back to the past!

Before I carry on with my own part of the story it is necessary to tell part of Trude's story because it coincides from the moment when she was 4-6 years old. Her family used to have a small cinema. The very old fashioned type, when a pianist was playing all the time because these were silent films. I used to go to this picture house when I was visiting my poorer relations. There in front of the entrance stood a girl with beautiful black eyes and hair. She seemed to belong to the owners of this place. I thought that she was a very lively and beautiful child but otherwise I did not take any further notice of her.

Later, in Leeds, when we got to know each other, she showed me her photograph album and there was her photo as a child. So I asked her, did you every have a picture house? And she said, yes, this is me when I was a child. And I made a silly joke and said, "I always kicked her!" And she laughed and said, "Nobody ever kicked me!" So we both laughed and had a good time together. Of course I never did kick her. Then she told me that according to her doctor, Her mother was not supposed to have another child. But Trude came to prove the doctor wrong. Fate wanted it, that I should meet her. Her two sisters were not told about it and were sent to Czechoslovakia to stay with some relatives in order to hide the fact. After nine months they came back and had a terrible shock when they saw little Trude. Greta was 15 years older and Martha 17.

This type of picture house became old fashioned and they had to sell it. The father was a very astute business man and was able to buy a small hotel near Lake Mond See, not far away from Salzburg. There Trude went to school next door to the place where the Sound of Music was made. In Salzburg she went to a School of Commerce. Soon the black clouds of the Nazis came over Austria and a very hard and dangerous life began. Now, Greta was able to get a job at the CWS (Co-op) in Leeds. She was later able to get a job for Trude in Weybridge as a housekeeper, so both of them were saved. But the oldest one who had a boyfriend in Vienna could not make her mind up to follow her two sisters until it was too late. She and her parents and all the others were murdered in Auschwitz. The hotel was given to some Nazis.

After the war we tried to get the hotel back but the Austrian government told us that the people who got it are now the owners because the Hajek family could not pay the debt which they left behind. A Jewish lawyer whom I knew very well promised to do his best in Vienna but did not succeed. Although I suggested that we would turn the hotel into a holiday home for orphans it was not accepted.

We were not surprised to hear that one refugee who came back from America to get his superstore in Salzburg returned to the USA. He went back to New York because his shop was completely boycotted. He was able to sell it for a much reduced price. Many people got some compensation from the Austrian Government. Trude got a very small sum and I got nothing because I was too many years away from Vienna - luckily enough!

The only family left is a far removed cousin from Trude's side and my family here in Lichfield. I do not see them much because they are all very busy. The mother, Deborah, is the Deaconess of Lichfield Cathedral and writes the most beautiful sermons. She is very much liked in the church community and I would not be very surprised if she does not become one of the few women bishops in this area. Of course she is also otherwise also very busy, but there is her husband (my son) who is an excellent cook and much more versatile than I am. Several years ago he wrote a book on chemistry which is still sold in South America. The college (Sandwell) where he used to teach still sends him students.

Now, here is a special good example how two people can live together in harmony, although they have different religions.

Their children are very intelligent and study. Anna has been doing very well at Durham University. She told me last time when I saw her that a big firm in Durham is sponsoring her for another 3 years so that she may be able to get employment there.

Daniel is now in Cambridge and studies mainly computer science. He is keen on music, especially the piano. At school he used to help on many occasions when there were concerts and plays. I remember one day when our Victoria Hospital in Lichfield organised a money-raising event, there was some Scottish music and dancing. I was helping in one event to raise money and suddenly there was this lively music. I went there to see what's going on and there was our Daniel, dancing in a Scottish dress with a group of Scottish dancers. I was so pleased to see that because it reminded me of my young days, when I also took part in every event.

Peter himself plays the piano. In other words, it is a versatile family. Deborah's mother is in a home where she is very well treated and Deborah visits her whenever her busy life allows. The children see me whenever they come back to Lichfield.



AUTOBIOGRAPHY
of a survivor

W. Sheridan

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FOREWORD

This story covers a period of eighty-seven years. The idea of writing my life story has been brewing in my mind for a long time. When I was telling some of my friends some snippets of my experiences, they urged me to write about them before I pass away. So I decided about a year ago to take the plunge and put the story down just as it really happened. It leads me from Vienna to Poland, then back to Vienna; my experiences there, then back to Poland; prison, then return to Vienna via Czechoslovakia; my activities in the CSR; helping people to escape to Poland, and my own escape. Landing in Britain; experiences there and internment during the war. Life in Canada, then back to Britain; meeting my future wife in Leeds, and activities in Leeds and Lichfield.

My story starts when my mother was eighteen - two years before my birth on 23 December 1910. Then the sudden death of both her parents forced her into marriage with a Polish Jewish locksmith. My birth in Poland - then back in Vienna - orphanage - Hotel Astoria as lift-boy - apprentice as electrician - unemployment - 1927: the Blue Danube becomes white.

Joining a trade union - the Dollfuss dictatorship - the Nazis becoming strong in Austria - Hitler's entrance into Vienna - my flight to the CSR - helping refugees to get accommodation in villages - Nazi invasion of CSR - helping refugees to flee to Poland - ship to England - internment in Canada - return to England - join the British Army - marry Trude - get permission to work as electrician - work for English Electric, then Yorkshire Switchgear for twenty years. Live in Leeds for fifty years. Join my son and family in Lichfield.

Lichfield
March 1998

16.8.98.

*I hope that you will find it
interesting reading!*

Yours Willi Sheriolan



AUTOBIOGRAPHY

W. Sheridan

CHAPTER I: VIENNA -1907-1914

Vienna in 1907 was a thriving city. Being the headquarters of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, all important events took place there. Wealth came in from many countries. Trade boomed and continually expanded. Naturally, this had a great effect not only on the industry, but also on the cultural life of the whole country. New inventions were made, literature and music flourished, operas and theatres were full to capacity. The best musicians, singers and actors came to Vienna. The city was full of visitors from all over the world. The shopkeepers in the elegant inner city were very successful. It seemed that this wonder would last for ever.

The ordinary citizens did their shopping on the main roads leading from the inner city. The most popular one was called Maria-Hilferstrasse, and it is there where several of my relatives had their shops. They did quite well. In other words, they had no reason to grumble. One of them was my mother's father. Unfortunately, he and his wife died of a mysterious disease and left Elsa, their eighteen-year-old daughter, an orphan.

As is usual when serious problems occur among Jewish families, the relatives gathered in order to solve them. Firstly, the girl must stay in turn with each family. She must not stay in the flat alone. The flat and shop must be sold. She was spoiled and completely helpless. She was a pupil at the conservatoire for singing, as she hoped one day to become a singer. That dream was gone.

In the eyes of the relatives, the only solution was to get her married. This was done the usual way, as it happened to them in the past. You marry first, and love follows. They advertised in the Jewish journals, which were also sold in Eastern Europe, where there were millions of Jewish people.

At first there came Viennese people to look at the girl. She was beautiful, but had little money and no experience in housewifery - a poor advertisement for getting a husband! Old people didn't mind a very young wife, but she didn't want them. This attitude did not please the relatives, and eventually they made it clear to her that if she refused the next man who showed an interest in her, she would be abandoned to her own fate. Poor girl, she cried her eyes out: too young to marry; completely helpless.

One day, a man came from a place called Stanislaw, which still belonged to the Austrian Empire. (After the War, it belonged to Poland, and now it is in the Ukraine.) This man - a Mr. Silber - had read the advertisement, and took a chance to see Vienna and to find himself a wife. As soon as he saw the girl at one of her uncles' houses, he said he would marry her whether she had money or not.

She was forced to accept him, otherwise they would have abandoned her completely. He explained to the relatives that he had a workshop and a little house. He was an electrician and a locksmith with six people working for him. He was earning a lot of money.

The relatives were pleased to hear that, and the marriage took place a day after. Poor Elsa was heartbroken. Having to leave that wonderful city of Vienna and probably never to see it again. No

more singing lessons, and away from all her friends! The next day they arrived in Stanislau, where his sister and a lot of friends and neighbours awaited the couple. The sister immediately took my future mother to her heart and became a good friend.

When they arrived at their new home, there was only a flat. She could not imagine that two people could live in a place as small as that. She was shocked that he had lied to her relatives, and wanted to return to Vienna immediately. But Stella, the sister, restrained her and helped her unpack their luggage.

My future father had to promise that he would get a better place to live in. Stella explained to him that Elsa was used to better things, and that he had enough money to provide his beautiful wife with the best he could afford. Elsa had to get used to this new life, and this was only possible with Stella's help - she was a tower of strength. She taught Elsa how to cook wonderful and tasty Jewish dishes and many other things.

A few months later, my future father promised his wife to do everything she wanted, when he was told that they were going to have a baby! A larger flat was bought, and many new kitchen utensils. When he was told that his wife was pregnant, he was delighted. Up until then, he was known as a drunkard and a gambler, but an exceptionally good worker. He had a workshop - not very large - with two apprentices and two journeymen. They mainly did electrical installations and mechanical jobs.

When he had a lot of money, it disappeared very quickly to his vodka and gambling in the café. That's where he lost his money. But now he hoped to get a girl, and looked forward to it. He was so sure that the child would be a girl that when it was me who came into the world (with the greatest difficulty - my mother and I nearly died), he was shattered. From that moment on, he went back to his old habits and made my mother's life a misery.

All the neighbours were very nice and helpful in many ways. Stella was a tower of strength and when she was around, he did not dare to touch my mother. My poor mother begged her not to leave, although she had two daughters of her own to look after. My father was able to chase the neighbours out, but his sister knew how to handle him. Stella remained as long as she could.

One day, when the doctor came to my parents to tell them that my mother could not have any more children, her life became a complete misery. She withstood this until I was two years old, and then, with Stella's help, she divorced him and returned to Vienna with me - a heavy burden.

When we arrived in Vienna, she went straight to her favourite uncle. He knew from her letters what had happened to her, but when he saw her emaciated body and face, he could hardly believe she was the same person. He had always been nice to her, in spite of the other relatives. He and his wife decided to look after her until they had found her a job and a small flat. He would also pay for her until she would be able to fend for herself. Of course, there was no talk of singing lessons. There was only me shouting and singing to my heart's content, not realising what was happening in the world.

CHAPTER 2: 1914-1918

My uncle kept his promise to help my mother, but he stressed the fact that since the beginning of the War his business was very slack. He halved the donation he had given before, and later on, when she got a job, my mother had to use her poor wages for our upkeep.

His wife was also in favour of helping my mother as long as she did not stay there with me too long. They looked for a flat in a very poor area, and were prepared to pay for lodgings until my mother found a job. They found lodgings in a little street with three-storey houses. They met someone who knew a widow who needed a lodger. And so it happened that we landed on the second floor of no 3, Dianagasse.

The lady - Mrs. Wimmer, a woman I shall never forget - came to an agreement with my uncle. He paid her for the first three months in advance. Before he went, he again insisted that my mother should find herself a job as soon as possible. Mother promised to do her best.

At this stage of my story - according to what my mother told me - I feel that I have to say a few words about Mrs. Wimmer. When she found out what my uncle had said, she immediately reduced my mother's rent and suggested that we should eat our meals together. That would be cheaper and less time consuming. My mother was very happy about this arrangement. The cabinet was very small - so were we! Somehow, we fitted in. Mother was allowed to cook and use the plates and cutlery. The water tap was outside on the landing, as was the toilet. These were used by four families on each floor. It was really one of the slum houses in the row of streets. The women would stand around the taps chatting or arguing.

Mrs. Wimmer turned out to be a wonderful person. She had compassion and helped my mother in every possible way. Here was a lesson for me which has lasted all my life. A devout Catholic and a Jew can live together. Mrs. Wimmer had lost her husband at the beginning of the War, and left her with two children. The boy got married, but the girl still went to school.

Mrs. Wimmer told my mother not to worry because she worked in a place where they always look for someone who had a nice handwriting. Mrs. Wimmer was astonished when she saw a few lines which my mother wrote on a piece of paper. They decided to go first thing in the morning to see the boss of the firm for which she was working.

I was left with one of the neighbours, and off they went to the centre of Vienna, where in one of the little streets this office was situated. There Mother met the boss - a very energetic lady. When she saw my mother's handwriting, she immediately engaged her.

This firm wrote addresses for big firms who advertised. There were hundreds of lists with names and addresses. These had to be written by hand and stamped with the name of the advertiser - a very boring job. Until I was able to go to school, my mother had to do the writing at home, which meant that Mrs. Wimmer brought and returned the envelopes to the office. Both of them worked very hard.

Until I was five years old, I was allowed to stamp each envelope with the firm's name. Later, when I wanted to write as well, they both decided that I was writing like a cockerel on a dung heap. I was offended, but this didn't cut any ice with these ladies.

The daughter often played with me. But she also played tricks on me - especially shortly before Christmas. On the fifth of December, she dressed as a Krampas (the Devil) . She would come to the door and knock, shouting "Is Willi there?" The two women would say, "Yes, he is with us!". I was frightened and shouted, "No! I am in bed, sleeping!" But they would open the door and push me forward, saying "Here is that naughty boy." The girl would pretend to smack me with a broomstick. Then she would say, "Say your prayers now" and I would shout some Jewish prayers which I had learned. Next day she would come dressed as St. Nicholas and give me sweets and chocolates.

But soon life started to be serious, when I had to go to school. My mother had to go to the office with Mrs. Wimmer while I was there. When I returned, I was all alone. My school was not very far away, but after school I became one of the street urchins. When the weather was fine, I played with the other children in the street. As we didn't have any money to buy a ball, we made our own. It consisted of an old stocking filled with "horse-apples" of which there were plenty about. But the trouble was that the dogs also took part - without permission. The balls were soon torn to shreds and we had to find some more stockings. The dogs were nipping our feet while we were kicking them. Our mothers were not very pleased when they came home.

Sometimes we went to the Prater, a place like Blackpool. But there were woods as well. I was once brought back by the police, all wet and dirty, having jumped into a dangerous pool. This was the last straw for my mother. She cried her eyes out, and when I saw her crying I felt very guilty and promised her that I would never cause her any more trouble. I kept that promise. My uncle bought me a new suit with a serious warning that I should never get another unless I became a very good boy.

Now that both women went to the office, there was a chance to earn some extra money by taking several hundred letters to stamp for both ladies.

There was a time when my mother had to go to a hospital for an operation. It was a second-rate hospital, called Rudolph's Spital. During this period, I stayed with my uncle. He bought me a new suit so that I could visit my mother. She was telling all these people that I could sing, and at Christmas time I sang "Silent Night" for them. What surprised me was that they all were crying because "you have such a beautiful voice". And so they came from all the wards to listen to me. Since then I was asked to come with Mother to sing for them, and she sang like an angel. What I didn't understand was why these women always cried when I sang, until my mother explained to me that they were so touched - especially when I sang "Silent Night".

Every time I went there to visit my mother I saw a man with a violin. He was begging for money. But he didn't play - just one stroke. I watched him and asked him "Why don't you play something? People will give you more money." "Scram!" he shouted, "or I'll kick your backside!" I had to run away. It dawned on me later that this poor man couldn't play the violin.

CHAPTER 3

At the end of the 1914-1918 war, the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed. Their dream to remain a great power was shattered. What remained was a tiny country with seven million people, two million of whom lived in Vienna: in other words, a big head with a small body. Hungary was cut off altogether. Cereals, fruit and vegetables remained in the adjoining countries and could only be purchased at exorbitant prices. What remained was the countryside. Austrian agriculture was neglected and could not supply enough for Vienna. Rich people could get everything they wanted, but the rest of the population had to starve.

So began the great trek to the countryside by thousands of people. This was called the "Hamstern", deriving from that little creature, the hamster. People with bikes were better off. Others had to get up at three or four a.m. to be able to get potatoes and other vegetables. Those who were unable to walk had to stay at home. Others went to work for nothing on the farms all day, to be able to take home any vegetables that might be available. Vienna was starving. People got cards stamped by the authorities in order to get rations. Disease connected with undernourishment spread very rapidly.

Various charitable organisations sprang up to contact better-off countries in order to take the starving children for a period of time in order to alleviate the situation. Our Jewish Council contacted the Jewish Councils in Holland and Hungary. The response was fantastic. So one day my turn came, and I was sent to Holland.

I can still remember the atmosphere at the railway station: two hundred children and their parents, all excited. Mothers crying, and yet happy for the children to have a chance of getting some good food for their children and certain that they would be well looked after. My mother pleaded with me not to get into mischief, knowing what a wild boy I was!

The train was waiting and we had to jump in very quickly in order not to be left behind. Of course, we all said good-bye to our parents and soon they were out of our sight.

In the train each one of the children got a label on which was printed the name of the person and the town where they were going to stay. On the train we got some sandwiches, a box of chocolate and cocoa. That was our first treat. When we arrived in Holland at the station, there were groups of people waiting with placards of the various towns. On my label was printed Sheveningen and my name, Silber. All children had to go to various stations like Rotterdam, Amsterdam, etc.

There were several children who went to the train for Sheveningen - myself included. We arrived there after an hour. There were a lot of people waiting for us. We heard a lady shouting my name. I ran towards her and immediately knew, just looking at her, that I should be well-treated. We went by car to her house.

As soon as we arrived, she said she would prepare a meal for both of us, but you must first have a bath. I never had such a wonderful bath in my life! I just didn't want to get out of it. I could have stayed longer, but she shouted that the meal would be ready in five minutes. When I looked for my clothes, I found that they were missing and new ones were there instead. I put them on, although they were a bit larger than my own. Whatever I was wearing before was gone. The lady watched

me eating with tears in her eyes. "Why do you cry, Madame?" I asked. She said, "Just eat your meal. I'll tell you after." The meal was just out of this world. I didn't know what to eat first.

After several days had passed, she told me that she had had a son of my age who was drowned at sea by a huge wave. This is why she wanted a boy of his age as a guest. He was apparently slightly taller than me. She also said that in a few months' time the clothes would fit me as I would certainly be growing. I thanked her very much. One day she said to me, "You know, I have been listening to you just singing to yourself. Come to my piano and I shall play for you any songs you know. We got on very well until the two months allowed were over. She tried to adopt me, but the authorities said that this was strictly forbidden. The children had to be returned to their parents.

On the journey back, the children were telling their experiences to each other and didn't think much about their future. But as soon as we arrived in Vienna, the dirty station and shabbily dressed relatives brought us back to reality. Of course we were disappointed. But in spite of that we were pleased to see our parents again. My mother had tears of joy in her eyes and kissed and hugged me. After all, I was the only precious possession she had. At that moment, I forgot Holland. It was not her fault she was poor. I promised that I would try not to be naughty again and hurt her in any way. She smiled, but then she started crying again. I could feel that she wanted to tell me something unpleasant. So I said "Please, Mother, what is it that you want to tell me?"

And then it came out. "You know our relatives - these uncles and aunts. They think that it is not right you should sleep in the same room as I, with only a mattress and blankets. So they have decided that you should go to an orphanage. They will pay for you until you are fourteen, and then you will start as an apprentice in some trade. The older you get, the more of a burden you will become to me." I reluctantly agreed, but understood that this was the only solution to our problems. My mother promised that she would visit me once a month only, because this was the regulation, and that she would take me to see operettas, operas and cinema shows.

CHAPTER 4: LIFE IN MY FIRST ORPHANAGE - 1919-1920

It was arranged that in January 1919 I should go to the orphanage and stay there for six years until my fourteenth birthday. The orphanage was on the outskirts of Vienna. So when the fateful day came, I said goodbye to Mrs. Wimmer, the landlady, and her daughter. I thanked them for everything they had done for me. The girl warned me that if I am a bad boy the Krampas would come and smack me with a broomstick on my backside. We all had a good laugh about that threat, as I had learned long ago who that Krampus really was. Then we made our way to the orphanage by tram. I realised that it was necessary to break away from that sort of life, and that my relatives were quite right to send me to the orphanage. There was no other solution.

We arrived at the gate - No.21. We knocked at the door and the porter came and took us straight up to the office. The Director asked my mother for the necessary documents, which she gave him. Then he asked several questions which she answered as best she could. Then he said to her, "Visiting time is every second Sunday from 2 to 5 p.m. If he behaves badly, your visit is cancelled. You may go now." This behaviour of his was a great shock to her and she started crying again. How I hated that Direktor from this moment.

After my mother had gone he turned to me. "You have heard what I said. Remember, any misbehaviour will be severely punished. Do you hear me?" "Yes", I said. You had to say yes: "Herr Direktor" remember!

That was a poor beginning, I thought. Then he called one of the boys and told him who I was and to take me to the sleeping quarters on the first floor, and explain to me everything I needed to know. He said "Yes, Herr Direktor", and off we went.

He was the Head Boy, thirteen years old and knew all there was to know in that place. His name was Muller. He explained to me that we called each other by our family names, because there were so many with the same first names. "So you are Silber, and I am Muller." He was very friendly and I had the greatest respect for him.

He explained to me many things which became very useful in the future. "First of all, get out of the Direktor's way whenever you see him. I have never seen him in a good temper. Just behave quite normally and don't ever show him that you're afraid of him. Some boys never learn. Let's hope you are different. The next thing is something which you have to learn to understand. There are sixty children here. Most of us have one or two relatives only, but many boys have none. So we have decided that all the gifts we get when relatives visit us have to go into a basket to be distributed amongst all the boys, so nobody gets left out. Now, I hope you will take part in this scheme and not exclude yourself."

Although I was only eight years old, I understood this very well, especially since we children in our street always shared whatever we got. After a few seconds of hesitation, I gave him my packet of sweets - bar one. He laughed, thanked me and made it quite clear that this must remain a secret. We must not tell the Direktor, the Staff or our own relatives - for obvious reasons. They might stop giving us anything. Not everybody was happy about this scheme, but it worked for years and we were all good friends. Later, events occurred which were of great importance for our and the director's future.

Not everyone was punished. We learned that those boys who screamed and cried were beaten more often, which seemed to give the Direktor great pleasure. I had my share as well, but I never cried or shouted. This had never occurred to him. So he stopped beating me, especially as he could use me when he had several performances every year, because of my good voice. So he left me alone. The school was ten minutes walk away. We always had to walk there in twos.

These years in the orphanage were where my true character developed. Events which happened there influenced me immediately. I learned how to mix with sixty other children, the wrongs and the rights. No more playing in the streets with horse apples stuffed in old stockings and the dogs taking part. No more pinching apples from other people's orchards. And certainly no more jumping into dirty pools and being brought back by the police. I caused my mother a lot of trouble. What would have become of me if I had stayed with her?

How the Herr Direktor was thrown off his high horse

As soon as we came home from school, we put our books and copy books away, washed our hands and had our midday meal. It was poor and tasteless. We swallowed it, as there was nothing else. Then we went to our rooms inside to have a compulsory two hours sleep. But this time, we only pretended to sleep and just waited until the Herr Direktor made his usual round. Once he had gone, each room became a beehive of activity. We were all fed up, and decided to act the same evening.

Muller and others went from room to room to make sure that everybody knew what to do. After the "sleep", we all went to the main room where we did our homework and read books or played various games. I had just started to learn to play chess, which became my favourite game. Others went into the yard to play handball. We were all excited about our action. Some were a bit worried. The evening came, and we marched into the dining room. The Herr Direktor was already there. He sat on his chair like a pompous frog. We could not detect anything in his behaviour to show that he had any knowledge of what was to come. This was a very good sign. So the two cooks came in with some sliced bread and that horrible herring soup. Each boy went for his plate of soup and bread and went to his seat. But nobody ate it. "Why don't you eat your soup?" he shouted. All the children with one voice shouted "We don't like the soup!" He got up and shouted again and went all red in the face. But we didn't answer any more. "Alright then. Say your prayers and go to bed!" he screamed. And we answered in one voice, "We haven't eaten, so we do not pray." He sent us to bed and swore that he would settle with us the next morning.

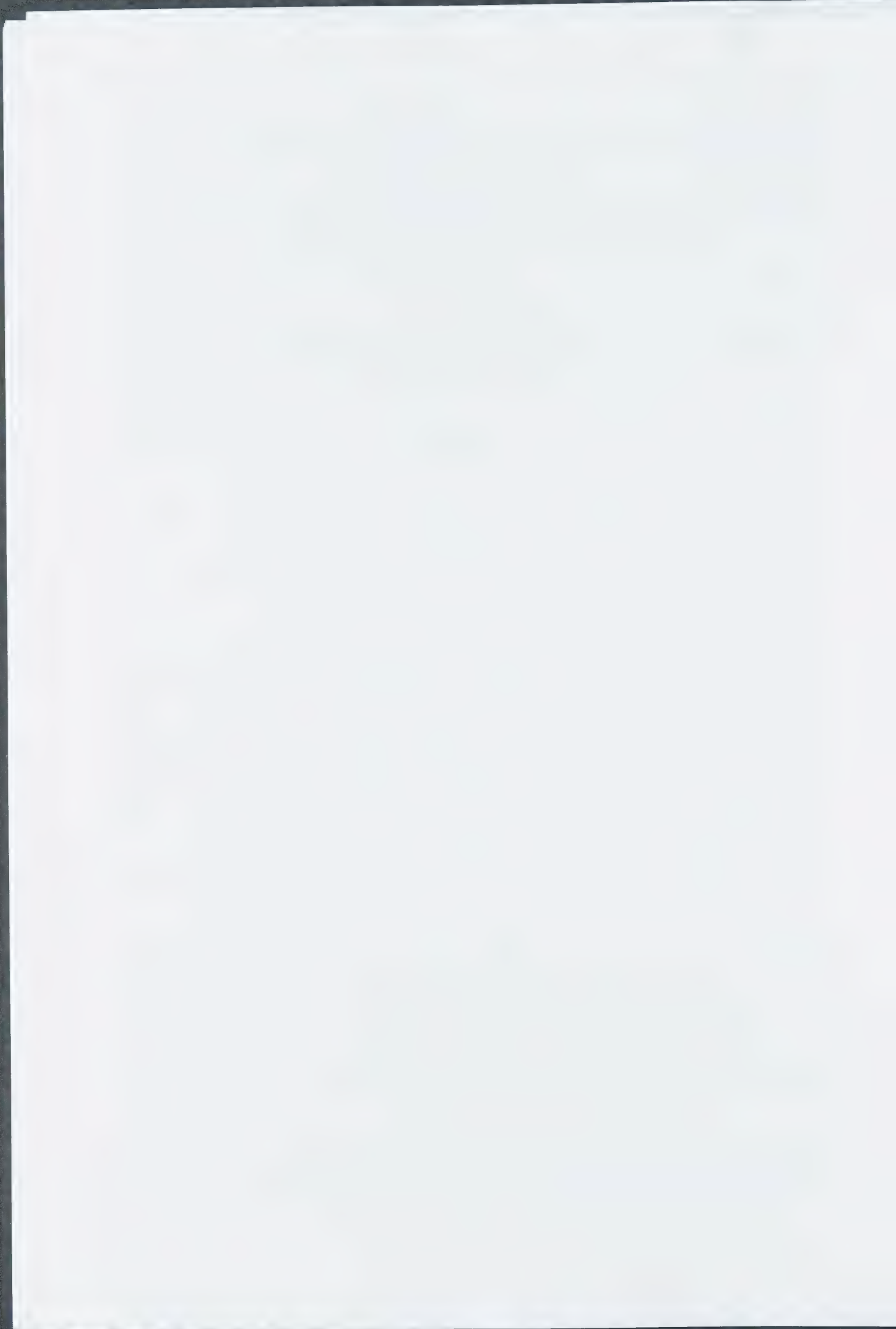
We all stuck together and not one of the boys let us down. The Herr Direktor did not know what else was waiting for him. We went upstairs, washed ourselves, then went to our bedrooms, opened all the windows and shouted "Hunger!" After a few minutes we jumped into our beds and stopped shouting. Only one boy carried on shouting, not knowing that the Herr Direktor was in our room because he had his blanket over his head, poor boy. So the Direktor tore the blanket off him shouting "See you tomorrow!" Then he ran upstairs to Room 2, so we and the boys in Room 3 shouted, and so it went on. We didn't know at that moment what we had achieved. None of us could fall asleep for a long time.

In the morning, we had our wash and went downstairs to have our breakfast. We couldn't believe our eyes! There was lovely hot coffee, the famous rolls with butter, cakes and jam. But not for everyone. Some of us got nothing. But the boys shared with us as soon as he was not looking. The

porter told us that the neighbours, although they hadn't much themselves, collected all this food and brought it to the door.

When we got to school as usual, the whole school was in uproar. The papers were full of it and naturally the Jewish Council as well. What the Direktor had been doing was misappropriating a big slice of the money provided for the upkeep of the orphanage. When we started this action we didn't realise or dream of the consequences of it. We found out later that the Herr Direktor finished up in prison.

Soon after this event our friend Muller left the orphanage as he had reached his fourteenth birthday. We thanked him for what he had done for us and wished him a happy future. A new director came, but only for a short time, and our orphanage was closed down. Thirty of us went to another place not far from Herklotsgasse and the other thirty somewhere else. We never heard any news of them. But this new orphanage was a heaven for us in many ways. All the children's parents or relatives were informed of the new address and came to visit us at the first opportunity.



CHAPTER 5: OUR NEW ORPHANAGE - 1921-24

Before we left the orphanage, a member of the Jewish Council came to see us. He wanted to express very strongly that such behaviour as had occurred in this orphanage would not be tolerated again. We should have told our relatives about it and they in turn would certainly have contacted the Council. They would have been able to deal with the matter straight away. Now the whole Viennese press was only too keen to write about it and give the Council a bad name. "This time, however, you will go to a different place. A very rich Jewish gentleman had, several years ago, donated a huge house with garden and trees, to be used as an orphanage. There is plenty of room for sixty children, a proper swimming pool in the cellar and a great library. The food there is excellent. There is no reason why you should misbehave. Troublemakers will be instantly removed."

Only thirty of us were taken to this place, but the other thirty boys were sent somewhere else. We said good-bye to each other, and especially to Muller, whom I met again several years later. When we arrived at our destination, we could not believe our eyes. At this moment, we thought, that our Councillor did not have to worry. None of us had ever seen a place like this before and we looked forward to enjoying it. At the gate there was a thirteen-year-old boy waiting for us. He ordered us to put our things into a passage, and then go to a long row of tables and benches. The local boys were already sitting there very quietly, staring at us as if we were some sort of animals from the jungle. We were told to sit down on the empty half of the benches and not to speak a word until the Herr Direktor would come and make a speech.

As soon as he arrived, the big boy took out his whistle and blew it very strongly. Everybody had to get up and stand like a soldier until the director gave us permission to sit down again. He welcomed us and wished us a happy time here, but warned us to behave, or we would be in deep trouble. Then he pointed to the boy whom he called Ernst Kohn. "This young man is responsible for the discipline here because I am very busy in the office", he said. If you have any problems, tell him and he will see me or help you to solve them himself. He knows the place inside out." Then he left, but first we had to do the same procedure as before.

Our lot were astonished. We couldn't believe it. Soon we had to get used to it ourselves. At last we got our first meal, which was excellent. After our meal, Ernst Kohn got up again and made his own little speech. It was mainly for our benefit. "Remember", he said, "this place here is not Herklotsgasse and you are to behave like everybody else here. I am responsible for the discipline here, and anybody breaking our rules will be punished. Then he explained that there were three bedrooms, A, B and C, and our lot would be split up ten to a room, and mingled with the other ten. Then we had to take our belongings to each bedroom. Mine was on the first floor and the others (B and C rooms) on the second floor. We gladly agreed to that. After all, we were orphans and wanted to be friends with the others and get to know them and also to find out what was going on there. We soon found out.

When there was an opportunity, some of the boys approached us and told us that Ernst Kohn had formed a club which he called "XYZ", and the members were his bully boys. They were distributed to each bedroom to see to the "discipline". One of their duties was to rob the boys of gifts which visitors brought them. These were distributed among themselves. The children were frightened to complain because they knew that they would be beaten up. When we told them what we had done

at the Herklotsgasse they were astonished and hoped that one day that could happen here as well. I was ten-and-a-half years old by then.

It was necessary to find out who the bully boys were. Once this was known we could spread our influence among the others. This took a while, because E.K. and his gang watched our movements.

Now it is necessary to say a few words about Ernst Kohn. His parents came from a theatrical family and he had the theatre in his blood. When he talked, it was always in a theatrical way. He was Julius Caesar or Nero - always somebody great. When he discovered the wonderful library in one of the rooms, it gave him the chance to learn more about the theatre and plays. So he started to stage plays for various occasions. The first one was for the Direktor's birthday, which pleased him very much. There were more plays for various other occasions and these were always successful. In appreciation for these activities he was made prefect. In this way the Direktor killed two birds with one stone. He made Kohn happy and at the same time put part of his duties on Kohn's shoulders.

From that moment on, Kohn's character completely changed. He became overbearing and arrogant. In order to keep a grip on the boys, he surrounded himself with some of the tougher boys and started a new regime. Then he created his XYZ club. He exercised his power mainly where the children did their homework - a special room with benches and tables and a podium with chair and table for himself. Here he ruled supreme. Anyone wanting to go to the toilet had to put his hand up and ask for permission. He did not allow the boys to go to the garden and write and read outside when the sun was shining. There were plenty of tables and benches, but he could not control the boys there.

So his rule became very oppressive. He could do all this while there were only thirty boys, fifteen of whom were his gang. Once we arrived, there were thirty more, and we had to find out who was who before we could change all this. He, in his arrogance, did not realise that he provided plenty of material to plot his own downfall. Our strength came from the boys themselves who kept complaining to us about what was happening. We could see it ourselves. He smoked secretly. He robbed the children of their gifts. There were his bully boys and his Club XYZ and - worst of all - the boy who always played girls' or women's parts in his performances. Nearly every night he was forced to go upstairs and be misused. And on top of this, all his bending of the rules which stipulated that we must have the opportunity to go to the garden and enjoy it.

We never had the opportunity to see the Direktor ourselves, so we had to think first how to handle Kohn on our own without destroying him and to see to it that there is no fight. We knew that most of the boys were on our side, but if we would have had a fight, we would all have been thrown out as troublemakers. Muller taught me a lot, and I still remember his saying, "Think first, then act. Make sure that your facts are right and remember we are all human beings with our own weaknesses." And with these words in my mind I suggested to the boys the following, which we discussed thoroughly to make sure that we have the vast majority behind us. This was easy because they were all very unhappy with the state of affairs.

Kohn and his gang were completely isolated. It started with Kurt, who was second-in-command, to fetch the "girl" upstairs for his usual dirty game. We surrounded him - Robert was his name - and did not let him go. I said to Kurt, "Go upstairs and tell Kohn that this boy will never go to be your play-girl." When the five bully-boys tried to intervene, they were only five against our fifty, and Kurt quickly ran upstairs to tell Kohn what had happened. Kohn came down with the rest of his gang, but not alone, because all the other boys from rooms B and C came down as well. In other words,

fifteen of his against forty-five of ours. He could see that he was finished and went all pale in the face. He shouted "Everybody to bed!" but nobody went.

This was his last order. He could not believe that this could happen to him. This was the moment that we had chosen to conclude the matter in an amicable way. I was asked by all the boys to be spokesman for them all. Having learned from our friend Muller, I addressed Kohn quite frankly that we did not want to destroy him by telling the Direktor what he was doing behind his back, because he would then be thrown out of the orphanage in disgrace and this would certainly destroy his future. "Go to the Direktor and tell him that you would like to resign, because you want to concentrate your full energy towards your schoolwork during your last six months in the orphanage. We hope that you will still be able to stage a play before you go, because this might be the last one until someone else can follow in your footsteps. Rest assured that nobody here will betray you."

He thanked us all with tears in his eyes - as actors are able to do. He did what we asked him to do. His XYZ club was dissolved and from that moment on we started a normal life and the orphanage became a better place to live in. When the weather was fine we had our meals outside under the trees, even when we suddenly found caterpillars in our soup trying to share our meal! We fished them out, but carried on eating. Sometimes a sudden shower forced us to run for cover with our plates or books, but altogether we were very happy there. Kohn became a normal boy again, and our "girl" Robert was just a boy like all of us. When we played nine-pins he often beat us.

A few days after these events, the Herr Direktor acknowledged Kohn's resignation. Then he asked me whether I would be the next prefect. I declined, but was prepared to be the spokesman for the boys if they would have me and a necessity should arise. At a special meeting, the majority agreed that I should represent them if such an occasion arose. Only a few bully-boys were against me. Many of them had no relatives at all. When I suggested that we should distribute all gifts among all the boys, everybody was in favour. From that moment on, life became normal, and from then on a new phase in my own life started.

Later, I became very interested in books and the basis of the German language. Our German teacher was very interested to find that the boys from the orphanage spoke German exactly as it was written in books, whereas the Viennese spoke in a very strong dialect. So it was easier for us to understand poems and stories and the grammar, or write letters. Even now, it is difficult for me to speak in the local slang. We always got the best marks in German. Now our teacher, Herr Schmidt, asked me if I would also like to attend his afternoon classes. This surprised me very much. But he immediately explained that there are days when he is unable to come and he thought it would help some of the boys with their grammar. He said "I have watched you when you thought that I wasn't there: how you explained to them difficult grammatical points. So I asked your Direktor for permission to keep you here on certain days when I have to attend meetings. I don't live far from here, and I would like you to come to my house afterwards. My wife will look after you until I come." And that happened quite a few times. The lady prepared some drinking chocolate for me and some wonderful cakes. We chatted quite a lot until the teacher arrived. I told him exactly what had happened at the school and he was highly satisfied. Sometimes he came a little later and found me in the best room singing with his wife playing for me at the piano. That is where I started to learn my favourite Schubert songs. The Direktor at the Orphanage was always informed by telephone where I was.

Apart from visiting days, we spent Sundays in the Vienna Woods - unless it rained. On Saturdays, we had to go to the Synagogue which was only about thirty minutes away. The Direktor had a daughter - ginger-headed Elsa. She was about twenty, and we were all in love with her. But we were very

naughty, especially when she had her bath. The window was a bit high, and of course we lifted each other to see her. She knew it but allowed us to have the benefit of watching her!

Sometimes when the ladies in the kitchen prepared sandwiches for our outings, I got up a bit earlier to help. There was Elsa, supervising. She would come and kiss my forehead, and her red hair would cover my face and head. I got all flustered, and the whole staff would have a really good laugh, shouting "Don't be afraid - she won't eat you!" I quickly disappeared, but later on I got used to it. Elsa usually worked in the office, and knew everybody's history. When my mother came to visit me, I told her about Elsa. She said, "Don't go near her - she is dangerous." None of us boys thought so.

The last three years in the orphanage became hectic. Besides taking part in the activities there and at the school - which I really liked - there was a new one, which gave me a lot of pleasure. I was asked by the Direktor to do one more job, and that was to take a bunch of letters and distribute them to the Jewish bookshops, which were right in the centre of the city - mainly in one long street. (As a matter of fact, when I was last in Vienna, the same shops were still there.) I had to see the owners, who were mainly Jewish. In order to make a good impression, I had to be well-dressed. Some of the owners called me into the office and had a little chat with me and promised to send us several books. A few only said that business was bad and they could not promise anything.

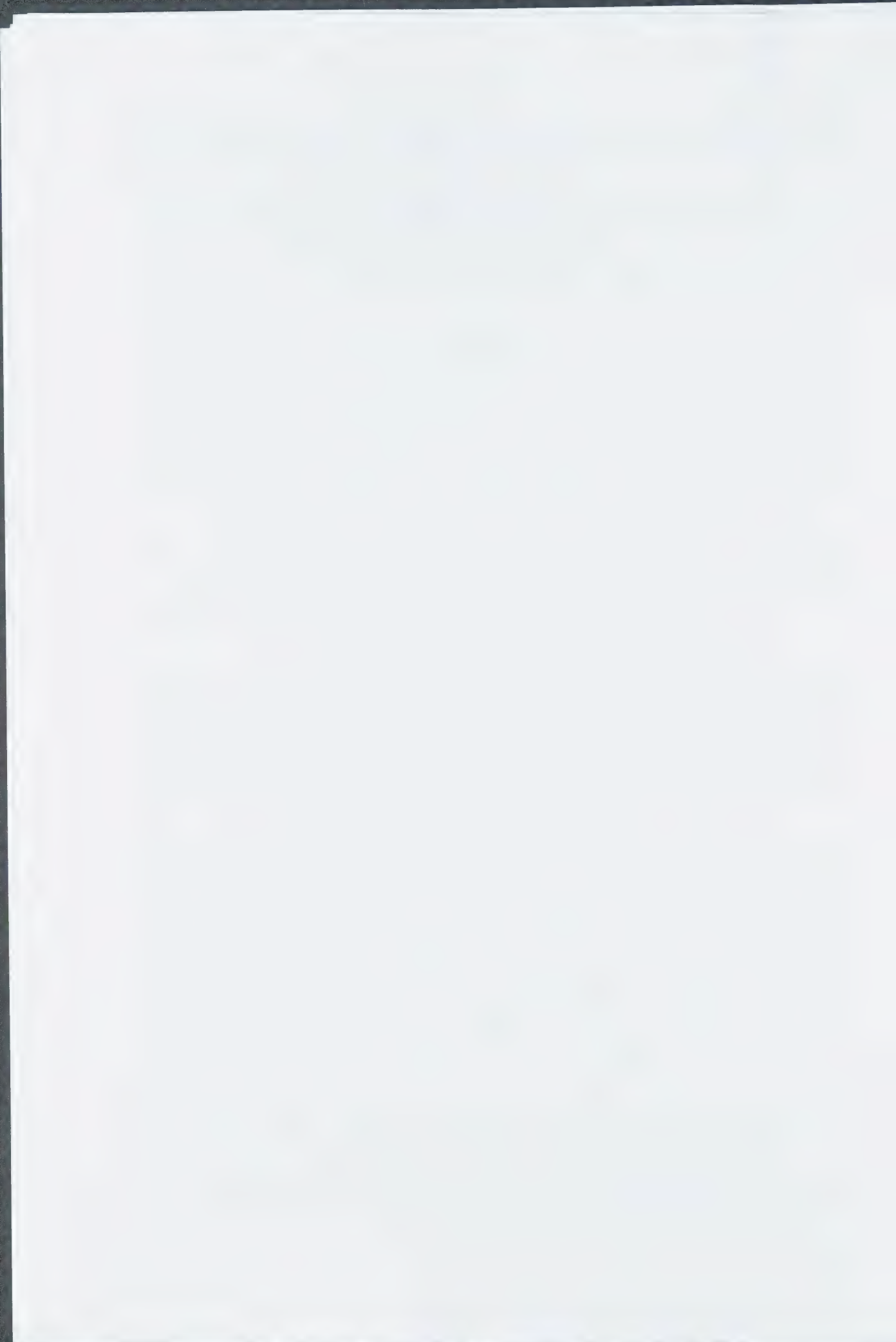
All in all it was quite a success. Although I was not told to enter Catholic shops, I took a risk and went in. I thought I would try. I thought, they can only say "No." It turned out that they did send us some very interesting books and some highly religious ones. I remember as if it was yesterday how astonished our Direktor was when all these books arrived.

My mother used to work about five minutes away from this street, so I used the opportunity to see her. When she saw me, she got a terrible shock. "What happened?" she cried, "Have they thrown you out of the orphanage? You know I can't help you." Luckily enough, Mrs. Wimmer was there as well. "Look at him," she said, "he looks quite happy. Come and tell us why you are here." Then Mother was happy again, when I had explained all about the books. Then I went, caught my tram, returned to the orphanage, and went straight to Elsa's office to tell her the good news. Our Direktor was very pleased when the books arrived after a few weeks.

My last days at the orphanage were spent saying good-bye to everyone there and at the school. When I got my School Certificate from the headmaster, he told me he was very satisfied with my results and wished me a successful future. He hoped I would get a job fit for my abilities. But the best thing would be to carry on studying at a grammar school. I told him that my mother hadn't got the money, then I went back to the orphanage disappointed. In the meantime, my mother had arrived there and told me the "good" news that she had a wonderful job for me which would solve all the problems about where I should live. "You know," she said, "you can't come to Diana Gasse (street) with me because there is no room there. But the place where you go to work is a fashionable hotel near the Opera. You get your food there and sleep in one of the rooms with three other boys. Today you will be a lift-boy, but tomorrow you will own two hotels!"

Just so! After she had told me all this she went to see the Direktor, but I went to see his wife with whom I had spent many hours singing while she played the piano. She taught me the beauty of Schubert's songs and many other gems of music, which I preserved in me for later days. When I told her what my mother had in store for me, she was very sad and had tears in her eyes. But she said nothing. I said goodbye to her and she gave me a kiss on my forehead and wished me all the best. Afterwards, I went to the kitchen staff who already had prepared a big parcel of food, including apples

and a nice cake. They all wished me good luck. Then I went to see the Herr Direktor and thanked him for all he had done for me and all the other children. But my main interest was in seeing all my friends who shared with me all the ups and downs of the past years. I was not worried for them as they were sheltered there and never wondered what the future had in store for them. I left the new boys in good hands. They learned a lot from me and others, just as I learned from Muller. That will bear good fruit for the future. At the end I went to see Elsa to say goodbye to her. She gave me a warm-hearted kiss and said good-bye and visit us.



CHAPTER 6: HOTEL ASTORIA - 1925

The Hotel Astoria was quite fashionable, but still second class, mainly because it was in a side street, and for that reason its clientele were second class as well - although it was quite near the Opera and other famous places. In front of it all along the street were a lot of taxis. Opposite was a shop where one could buy material for magicians and all sorts of masks and fancy dresses for people who borrowed them a ball. That was in 1925. That's when I became a lift-boy.

When my wife and I went to this street in 1990, that shop was still there with exactly the same masks and other materials. Nothing had changed since 1925. Even the outside of the hotel was still the same. I had a uniform with three rows of brass buttons, and a hat with two brass letters "HA". I could see the same boys coming out of the hotel and shouting "taxi", carrying the same type of suitcases. The only worry I had at that moment was that the Secretary would come out and shout "Why have you left the hotel without my permission?" My wife and I had a good laugh about this. Imagine! 1925 and 1990 mixed! Unfortunately we couldn't see the inside as we were not looking very presentable.

I can still remember everything that happened there, right from the beginning. First, the Secretary: medium-sized, slightly gingery hair, and very unpleasant-looking. He was in charge of the whole staff - a very important man! When my mother presented me to him, he said, "Your son is not very tall. He won't be able to carry those heavy suitcases." My first mistake was to open my big mouth and say, "Oh yes, I'm strong enough to carry heavy loads. We were always wrestling at the orphanage, and I was the third strongest." He gave me a dirty look and told me off, saying, "How dare you speak without my permission!" My poor mother was worried that I would lose the job before I even started. He told her not to worry, he would curb my tongue and bad behaviour. Then he sent her away and started to explain my duties. My only asset at that moment was that I was able to speak pure bookish German without the dialect which is spoken in Vienna. Then he pointed out to me that I would not get any wages until I had proved to him that I had learned enough to deserve them. But I would get plenty of tips from guests if they were satisfied with my service. "You will get a new uniform and hat, which you have to clean, otherwise you will pay a fine." He stressed the fact that I should have a midday meal and a supper, but no breakfast as there was nobody available to make it in the morning. Everyone had to provide it for himself. I asked him what happened if I had no money. "Use your tips sparingly", he said.

This was a sad affair, and I started to feel worried and dissatisfied. Every morning at 8 a.m. all lift-boys had to report to the secretary's office, where their buttons would be checked to see if they were shiny and their uniforms clean. Anyone found with spots on his clothes had to pay a fine "which will go straight into this box for charity. Remember you must be polite to our guests. We do not want any complaints. Understand?" Yes, I said.

One of the boys took me up to the fourth floor to our bedroom. He said to me, "No matter what you do, how well you clean them, he will find a way to get your money. It's for himself." So that was a poor beginning. The two hotels which my mother had forecast for me disappeared in the blue heaven of Vienna.

I learned the trade fast enough. Soon I had my first big trouble. I took a lady in my lift to the first floor and greeted her very politely: "Good morning, madame." She went all red in her face and shouted, "I am a Countess, and you should have addressed me as such!" "Sorry, I didn't know", I said. "You

should have known! Take me immediately to the manager!" I took her and apologised and then she went. Although I had little money, I had to pay a fine. That was not fair, I thought, and from that moment I began to think how I might get away from that place.

And then there was this affair with the Hungarian actress. Her eyes and her hair were black and most beautiful. She flirted with everyone and the boys were fighting for a chance to take her to the second floor in the lift. In the long run, everybody had the opportunity, but not I. She would ring the secretary and ask him to send Frank or Charles to her room to fetch a parcel or an important letter and post it. Usually he stayed there quite a while. When he came back, he would only have a piece of paper in his hand, which he threw away. Everybody had a chance, until the secretary called me and said "Go to the second floor, number 332. There is a person there who wants an important letter to be posted immediately." I took the lift and went to the door of room 332. I knocked and a woman's voice said, "Come in." When I opened the door I saw her in a beautiful fur coat. She said, "Come here, boy." I went nearer, and suddenly she threw down her coat and there she was, all naked. I turned round and ran to the door and the lift. I was so disgusted and at that moment she became ugly in my eyes.

When I arrived in the main hall, the secretary said, "You have come back quickly. The others stay much longer upstairs." So he knew what was going on. He supplied her with young boys, and I had to be another victim. I determined to leave that horrible place.

CHAPTER 7

In front of the hotel were all the taxis, and the drivers with whom I used to have many a chat. Among the taxi drivers was one with whom I had a special friendly relationship. We usually talked about all sorts of things when he was available. I told him what had happened and he was disgusted and said to me, "You did the right thing. Apart from everything else, you could have got a terrible disease and suffered all your life. I think it is time for you to leave this place and find something which would fit your intelligence. I listened to his advice, and funnily enough, the opportunity came.

I used to go swimming in the famous indoor swimming pool, the Dianabad. There I met some of my old friends from the orphanage. I told them about my horrible life at the hotel and my dilemma about having somewhere to sleep if I left. "Don't worry about it," they said. "We are all in an apprentices' home run by the Jewish Council. Only those who are learning a trade can live there. But the manager who runs it is very helpful. He has a list of jobs available for new apprentices. Come with us - it's only ten minutes' walk from here. It's worth a try!"

So we went there with great hope, chatting about past experiences. The place was called "Zukunft" (Future). I met the manager and told him about my problem. All the boys vouched for me and told him about the orphanage. He immediately looked at his list and among the various places available was one which I immediately liked. This was an apprenticeship available at a famous electrical firm. He rang the firm up, and luckily there was someone available in the office. An interview was arranged for 10 a.m. the next morning. The manager, Mr. Fisher, said things were going well for me and if I was accepted he could give me a place in the home. The problem of payment could be settled once I had started my apprenticeship and got my first wages.

Then he asked me if I always did things on my own. "No," I said, "but this time I have to. I don't want to be a liftboy for ever, inventing little tricks to get a tip from guests, like a beggar." I also told him a little about the Hungarian actress. "But when everything is settled and I have a place to sleep and can learn a proper trade, my mother will have to accept the established fact and be happy about it." He congratulated me and promised to keep a bed for me.

Then I returned to the hotel. Next, I asked the secretary whether I could have two hours off to see my mother, which he permitted. I then had a long interview with the manager and foreman at the electrical firm. They were both well satisfied., especially since Mr. Fischer had guaranteed for my good behaviour and a place at the apprentices' home.

Only then did I go to see my mother at the office. When she saw me she got a shock and went all pale. Mrs. Wimmer came as well and said, "What have you done this time?" Then I told them the whole story.

Mother was very pleased to hear all this and agreed with me that I should leave this horrible hotel immediately. She got permission from her employer to accompany me to the hotel secretary and ask for my instant release, as she had found for me a proper apprenticeship as an electrician. But he did not allow me to say goodbye to the boys. There was no need to worry about that, as I was now able to see my new friend the taxi driver to whom I told the whole story - including about the actress. "It is better for you to become a real tradesman" he said. "I'll tell the boys about it and warn them that they should stop having anything to do with that woman. They could get some terrible diseases and

you just escaped this danger." Then he congratulated my mother for having an intelligent son: "He will go places yet - don't worry about him." As usual, Mother had tears in her eyes, but this time, happy ones. We shook hands and he wished me a happy future. (Little did we know what was waiting for us all!)

My dear mother was very happy at this moment and I took her back to her dreary office. I promised her that as soon as I was organised we should have some Sunday meals together. That pleased her very much.

Afterwards, I went to the apprentices' home and told Mr. Fischer that I had followed his advice and that my mother settled everything very satisfactorily at the hotel. When the boys came back from work, we had a happy re-union around the bottom corner of the street. There was a little shop with a front garden and a few tables and chairs. We could always get there some hot sausages with mustard and a bottle of sweet apple wine, some crispy cakes with cream in them and topped with chocolate. And below, we could see the Little Danube floating by. (The Little Danube is really the canal which takes all the rubbish from Vienna onto the Danube.) Those were happy days. Mr. Alter, the owner, became like an uncle to us.

Early in the morning, I entered the workshop from the back, where some boys of various ages were already assembled. The foreman was busy instructing some of them, slightly older than I, to go to various parts of Vienna and do some jobs. In the meantime, other apprentices had arrived. I introduced myself and shook hands with them. One of them, an extremely friendly young man, lent me an overall and offered to show me a shop where I could get one very cheaply. The atmosphere was very relaxed.

Later, during a 10 a.m. break, a boy called Karl came to see me and said that everyone here is a member of the Metalworkers Union and asked me to join the apprentices' section. I naturally did. So, that was a good beginning. I was shown what to do and quickly learned the trade. Then I had to enrol in the apprentices' school, which was a must. Slowly, I was integrated with all the others.

One day another young man came to see me. I could see he was very enthusiastic. He told me of the thousands of young people who have become members of the Young Socialists, a section of the Social Democratic Party. I joined and became one of them. His optimism was so infectious that it was not difficult for him to convince me. We became good friends, and later the others called us the two W's - William and Walter.

There was a little restaurant nearby where we could have a cheap meal. A lot of us went there every day. In the evening, when I returned to the apprentices' home, they all wanted to know how I was getting on. They were pleased to hear that I was quite happy.

The weeks went by very quickly and I felt that instead of becoming a beggar I had become a useful citizen. On Sundays we went to a restaurant as in the past, and Mrs. Wimmer had to come with us. On the First of May and 12 November (Austria's Freedom Day) 100,000 of us marched on one of the Boulevards (the wonderful broad roads of Vienna) singing "Vienna belongs to us". Only two days in a year!

CHAPTER 8: APPRENTICESHIP - THE BLUE DANUBE BECOMES WHITE

I was now well-established at the apprentices' home. There were plenty of my mates from the orphanage but also many new faces. Some had girl friends whom they were meeting occasionally at the gates of the Jewish girls apprentices' home. They were in the same position as we were. They had no parents or relatives. They learned cooking, typewriting, hairdressing or other trades for females. We often went to the Vienna Woods together, but they had to return sooner than we boys. At that time it seemed to us that the sun was always shining. But soon thick clouds came which destroyed all our hopes.

Most of us were members of the Social Democratic Party simply because we agreed with their policies but also that this was the only party which allowed Jews to join them. The Christian ^{Socialist} Democratic Party was strongly anti-Semitic. It was natural that we were part of the SDP and we were always enthusiastic in all their activities. A good example was when at the end of 1927 the Danube and the whole city was covered in ice and snow. We all put our names down to help the City Council in their endeavours to clear the city. We helped old people, distributed bread and hot coffee, shifted snow into the lorries.

How the Council managed to solve this big problem in a city of two million people is still a wonder to me. But nothing could be done to help the Danube. It looked like the North Pole - ice and snow everywhere. All the snow in Vienna was put into big lorries and thrown onto the ice on the Danube. That was also the time when unemployment spread slowly into the whole country. I was one of the first victims, mainly because my name being Silber was tainted as Jewish. No matter what praise I got for my abilities at work, I was sacked - especially when they found out I was a member of the Young Socialists.

Wine and happiness

My uncle Bela rescued me by employing me in his newest endeavour - an automatic buffet. You put your coin in the slot and out came a hot sausage. My duty was to see to it that there was always something in each compartment. Hot meals one could get from the kitchen - i.e. Hungarian stew (Gulasch). My main job was to see to it that all gadgets were in working order, that there was enough wine in each jar and that the kitchen staff replenished all the food.

There were ten different barrels of wine in the cellar. I had to refill the jars and take them upstairs. When I had to do it the first time, I did not quite listen to my Uncle's instructions, being too excited, and so I got myself into trouble.

Every barrel was marked type and country, so were the jars which were placed underneath each barrel. So it happened that I sucked some of the wine to make sure that the system was working, and put the pipe into the jar afterwards. This procedure had a wonderful effect on me. I felt very happy and as I was keen on singing, I gave each country the benefit of my voice. Hungarian songs, waltzes from Vienna and other parts of Austria and of course the Marseillaise when I filled the French bottles. My Uncle came down into the cellar and shouted "What's up with you?" I said to him in a jolly voice, "Oh Uncle, I am very happy." He knew what I had done and sent me home to have a good sleep. I slept for twenty-four hours. When I returned he gave me a real telling off and I had to

promise him always to listen and do things the way he wants it. What surprised me though was that each jar had been properly filled according to the name and country of origin.

This endeavour did not last long. It became out of fashion. People put wrong coins into the slot and the wine was flowing all over the place. People stole cutlery. I could not be everywhere at the same time. At the end he had to close the place down. Then he started a little factory making buckles for belts, and that was a disaster as well. So, I became unemployed again.

Vienna by night

In 1930, when I was nearly twenty, I only had an income from the unemployment benefit, like so many others. It was my friend Walter, whom I met accidentally, who suggested that one could earn a little bit extra by selling newspapers by night in the various cafes. There were plenty of them all over the area, which was like Blackpool but much more spread out. He explained to me that the newspapers came out at midnight. You had to pay in advance for a hundred copies, but you couldn't bring any back. This was the only snag. The newspaper was called "Das Kleine Blat" (a Daily Mirror type of paper). "Remember," he said, "You have to be very fast because you won't be the only one."

The next day I went to the place where the papers were printed and got my hundred copies. On the way to the playground I sold a few at some small cafes, because other sellers went to the bigger ones further on. I went to one café which was full to capacity with male prostitutes all painted like women. It was a horrible sight. I ran from there as quickly as I could. Somebody shouted after me but I didn't stop until I came to the next café. There I sold a few.

At about 4 a.m., I observed something very interesting. There was this café, and all the people who were inside came out including the waiters. One of them locked the entrance and they all went home. Then the next shift of waiters came, waited for two minutes, unlocked the door, and all the waiters and guests went in. The people carried on playing chess, cards and reading the papers. The reason for this was that there was a law which did not allow a café to be open more than twelve hours. Neither were the staff to work longer than that. So this was a way of beating the law. In the meantime, more people came in whose work started at 6 a.m. not far away from the café, and I had the chance to sell some more papers.

Whatever I had left I sold at the huge market in the city, called the Nashmarkt. Then I went to sleep for a few hours and then got the midday papers which were very popular: the Midday Telegraph, Die Stunde, etc. My customers were mainly people who had a stand selling vegetables and fruit. They were very nice to me and never bought a paper from anyone else. Sometimes they gave me some fruit slightly bruised, and there were even some who gave me a lettuce or tomatoes. There was one lady who had a stand working for a famous cake firm. She made various cakes and gave away slices for people to taste. She always wanted me to come to her stand when she was ready to go home, to give me a few slices to take away.

Once there was a lady who was 25 or 30 years old. She asked me, "Where did you last have a really good meal?" I said, "I sell my papers on the main road, the Landstrasse, where there is a cheap restaurant and I have sometimes a good meal there." She said, "What about having a good meal with me?" "Yes", I said, "that would be very nice." She gave me her address. After I sold my midday papers, I had a few hours sleep and went to her flat which was in one of Vienna's famous council buildings. I had a good meal and thanked her, of course. When I wanted to go, she said, "Just stay

for a while and have a rest. You can always get the last tram to the newspaper building." So I stayed there nearly every day. I must say I had a good time there, until one day she said, "You can't come for a while because my husband is coming back from Africa where he has been working. But afterwards it will be alright again." I got a terrible shock. I said, "I didn't know you were married. I would never have come here." And so my good days ended. But all the women knew about it, and had a good laugh at my expense!

I had enough time to spare to find places near the market where I could sell. There were some wine restaurants where a lot of people were still drinking and singing and having a good time. They were buying the papers although I saw quite a few lying about. I still had some left for the market people. There I sold quite a few as nobody else had been there so early.

These people became my regulars as I promised them that I should be coming so early every day. At the end I had only about five copies left. Then I went home to sleep until 11.30 a.m., when I sold the midday papers which were quite popular. I never shouted the name of the paper. I always asked nicely and in this way made many regular buyers. This I did also on the Main Road. There were plenty of shops. Very often I got a cheap meal in the smaller restaurants. At 1 o'clock, I was already in bed and had a well-deserved rest.

One day I went to the barber to have my hair done and I became quite a regular customer. I saw a lot of pictures on the wall of his shop and asked him "Who is this fellow? He reminds me of various operas I have heard." "That's me", said the barber, "I used to be an opera singer, but now I am too old for it and so I became a hairdresser." He originally came from Roumania. Then he said to me "I have got the feeling that you have a good voice. Come into the back room and sing something for me." When he heard my voice, he said, "You are committing a great sin to yourself if you carry on running about with newspapers. Now listen to me. At the Vienna Conservatoire there is a former great opera singer. He teaches now. He knows me well and I shall tell him about you. Give me your address and I shall get you in touch with him."

Two weeks later, it was arranged that I shall have an appointment with Professor Lirhammer. I went there with hope, wondering whether a completely untrained singer would have a chance. But then I thought, if one does not try, one cannot win. And so I entered that wonderful building in spite of not being nicely dressed.

At the entrance stood a huge porter. He looked down at me and asked, "What do you want?" I showed him the letter with my appointment to see the professor. He looked at it, probably thinking "What is the world coming to?" But he had no choice and sent me to the room where others were already waiting.

Then I met Professor Lirhammer, a huge man. He looked at me and said, "Don't worry. I looked like you when I came here for the first time." Then I had to go into another room. After about half an hour I was called into the main room where there were six professors. All former singers or musicians. My professor asked me whether I had brought some music with me for the pianist to accompany me. I said, "I'm sorry. I can't read music." "Oh," he said, "you unhappy raven! How can you come without music? The pianist won't be able to accompany you." The pianist saved me by asking me what I wanted to sing. I said, "The aria - from the opera....." "Rigoletto," he finished for me: "La donna e mobile!" And they all had a good laugh, because every singer wants to show off with this aria. Then I sang with all my might and he accompanied me. The professors listened very seriously. When I came to the end, my professor gave the pianist a wink. I could see that, but didn't

know why. The professor said, "Can you sing it again?" I said yes, and I sang it. But I observed that this time it was played on a higher note. It was more difficult, and was more shouted than sung. The professor just wanted to know the range of my voice. The pianist was very friendly and said that I had done quite well under the circumstances.

Then I had to wait in another room, where the professor came to see me. He was very serious and said that I had a very good voice, but rough. "If you follow my training method", he said, "you will be able to achieve something, and your voice will become smoother. But don't be under any illusions. You will never be able to sing heroes' parts - certainly not Siegfried, because you are too small. But there are plenty of other operas that need singers of your size. Remember what I am telling you now. There will be no more singing until you get my permission. I shall recognise the difference in your voice when you come for the next lesson. I am very strict on this point, as I do not want to waste my time, and somebody else would take your place."

Soon I started my scales, and nothing else. Up, down; up, down! I also had to learn how to read music. This happy but strainful time which lasted a year came to a rapid end. My professor called me to his office one day and told me that he was not allowed to teach pupils who could not pay the full fee as there was a big economic crisis. "I would have gladly paid for you, but our salaries have also been cut" he said.

Then I went to my mother and told her the bad news. She said, "You seem to follow my fate" and as usual started crying again. At this time - Christmas - I could go with my mother and sing for the people in the hospital again.

My customers in the cafes and the market were very sorry for me when I told them the bad news. They themselves also suffered in the economic crisis. My Rumanian friend was very sorry to hear my tale. He thought it was probably that my name had something to do with it. The authorities at the Conservatoire were using the slump as an excuse to get rid of me. Most Austrians were, and still are, anti-semitic.

At the opera, the pupils would get free tickets, but there was a condition attached. The chief of the clapping group would tell when to clap or boo. I got a ticket. He told me "There are two lady singers. When the first one enters you have to clap, but when the next comes on, you boo." I never boo-ed. I just clapped for them both. He watched me, and said, "This is the last free ticket you got." But my principles did not allow me to act so disgracefully.

CHAPTER 9: THE FALL OF AUSTRIA AND THE DISASTROUS CONSEQUENCES

This part of my story covers the grimmest part of my life. From 1918 to 1938, I was just a little player in the coming tragedy, but I was involved and am able to tell the tale as I saw it, and from what I was told or read in the newspapers.

Austria after the War was a poverty-stricken country and had to struggle for its survival. The eastern and south-eastern part was strewn with all sorts of weapons which were left behind by foreign soldiers making their way back to their own countries. But a new set of people invaded the eastern and south-eastern parts of Austria. Hungarians, Yugoslavs and Italians gathered most of the weapons and began to settle on Austrian territory. In order to defeat them and send them back home, two main Austrian groups united to fight the invaders. Once their aims were achieved they split up again. One group was called the Heimwehr, which was a strictly Catholic organisation, and the other was the Republican Defence Corps or RPD - the armed unit of the Social Democratic Party. Both parties were gathering as many weapons as they could for future use against each other, but they had to hide them because Germany and Austria were supposed to be completely disarmed. The head of state in Austria was a fanatical Catholic: Cardinal Seipel. His aim was to create a totalitarian Mussolini type fascist state. In order to achieve his aim he had to destroy the SDP, and force them to hand over their weapons to the Heimwehr. Once he succeeds with this, the next step would be easier. But first he had to get more influence among the starving Austrian people. And so he devised the following plan.

He got in touch with the British and French governments and warned them that if there should be a plebiscite in Austria, the hungry Austrians would give an 80 per cent vote for unification with Germany. But if the Allies were prepared to invest in Austria, well-fed Austria would give them (the pro-Nazi party) only 20 per cent. He at the same time warned them that the gateway to the eastern and southern countries is the bastion Austria, with its high mountains. It is easier to conquer these countries from Austrian territory. This bastion must be kept intact.

The Allies took that hint, and invested plenty of money and increased their trade with Austria. They could not lose, as they made Austria dependent on them. Not only that: by accepting all this "help" Austria got itself into deep debt. But nothing was said about it at that time, in 1927.

Naturally, Cardinal Seipels' influence rose, especially in the agricultural areas. He felt now strong enough to demand from the SDP that the Republican Defence Corps should hand in their weapons to their deadly enemies, the Catholic Heimwehr. This the SDP was not prepared to accept, because Dr. Seipels' side would be so strong that he could take over the country and declare Austria a Mussolini-type fascist state and dissolve parliament. In Austria the police (which consisted mainly of farmers' sons and was strictly Catholic and anti-SDP) were and still are armed with revolvers, and those on horses have sabres. What the Cardinal needed was to create an opportunity to use all these forces against the SDP.

This opportunity occurred in a little village (Schattendorf) where two Heimwehr people who were hidden behind a barricaded inn shot and killed a cripple and his child. These two killers were brought to trial and acquitted. That particular event was, when one looks back with hindsight, the tiny spark which started off a fire which ultimately ended with the Second World War.

Next day, when we went to work, we bought the Arbeiter Zeitung - the working man's gazette - and read what had happened. It was decided by the SDP that in Vienna we should stop work and make our way into the inner city and march in peaceful procession along that wonderful broad road where all the important buildings, shops and hotels were situated. There were 100,000 people. We shouted slogans in connection with the trial and sang our revolutionary songs. My mates from the shop and many other apprentices marched together. The Republican Defence Force saw to it that nobody got out of line.

It was planned that at the end of the road we should turn left into the next street, and then disperse. Suddenly, we could not go any further. We heard shots fired by the police, which started to create panic. - especially when police on horses arrived and started hitting and wounding many of our comrades with their sabres. We could not go back, as there were so many thousands behind us, neither could we go forward because of the police. It was impossible to get to the next street either. Suddenly there was a lot of smoke, and we could see the Palace of Justice burning. The fire brigade was unable to get through, and the Palace burned down to the ground. Next we heard some more shooting and it was the Heimwehr. Our leaders told the RDP not to shoot because there would be a civil war. We asked ourselves, what use is it to have the RDP if they are not allowed to defend us? Then the voice of a loudspeaker was heard. It was Cardinal Seipels: "Shoot and have no pity". Since then, he was called the "No pity Cardinal".

That day was 15 July 1927. I was only not quite 17 and shall never forget it, especially since one of my mates was killed and two were injured.

That was not the end of all the trouble, because the Palace of Justice was burned down to the ground and it was never found out who the culprits were. That day was the beginning of the end of Austria's liberties and also the start of the growth of the Austrian Nazi Party.

When Dollfuss came to power in 1933, he wanted to dispense with parliament. He was helped to achieve this aim by a curious incident. A very important vote had to be taken, but as parliament was equally divided, only the president's casting vote could decide. He was a social-democrat and would have voted for his party. Now one of the deputies - a social democrat - had a sudden urge to go to the toilet. He gave his voting card to a fellow deputy and asked him to use two cards. This had happened often in the past, and had always been recognised. The government was defeated by one vote. The vote was contested on the grounds that there was no proof that the absent deputy had authorised his vote to be used. The president resigned in protest (something which he should never have done, as the two vice-presidents did the same). So, the other side won.

With the help of some lawyers, Dollfuss was then able to abolish parliament, and from then on ruled the whole country with an iron grip. Trade Unions, various political parties - especially the social democrats, the communists and the Nazi Party were banned. The prisons were full and many hangings took place. Dollfuss declared a Holy Catholic State. In later years, when these events were discussed, the social democratic party was criticised, not only by their members, but also by many other organisations for not using their weapons when it was necessary. They hesitated too much.

Just at this time, my mother married a Christian, which upset the whole family. Her best friend, Mrs. Wimmer, died and she was lonely. Unfortunately she wrote to my father to tell him the news. After a few days, he came to take me to Poland. I went first to my friend Walter and told him the news. He was sorry to let me go, but hoped that I would return one day.

CHAPTER 10: MY LIFE IN POLAND AND MY RETURN TO VIENNA

After a very sad parting and many tears, mainly on Mother's side, Father and I entered the train. She stood there, a lonely person. I nearly jumped out of the train but it was gathering speed. Had I known what was waiting for me, I would have risked that jump. But it is not given to us to know the future. And as I am by nature optimistic I hoped for a better future. After all, I escaped great danger from the Nazis.

During our long journey from Vienna to Stanislaw, my father and I used the opportunity to get to know each other. Although my mother had told me quite a lot about him, it was mainly negative. She admitted, however, that he was an excellent locksmith and mechanic. People came from far and wide to have complicated jobs done by him. He told me about his workshop and the people who worked for him. He was also very proud of his important customers. Even the Greek Orthodox Church wanted only him to do their complicated jobs. What ruined him was alcohol and gambling. He admitted his weakness and promised me that now I was with him he would do his best.

Then I told him I was an electrician and had a certificate having passed my exams in the technical college. He was very excited about that and said he would try to get me a licence so that I could work under him and that he could expand his activities and improve his standing in the town. So with talking, eating and sleeping we came nearer to each other than I had hoped.

But when I asked him whether he had a house or flat for both of us, he became evasive. This made me suspicious and I started worrying. At various main stations en route we got some hot food, and he would get himself some spirits - mainly vodka when on Polish territory.

When we came to the city of my birth, I was very much excited. There at the station, my father pointed out a group of people and said, "There, look! There is my sister and the whole family Rubin, your relations. And they came running towards me. The fastest was their mother, who had helped my mother to bring me up. She cried and laughed and kissed me as if I were her best-loved child. And then there were the children: Sořka, Minka, Tonka, Edka, Lonka, Isak and Jakob. My aunt told me that her husband was still working in his smithy, and the eldest girl and her husband were still at the market, selling clothes. We had to take two droshkies to take us all home.

One of the girls started making tea and warmed the potato cakes which had been baked before they came to meet us. Everyone got only one piece of sugar with the tea, which they let dissolve slowly in the mouth until they had drunk the tea. The reason for this was that sugar was so expensive that they could only afford two pieces per person per day. Mother had to lock up the sugar so that the boys should not pinch any. Only rich people could afford more sugar.

Whilst we were having our simple meal, somebody suddenly observed that my father had gone without even saying good night to me. He left only a message with my aunt that he will come and fetch me in the morning. I said to my aunt, "This is strange. Am I not going to be with him in his house or flat?" Now came the first shock. My aunt told me that he has neither. He is a lodger with some people with whom he has been for years. And he left very little money with my aunt to find a lodging for me. I could not understand that. I told my aunt that he boasted in the train how busy he is and how many customers he has, so he must have a lot of money.

Then she started crying and the truth came out. "He does have a lot of money", she said, "But he drinks and gambles it all away. I cannot have you in my house, but I have found you a place where you will have to stay for a while. And I promise you that when some of my girls get married - so God will! - I shall take you in and you will pay me a nominal sum."

Then she took me to my new lodging which was very primitive. The old lady was very friendly and I immediately liked her. Then came my next shock. I looked for the bed, but there was only a very long box with a lid. I asked her where the bed was, and she pointed towards the box. Then she took the lid off and inside was a palliase filled with straw. I asked her "Where is the bed?" She said, "That's the bed. I said to my aunt, "Why did you bring me to this place? What have I done to deserve such treatment?"

Now I know why my father did not tell me about the house or flat - he never looked for one. And what hurt me most was that he did not have the courage to say so and disappeared without saying good night. He left my poor aunt, who had plenty of worries of her own, to deal with this unpleasant business. I was so upset about this that I was ready to make my way back to Vienna on foot.

Poor Aunt! She cried her eyes out and begged me not to go. In the meantime her husband arrived. We shook hands and he washed himself while his wife was preparing his main meal. So I sat down and when he returned we had a little chat. He looked very tired, much older than his age. He had only one person to help him in his smithy and it was a very hard job. (I always think of him when they say they have never seen Jews in an overall yet - as it happened in front of me when I worked at English Electric. I told them: there is one standing here. And I am not the only one: millions of Jews were working in Poland, and they could not even afford an overall!)

The old lady at my lodgings gave me some milk and bread and showed me where the toilet was, and the pump in the middle of the yard. I washed myself under the pump and it was very refreshing. I also did some Swedish gymnastics and went to bed. I slept extremely well. In the morning I had bread and milk again, which I enjoyed. The old lady told me she had prayed for me.

The next day, when my father came to take me to his workshop, I asked him why he made this journey to Vienna so that I should live and work with him, when he had not got a home for himself. I told him straight that I would go back to Vienna if he did not provide for a decent home for myself. He had plenty of excuses but did not promise to stop drinking and playing cards. I had to bide my time because it was impossible for me to change his habits within a few days.

We arrived at his workshop. There was a shield with his name and underneath "locksmith" painted on. We went into the yard. There were four people working. I could hear the clanging and banging, which were familiar sounds to me. Then he introduced me to a Polish fellow - Stanek by name. He was an excellent worker, but very proud. When I wanted to shake hands with him, I could only touch his fingers. But he worked for my father only because his name was very famous for excellent workmanship. Then there were two Ukrainian apprentices and one Ukrainian for any job. I immediately took to him. He was about forty and lived in the next village. More about him later. Stanek, the Pole, got his wages regularly because Father could not afford to lose him. The others had to wait for weeks for their wages. They grumbled but stayed as they would not get any jobs anywhere in 1933 because of the slump.

One day I reminded my father that he should get a licence for me so that I could start doing electrical installation, and that Kaliczuk the Ukrainian could work with me. He went promptly to the licensing

office and got it very quickly, as my father knew these people well. That made us both happy and he really changed his ways for quite a while. He stopped drinking and gambling. I also managed to convince him that I would collect the outstanding debts from our customers and pay our little staff their wages regularly. Only Stanek, the proud Pole, would be paid by my father, because it was beneath his dignity to be paid by me.

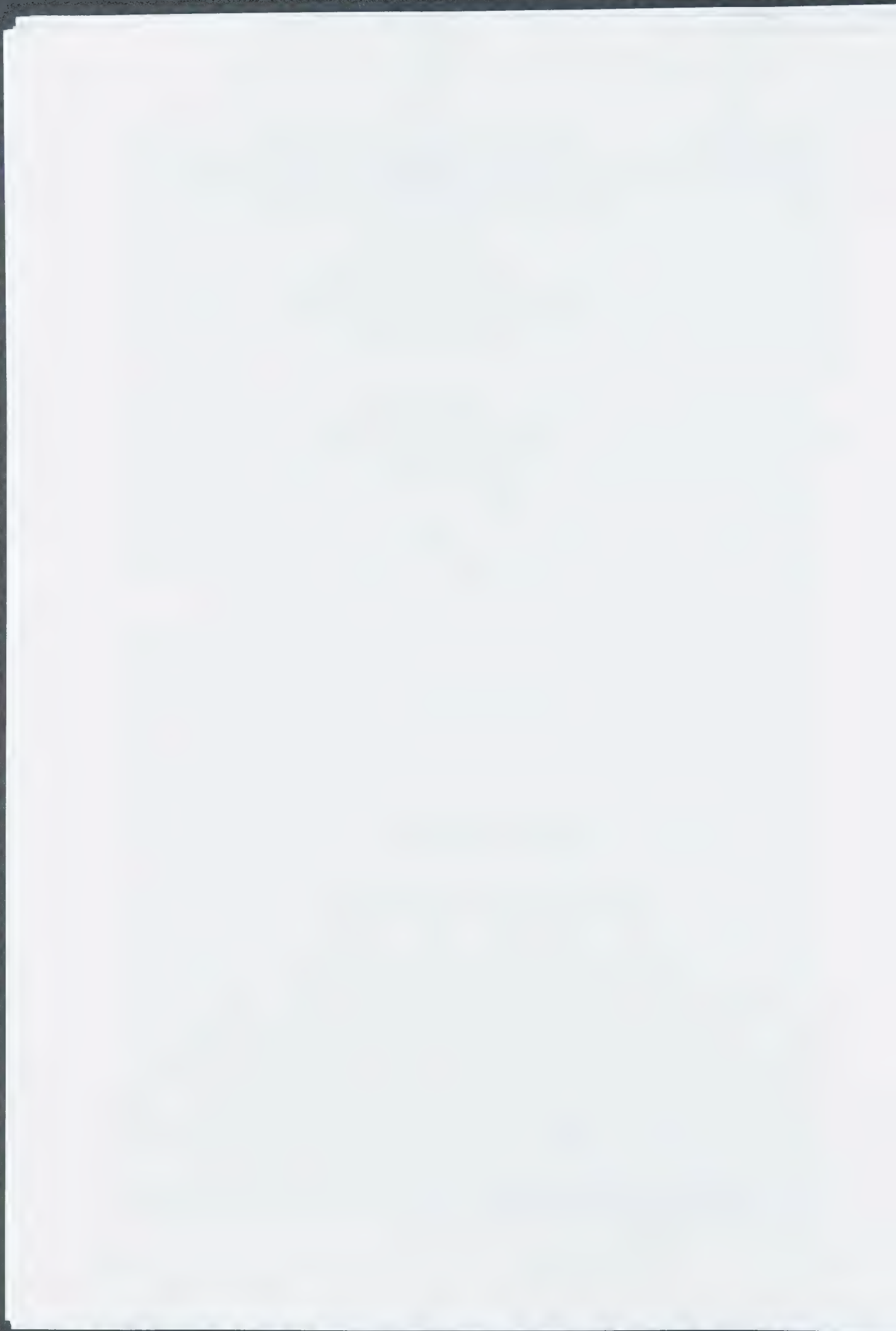
A terrible calamity happened in my aunt's house. The eldest daughter, Sophia, ran away with a Christian and married him. It was bound to happen sooner or later. She had no money and lived a miserable life at home. Soon she would be too old, which happens in many families and she would become an old maid.

Then the girl next in line, Minka, got married to a very nice young man. He came and asked her mother for permission to marry the daughter, which my aunt reluctantly allowed, because Minka was one of the two girls who had jobs which brought money into the home. For the time being I stayed with the old lady. She was known by all the people around as a healer. Women would come to her and tell her about a poorly child who wouldn't eat and was frightened. "Ah", she would say. Then she would take a pot and put some candles in and heat it. Then she poured water on the slightly melted candles and looked into the pot. Then she would say, "Oh yes, I know what the trouble is. A dog has frightened the child. When you get home, you will see that the girl will be alright." She would also say some prayers and would be given some eggs and a loaf of bread. Her visitor would go home happy.

I carried on washing myself under the pump and doing Swedish exercises. But one day a man came to see me and told me that I was being watched from all the windows around by the girls. He was a marriage broker and told me I could marry any of them. One had 800 dollars, another 700 dollars. I told him they were wasting their time and that I would only marry for love. From then on I only washed myself quickly and did my gymnastics inside the house.

Then my aunt asked me to come and live with them. She reminded me very strongly that we were blood relations and hoped that I would not start any trouble with the girls. "I watched you eyeing Tonka," she said. "That's how I used to look when I was her age." I promised that I would not touch Tonka unless to give her an ordinary kiss. And so I entered that house with all its troubles.

I paid in advance for two weeks, and all went well for a while. I also got to know my uncle a bit better, especially on Saturdays and Sundays. On Saturday he went to the synagogue to pray and had a proper rest. On Sunday he was not allowed to work because all shops had to be closed. He grumbled about that, because he thought that a six-day week should be allowed. But the Polish laws had to be obeyed. Shopkeepers, however, still sold things through the back door. The police knew about it. They came and knocked, the door was opened and they got a few Zlotys. This way of bribery went on all Sunday morning. After the ordinary policemen came the sergeant. He got perhaps five Zloty. Then a high-ranking officer. He would get ten Zloty or more. They were greatly annoyed when some of the shopkeepers decided not to sell on some Sundays. Bribery and corruption went on all over the place in every sphere of life. There is an old saying, after rain comes sunshine. But in my case the opposite happened. One Friday, when I made my round to collect money from our customers, my father had been there already. There were only a few customers who had not been seen. This was a big blow for me, because I had hoped to achieve a wonder. My aunt and I looked for my father in every café, but couldn't find him. I told the men what had happened. Stanek the Pole took all the best tools and disappeared. I was able to give the others some money, hardly anything for myself!



CHAPTER II: MY LIFE IN POLAND - 1933-35

In the 'thirties, when nearly all the world was suffering from the economic slump, Poland and all the other little countries could not extricate themselves from this disaster, and so it was natural that there were hunger demonstrations all over Europe, including Poland. Today, however Poland is one of the highest ranking countries in Eastern Europe, and therefore there is hardly any trouble.

After a long search my father was found lying in the woods under a tree completely exhausted. He must have been terribly drunk to have been in such a state. He was taken to a hospital where he died after a few days. I did not know him well, especially as he lived on his own. Lately I had seen him only when he came to the workshop to supervise. Then he went his own way when he found everything in order. But he was my father, and his death was a great blow to me. The whole family came to his funeral, and we all met at my aunt's house.

The burden of running our little workshop was not great, as the two apprentices left to work at bigger and better establishments. Only one person stayed with me and that was Kaliczuk. We became good friends, especially when we found that not only were we bound by our common jobs but also by having the same views about a socialist society. Not only that. He was against the Polish occupation of a very big slice of the western Ukraine, which the Poles named Eastern Poland. He hoped that one day this would be united with the rest of Ukraine and become part of the Soviet Union. (This happened after the Second World War.)

One day we got a big job for each of us. He had several jobs to do which were in his line, and I had to see a lady who knew my father and sent for me to re-wire her house, which she had just purchased. The house was on the outskirts of the town and stood in its own grounds. I knocked at the door and a lady opened it and invited me in. The first thing she said was "Are you Mr. Silber?" I said yes. "I am pleased to meet you", she said, "First let's discuss the job. I want you to re-wire the whole house and put lights in different places. I especially want a lamp outside over the entrance door. Can you do that?" I said I could. "The other thing I want you to promise me is that you tell me all about Vienna." I promised that I would, and also wrote down that I would do the job as she required it. But then I reluctantly asked her whether I could get some money in advance because my father had left me nothing apart from the tools in the shop. I promised her that she would be satisfied when the job was done. She gave me a certain sum, saying that she did not usually do it, but she would trust me.

Next day Kaliczuk and I borrowed a handcart and bought everything that was required. The job went on very smoothly as we were able to use the holes from the previous installation.

Later Kaliczuk had to go home as it was getting dark and his village was on the other side of the town. So I carried on for a while and then prepared to go home. She said "You can't go home now. It's raining very hard. Have something to eat and tell me all about Vienna."

The next morning I had a lovely breakfast and then Kaliczuk arrived. He was surprised that I was on the job already and not a bit wet. Later when we had finished the job she paid me more than I had asked for, gave Kaliczuk a good tip and sent good wishes to his wife and children. To me she said "My door will always be open to you, as I shall want to know more about Vienna." Kaliczuk went home,

and I to my aunt. I immediately gave my aunt a month's money in advance and a bit extra so that she would not ask any questions. I told her that as it was raining so heavily I was allowed to stay overnight.

The next day Kaliczuk told me that I should meet another friend, a Polish comrade, at his house who would like to get to know me. I told my aunt that I should be staying with Mr. Kaliczuk for one night. She was not enamoured of this, and a little worried. But at the end she let me go.

When we arrived at Kaliczuk's house, his friend was already there. His name was Jacek. We shook hands and knew immediately that we had something in common. We trusted each other. He told us about a meeting to take place in a week's time. He knew all about me from Kaliczuk and suggested that I should come along. He would vouch for me. We should meet many comrades from different strata in the country who were all united with one aim in mind: to defeat the fascist dictatorship in Poland. Jacek was able to translate some points which I did not understand. Then we were told where the next meeting was and dispersed. The next Sunday was luckily dry and warm, but we met somewhere else. This was policy. Each group came from a different direction in couples or singly to be quite inconspicuous.

In the middle of the wood was our meeting place. When Kaliczuk and I set off, his wife was a bit worried, but said that as she had been praying in the true Orthodox church, she knew God would protect us. So we went cheerfully to the special meeting.

Among the different groups were Poles, Ukrainians, and a Jewish left-wing socialist group. (More about them later). The main speaker was a Polish communist. He was pleased that so many had turned up and that so many came from different strata and nationalities, all with one aim in mind. At that time we could only distribute leaflets and fight for better conditions in the factories. We had enough of priests sitting in our union meetings writing down what is said and who the speakers were so that they finished up in jail. A few others also had a word to say. I was surprised to hear one of the Jewish group say some bitter words about their oppression. Later, I was asked to say a few words about happenings in Austria. I compared the situation in the two countries, and found that here in Poland they wanted to fight but had no weapons, whereas in Austria they had the weapons but were not allowed to use them by the leadership. The outcome was that in Austria the fascists murdered many workers and leaders. Austria became a most vicious fascist state. I could have told the meeting much more but it was time to disperse.

Then we got a little parcel of leaflets which we had to distribute in our areas. The main speaker thanked me and asked whether I could tell them a bit more next time. I promised to do that but reminded him that my Polish is not very good. He said that it was good enough for us.

On my way back to my aunt's, I was grabbed by two plain-clothes policemen and taken to prison. It was obvious that sooner or later I would be caught distributing leaflets. I was charged with being a danger to the Polish state, and got six months in prison only because it was my first offence. Every week a parcel of food arrived sent by MOPR, an organisation for the help of political prisoners. My aunt was also coming over once a week to bring me some food.

I must admit that food-wise I was better off inside than out, but we always had to share everything we got. This was only right. Every morning we had to walk round and round in the yard, one-and-a-half metres apart, and were not allowed to talk. That didn't do us any harm. Visitors were allowed only once a month. My aunt and the lady where I did the electrical job always came to visit me and always brought me a nice parcel of food. But the best part was our political education. Marx, Stalin

and Engels were the main topics. There were no books. Our tutor knew everything by heart. We had long discussions which are still in my mind. There was also a very good library still from the days of the Austrian occupation. Good Austrian and German literature. A lot of time we spent in playing chess. The fact remains that when we came out of prison, we were politically and educationally well-trained and new persons.

I went first to the workshop and found Kaliczuk still there working. He was pleased to see me and to report that he had been able to keep some customers and earn a living. He even gave me some money which he had saved. What a wonderful friend he was!

The problem was where to sleep. And it occurred to me that the old lady where I stayed when I came to Stanislau would probably take me in again. So Kaliczuk and I agreed to meet again in the workshop the next day. Yes - my old lady was still there. She knew of course where I had been and told me that she had prayed for me every day. That made me cry. I asked her whether I may stay with her again and she said yes, of course. And so another problem was solved.

One day I went to see my aunt and told her that I was free again and thanked her for what she had done for me. She was so pleased to see me but she could not keep me because the police would continuously watch the house and that would be bad for the family. I understood and told her that I was still with the old lady. She is so nice and friendly and needs some company. My aunt was very happy about that.

One day I went to see my good friend the lady who was so helpful to me. Luckily she was at home. When she saw me she started crying and pulled me into the house and kissed and hugged me as if I were her most beloved husband. I had to wash and shave, but before I started she said just wait a second, I have got something for you and she gave me a packet of the newest razor blades - the first they had ever produced, straight from the Soviet Union.

Was I happy! A razor blade from the USSR! The newest achievement! In the past I used Gillette blades, but now, I said to myself, there will only be Soviet ones! So I started, but although I have a very soft beard, the blood just ran in streams. I said to her, "I love the Soviet Union, but I shall carry on shaving with Gillette blades until they are able to create better ones."

Then I saw a picture of a man on the wall. I asked her who it was, and she said that was my husband until he died several years ago. I said I am sorry - what else could I say? And then she cried and I stroked her hair and was so sorry for her. After that she prepared a nice meal for me. She was so rich and yet so poor. This time we were not talking about Vienna. I made it clear to her that I am now in constant danger to be re-arrested and would not like to get her into trouble. I told her also about Kaliczuk - how he carried on looking after the shop and saved a few Zlotys for me. She was astonished. She said wherever you go, you make friends. I told her an Austrian proverb: how you shout into the wood, that's how it returns.

Then I asked her whether I may come to see her and stay for a night or two, so that I can escape when necessary. She said yes, you can stay here for ever, I will look after you. That was not my aim. I wanted to be useful. After I had eaten I thanked her for everything and promised to see her soon.

Then I returned to my old lady. When I arrived, there was a girl about twenty years of age waiting. I remembered her from our first political meeting. She had to perform a special function. She always knew when a new round of political arrests would take place, and my name was on the list again.

How she knew that I could never find out. She said , "It won't be today or tomorrow. Here is some money and a list of places where you can go and stay overnight, and there you will be told where to go next. The opinion of the Party is that you should return to Austria where you can be of better use. Here you will always be too conspicuous and useless because of your accent. Your first place is Lvov (Lemberg). Do not start your journey from the station in Stanislaw. Make your way to the next station because nobody knows you there. Your address in Lvov is on your sheet, and also the tram number and stop. The friends in Lvov will look after you and send you on to the next place."

The girl made it all so clear to me. One could see that she was very experienced and very intelligent. I stayed with the old lady just one more night and made my way to my friend the lady (Paula by name). She was very pleased to see me again. I explained to her what is going to happen and she agreed that this was the only way. We stayed two days together and one morning I was on my way with a little rucksack with some good food. I promised her that when I arrived in Vienna I shall write her a nice letter. On the way to the station I found quite a sum of money in my pocket. What a wonderful woman. She knew that I would never see her again and yet she did so much for me.

I did what was planned and arrived in Lvov. I did what the girl suggested and arrived at the bus stop. Some people were waiting where they had been for the last few hours. One asked me "Are you Willi?" I said yes. "Good, come with me." So there I was. He spoke Yiddish, and I immediately knew that I was at the right place.

When I entered the house it was full of people. Everybody shaking hands with me. I felt that I was at home. What a jolly crowd. I had a bath and something to eat. All properly refreshed, I entered the main room and heard them singing. I quickly joined in singing revolutionary songs. Afterwards they all dispersed and I was left with my host. We sat down and had a nice chat about conditions in the area and the strength of the Movement.

Then I asked him about the origin of the Yiddish language and luckily enough he knew all about it, having studied the whole development. Jews were persecuted 1000 years ago. They wandered from one place to another but mainly to the west. Wherever they went they could not settle. They had the Thora where the prayers were inscribed with them wherever they went. At last they settled in Spain. But as soon as the Inquisition started thousands of them were murdered or burnt at the stake. Many were able to escape and make their way over the Pyrenees and over the Austrian Alps into Germany. Here they settled for several hundred years and adopted the German language mixed with some Spanish and Hebrew words. But the dialect of the Germans in this southern part was very strong and remained as part of the language called Yiddish.

They were not allowed to start a trade, like smith or tailor. Only a real smith was allowed this name. A farmer for instance was called Bauer. His eldest son had to carry on this trade and the other children had to find another. So Jews had to find other German names, like all the colours - Green, Berg, Silber etc.

There was a time when Jews had to be traders, selling little items or medical pills. Some developed into money-lenders. There came a time when they were chased out of Southern Germany and fled to the eastern European countries. There they adopted Polish words or other Slavonic words around basic Yiddish. Most of them landed in Poland or Russia. The basic Yiddish-cum-German remained. But once they landed in America and Britain, the parents carried on using Yiddish. But the children soon spoke English only. The names were changed whenever an opportunity arose - like when I joined the British Army, or with the permission of the Home Office.

I want to stress here that everybody had to learn the language of the country in which they lived, and Yiddish was only spoken at home or with other Jewish people. In Vienna, Czechoslovakia and Germany and in the whole of the western world, each one spoke only the language of the country. What made Yiddish a recognised language was their literature which was written with Hebrew letters. They had great writers like Shalom Ash, Shalom Achem, and others. It seems now that all the Jews who lived in Poland and neighbouring countries have been murdered by the Nazis, Yiddish as a language has disappeared. In Israel they all speak mainly Hebrew or English or both.

The next morning, after a good breakfast, my friend gave me a parcel of food and took me to the station, but left me just at the corner. He said it would be better like that as he was too well-known. I mingled with the crowd and got my ticket for Rzeszow, a dirty town, halfway towards the western end of Poland.

Again some people were waiting for me to take me to their house. There were also some people gathered to meet me. It was a schoolmaster's house, and again there was a very jolly and optimistic atmosphere. I could see these people were more poverty stricken than in Lvov. They insisted that I should go to a special steam bath - they had these all over Poland. The room is full of steam. There are steps. The higher you go, the hotter it is. You take a pail of cold water with you and pour it over yourself. I could only go to the third step whilst others went up to the sixth. And you sweat and sweat so that the dirt comes out of your pores and you are a new person.

Little snippets of life in Stanislau

People here were very superstitious. When a beggar woman was pregnant, it was considered to be a sin not to give her anything. She would go from house to house and everybody would give her something, even when they did not have much themselves. One day one of these beggar women came round. She got very little, as others had been before. But she was especially persistent, having a big belly. She swore at them all out and used very bad language. In her excitement she lost the pillow she wore under her skirt and the women saw she was not pregnant at all. So the beggar woman had to run, because she was caught cheating and she forgot even her pillow. She was never seen in this area again.

If you want a pair of trousers or any clothing, you never pay the amount which the shopkeeper demands. I watched one day this curious way of selling and buying. A man wants a pair of trousers. He asks "How much?" The man says, "10 zlotys." "I will give you four." "Four! No I can't do that. Look how lovely these trousers are. All right, nine zlotys." "Nine zlotys? I shall pay five." And so it goes on, until the shopkeeper says, "Look, let the earth swallow me on the spot if I can sell them for six zlotys", and he quickly jumps away, lest this really happens, and then sells the trousers for five.

People there loved dollars. There were some who sold dollars in the street. So I watched the following procedure.

A: Have you any dollars? I want them for my daughter who wants to get married.

B: Yes, I have got plenty of dollars, but these dollars cost more than it used to be. It's in the papers, the Gazette.

A: Yes, how much are they now?

B: 15 zlotys per dollar.

A: OK.

B: 1.,2,..... till he reaches 12, then asks A "How old is your girl?"

A: She's 18.

B: 19, 20... And so it goes on. A has been cheated and B quickly disappears.

People in this country were very poor, especially families who had many children. So the atmosphere was very tense. They were frustrated and vented their feelings by arguing and swearing. This happened very often in my auntie's house. They would shout "Let the devil go into your father's father's father. Or Mother." This was ridiculous and at the same time nasty and yet without any meaning. The only girl not swearing like that whilst I was there, was my favourite cousin Tonka. Maybe she did the same. I always felt like running out, especially when the parents were swearing the same way. All this happened in many families.

CHAPTER 12: MY LAST DAYS IN POLAND AND NOW INTO CZECHOSLOVAKIA

When we arrived at the schoolmaster's house there was a meal waiting for me which reminded me of my childhood polenta! An Italian relish, ground maize cooked. You add either hot milk and sugar or eat it with fried or roasted onions, but as there was hardly any sugar (because of the high price) I asked for the polenta with the fried onions. Suddenly I thought of my mother and Mrs. Wimmer. She used to cook both ways, but mostly with milk and sugar. And at this moment I knew that I had to go back to Vienna and Mother as soon as possible.

Next day I was on my way again, having thanked them all for the wonderful hospitality and wishing them success in their endeavours.

I arrived in a town called Biala Bielsko. Here a completely different atmosphere awaited me. There was a huge farm full of boys and girls at the age between 18 and 24. They were learning how to grow vegetables and running a farm in order to prepare themselves to go to Israel. They dreamed of a socialist Israel. They also learned the Hebrew language. I have never seen so much enthusiasm in all my life. I liked the food they grew, especially their tomatoes and potatoes. They were all 100%. They baked their own bread, white and brown. One didn't even need butter on it.

In the evening we were singing together. There were pairs who were already married or were planning to get married. And then there were some girls left without a boyfriend. So naturally some of them turned their attention to me, but I had other plans, especially that I did not want to go to Israel and help to force the Arabs out of their country. But I did not want any arguments with such happy and enthusiastic people so I told them that I have to go back to Vienna and do my share to fight against Fascism and also be near my mother. They agreed with my argument and let me go. Next day I got a parcel of tomatoes and some of their home-made bread. Also a letter to the librarian at my last Polish town, Czechin.

When I arrived there I asked for the library, which could be easily found as it was on the main road leading to the bridge over the river dividing Poland and Czechoslovakia. In front of the library sat two people playing chess and arguing about some political problems at the same time. They were over 60 years old. I knew from experience when you play chess you have to think hard what next move to make and especially what the other fellow is going to do. Anyway, when they saw me coming towards them, the Librarian asked me whether he could be of any help. I said 'Yes, could I go inside and help me chose a book.' He said, 'Yes, I understand,' and he immediately took me to his office. Then he made some Russian tea and gave me some homemade cake. The other man brought in the chess set and put it all on the board as *he* remembered it. The Librarian looked at the chess board and said 'This is not as we left it when we stopped playing, what happened to the queen?' 'Oh,' the other man said, 'you did not have it any more. I took the queen.' And it went on and on. At the same time they argued about Engels and Karl Marx and then turned to the farm policy in the Soviet Union. And it went on and on like that. As a matter of fact, I have not laughed so much for a long time. At last he turned to me and said 'All right, we go to my house when we close down the library.' The other one went and wished me all the best. He knew what it was all about.

At home the Librarian introduced me to his wife, a nice old Jewish lady. She immediately went to the kitchen to prepare a nice meal. They were both left-wing socialists and hoped for a better world. He explained to me the following. The town Czeshin is separated by the river. One is called Polski Cesin

and the other Češki Cešin. In between is a bridge which is closed during the night. In the morning at 6 a.m., people from both sides cross the bridge. Most people go to the Czech part at about 8 o'clock in the morning, that is the best time to cross because nobody bothers. They are so used to this, that the guards do not even come out.

Once you have crossed the bridge there is a huge square with some lovely shops. Here in the Polish part you will see a lot of beggars and poor people. Some of them are walking without shoes or wear bags on their feet. But there in Czechoslovakia you will see only nicely dressed people. It is time that we have some changes here.

When you cross the square you will see a bus stop. This one will lead you to Moravska Ostrava. From there you will have to find the offices of the various parties and Trades Unions. I could give you a letter, but if you are caught it may get us here into trouble. You understand? The whole system of helping people could be destroyed. So I promised that I shall try to forget what happened on my long journey. 'By the way,' he said, 'you give me now *all* your Polish money and do not keep the smallest coin. Destroy all papers and addresses which you have in your pocket. It is for your sake and for those you have left behind.' That's what I did in front of him and it was burned straight away. Then he gave me Czech money in exchange for the Polish I gave him. I promised to do as he suggested. I was only sorry that I could not have a game of chess with him without talking.

Next day I went across the bridge without even looking back and found the bus stop. And as luck would have it there was a girl waiting for the bus. I asked her whether the next bus goes to Moravska Ostrava and she said "Yes." Then she asked me where I wanted to go and I said to the Trades Union building. She said that she worked there and she would take me there. That may seem far fetched but that's how it was.

I met the Secretary of the Czech C.P. and told him my story. He suggested that I should not rush at the moment as it is very dangerous in Austria just now. Some Jewish people and socialists and communists are entering the C.S.R. from Austria and are being helped to find homes in the countryside and in towns. I should concentrate on learning the Czech language which should be easy for me and helpful for our task ahead.

Helena, the boss's secretary, took me later to her parents' house and asked them whether I may stay there for a few days. It seemed to me that it was not the first time that they were helping people, especially when the border with Poland was so near. So I made friends with the grandfather, who used to be a miner and he told me about the bad days under Austrian rule. Helena had to translate because there were many words I could not understand. She spoke a bit of German but when the father came home from work his German was nearly perfect. Of course Bohemia was part of the Austrian Empire. I only stayed for a few days.

Helena took me then to the famous Vitkovice Ironworks which is the industrial part of Moravska-Ostrava. Then she knew of a place that I could lodge for a while. The idea was that I could improve my Czech language and have the opportunity to mix with the people. This was possible because the local pub was owned by a member of the party. Meetings were held there. There they played billiards and chess, which interested me very much. Helena suggested that I could earn money by selling the Party papers there, mainly at the entrance of the Vitkovice Ironworks. This would help me to get some money and make me independent of the office because it needs money as well.

This proved to be a very good idea as I was able to save enough money to make a good start in Vienna until I had a proper job. After I had done this for 3 months I found that my Czech language had very much improved and when I next saw the Secretary he was very much surprised and suggested that I should make my way home. "It looks very much that sooner or later Hitler will march into Austria and if the allies, Britain and France do not stop him soon, our country will be next. But we shall fight if our neighbours will help us", he said. He stressed very firmly that if I should come to this country again I must first make my way to Prague and "meet our Parliament Representative, Hodinova, and they will send you to me personally. This is important for organisational reasons."

CHAPTER 13: SPRING 1936 - RETURN TO MY BELOVED VIENNA

Now that I was forewarned that Austria may be invaded I felt a greater urge to be there in order to take my part in the coming struggles. Whether I should be able to return to Czechoslovakia I did not know. I packed my little rucksack which I had purchased, with apples and sandwiches and a few other things. Helena had in the meantime exchanged my Crowns into Shillings, although I kept some Czech money in case I needed something urgently. Then I had a last chat with the Secretary, who warned me to expect a lot of trouble in Vienna and that I have to be very careful as a lot of Jews have been beaten by Nazis. Then I said goodbye to Helena and thanked her for all she had done for me. But she stressed very strongly that whatever she does is for the love of her country and the Socialist Movement.

She also told me that she is going to get married soon. I saw him there once, tall as a tree. He was also involved in the Socialist Movement and very active too. I thought that they were a pleasant couple. Before I left she gave me a railway ticket which was for the other end of Czechoslovakia, the town of Bratislava. A most beautiful city. The Danube flows through it touching many other countries until it reaches the sea. I remembered when I was in Vienna, right opposite the Opera was an electric tram like a train coach which took visitors to and from Bratislava. People from both cities went to each other's cities to do some sightseeing or shopping. This was a very popular tram. When I arrived at Bratislava I saw that tram standing there ready to go. I suddenly thought, 'If I buy a single ticket the chances are that I will be asked to show my passport, because they will be thinking that I want to leave the country for some reason or other. But with a return ticket and my little rucksack the porter or driver won't even ask me for a passport.' I risked it and I succeeded. After about 1 ½ hours' drive I arrived in the middle of Vienna, 2 minutes away from the Opera. There is a moment in life where you have to make a decision. In Austria we called it 'He who dares, wins'. And I won.

My first steps were to find my mother at her last address which was in the 3rd part of Vienna, No. 30 Landstrasse Hauptstrasse. I knocked at the door and an old lady came out and asked me what I wanted. I said that I am looking for my mother, Mrs. Schrenk. She said that my mother does not live here any more, but that she had moved to the second part of Vienna. Then she told me that she was her mother-in-law and that her son had disappeared 6 months after they had married. Apparently he joined the French Foreign Legion and was killed in action. A letter had arrived from the French Government with some money in it and with the sad message of his death. She wanted my mother to stay with her but she chose otherwise. She also told me that the flat where my mother lives is very tiny. Then I said that I would go and live with her, but the old lady suggested that I could stay in her house for very little money, like a grandson. She gave me some coffee and a piece of her own cake, which I devoured within a few minutes and so I decided to stay with her. I made it clear however that I was looking for a job and have little money at the moment. It then occurred to me that I drop my true name of Silber and take my mother's name Schrenk. This idea proved to be very helpful, especially later on. She said that my mother is still working at the office where she used to write the addresses. So I went there and saw a very, very old lady, all ragged and poorly. I could hardly recognise her. We went to her flat a bit earlier with the permission of the supervisor. I could see it was too small for 2 people to live in and I told her what I had arranged with her mother-in-law. I promised to see her more often than in the past and went to meet my friend Walter. Luckily enough he had just arrived and we were able to chat and to discuss past and future of our struggle against Nazism and Mussolini-type fascism. I told him where I am going to live and that at the moment I could only sell newspapers again if it is possible.

A short review of the tragic events during my absence

During the years 1934-36 Dollfuss used his power to make sure that Austria becomes a complete Mussolini-type catholic state, purely Fascist. In order to succeed he had first to ban the Nazi party and disallow swastikas to be worn. For a short period he was successful. Although the SDP supported him in this, lulling themselves into a false sense of security, Dollfuss now turned against the SDP with all his might. Police, Army and his well armed supporters in order to destroy the SDP for ever. Without any warning they bombarded those famous working class buildings with all weapons available. The workers answered with rifles which they had hidden in their houses. They could only defend themselves but not starting an offensive. Thousands of people were killed when the SDP leadership turned to the League of Nations to stop Dollfuss from carrying on this slaughter. The answer was we do not interfere in internal affairs of any nations. The slaughter ended with the total military defeat of the SDP party and all their allies. The workers came out from the sewers where they were hiding. Nine of their leaders were hanged and many finished up in prison. Although the SDP was completely banned they still had half of the population behind them. Under pressure by Hitler the Nazi Party who remained neutral in this battle, was again allowed. But Hitler never forgave Dollfuss for banning the Nazis and he was duly murdered by the Austrian Nazis on the 25 of July 1934. The next Chancellor was Schuschnigg, who certainly was not a strong man. He was now under a very strong pressure by Hitler and had to see him more often as he liked. Schuschnigg knew that the greatest part of the Austrian national was in favour of being an independent state. The leaders of the SDP which were left were still in favour to support Schuschnigg against giving in to Hitler but under the condition that he would restore the freedom of the Party and the unions. He promised but never did keep his promise, only persecutions stopped.

Spring 1936 - Vienna in turmoil

When I got out of the Bratislava-Vienna tram my first thought was happiness. Back in Vienna, what greater happiness can there be than to stand in front of the Opera where I have spent so many joyful hours. And then I opened my eyes. People with grim faces, teenagers with Swastikas on their armbands. Running about shouting Heil Hitler, down with the Jews and other horrible phrases. I quickly made my way to the 3rd part of Vienna where it was very quiet. It was only 15 minutes walk to the house where my mother was supposed to live. Landstrasse Hauptstrasse, No. 30 or higher up. But I recognised the house. I knocked at the door hoping that my mother would open it and we could embrace. Instead an old lady opened it reluctantly and wanted to know who I am. I asked whether Mrs. Schrenk lives here - I am her son. Then she opened the door widely and asked me to enter.

It turned out that she was my mother's mother-in-law. Then I had to sit down and she brought me a glass of soda water with raspberry juice in it. How I enjoyed it! Then she told me what happened. After 6 months of a happy marriage, her son disappeared and nobody knew what happened to him. One day a letter arrived from France with some money in it and the sad news that my mother's husband died a 'hero's' death for France in the Foreign Legion. Of course both women were heartbroken, but that did not bring our hero back to life. Then my mother decided to move to the 2nd part of Vienna, which was mainly the Jewish area. Her mother-in-law begged her to stay with her, but she had made up her mind to leave.

Old Mrs. Schrenk asked me whether I would like to stay with her as long as I pleased, because sooner or later her house would be my mother's if her son would have stayed at home instead of

being a dead hero. I asked her if she has my mother's address because she might want me to stay with her. She said there is no chance because there is only room for one person in her flat. It occurred to me at this moment that my mother should have stayed with her mother-in-law because this area is a quiet one, and Schrenk is not a Jewish name, but I adopted it from that moment on.

As Mrs. Schrenk was so friendly to invite me to stay in her house, we arranged that I first see my mother and find out what she has to say and if she agreed. I would gladly accept her invitation but under the condition that I pay her like a lodger. I made it also clear that I have very little money at the moment and promised her that I shall pay whatever she would charge if and when I get a job.

Then I made my way to my mother's house over the little bridge where the narrow river Vienna joins the Danube Canal. That was the shortest and the *quietest way* towards my mother's flat. It occurred to me on the way that if I stay with Mrs. Schrenk that I could adopt this name as the son of my mother and the grandson of her mother-in-law. I stayed with the old lady until I had to leave Austria.

When I saw my mother she looked very poorly and haggard and frightened. She told me that she was still working for the firm which advertises all over the country, but with slightly better methods. I asked her whether her boss would employ me because my writing has now improved. As usual she was very pessimistic but after long deliberations she agreed to ask Fraulein Stadler next morning whether this could be done. If possible I would rather do this type of work than selling newspapers by night and day. I said to my little mother, come and let me cuddle you, and I promise you that as long as possible I shall look after you. For the time being we agreed that I should stay with her mother-in-law and I stressed it very strongly that I am now Herr Willi *Schrenk* (your son).

Then I left my mother and took the number H2 tram which led me straight to my friend Walter. I stayed only a short time. I only wanted him to know that I am back and when I am properly settled, I shall be prepared to do my share in the battle against fascism. Then I returned to my new "grandmother" and had a nice "kosher" pork sausage with mustard and a glass of lemon tea. She was glad to have somebody to talk to. I told her that my mother is trying to get me a job at her office.

When I returned to Vienna I faced a big problem. How to earn a living? My mother's firm did not employ men because women were much cheaper. So that was job number one I couldn't have. Next job I tried was even more difficult to get because the Nazis were roaming about in the Prater, destroying all cafes and beating and maiming the customers. The café owners were not all Jews but they were beaten for allowing them to enter their cafes. After a few days nearly all cafes were destroyed. So I had to try my luck somewhere else and here again came my friend Walter with a good idea, whom I told of my new name. He said, now that you have adopted the name of your mother you can try to find a job in the outskirts of Vienna. The 15th, 16th and 17th part of Vienna are much quieter. The Nazis are at the other end of the town. You are lucky you have got a trade and luckily enough you have blond hair.

I found a place very quickly. My new boss did not ask many questions. What he wanted was good workmanship, punctuality and reliability. I was able to do that! After work I was able to use the tram home, which was going sometimes above the ground or underneath along the tiny river Wien.

My friend Walter never talked about his job, but only once did he mention that he was involved in commerce and foreign trade. I knew he was very intelligent and could speak English and French. He asked me very emphatically not to mention this to anybody. As I lived near the Nash Market (the largest market in Vienna) I was able, while the city was half asleep, to distribute leaflets amongst the

market people for a united fight against the Nazis. Of course I was not the only one. The ordinary people knew well that only a united fight would help us to stop Hitler from invading our country. When I did my stint I went to the electric trams and to work.

During my dinner hour I went to the smaller restaurants and bought a nice meal, not far away from my first orphanage.

One day I decided to visit my uncle for whom I worked several years ago. He still had his shop at the famous shopping centre in the Maria Hilferstrasse 109. He was pleased to see me, but he was very worried because his shop windows were smashed and people were stealing his wonderful leatherware. I helped him to take all his things to his house. They were secure there but he could not sell them. As his house was only a few minutes away he sold a few handbags and other little things singly. When some Nazis were in sight he quickly ran to his flat on the second floor. His wife, Paula, was one of the five sisters who married all the other relatives.

His daughter was the only one (apart from myself) who was saved because she chose to go to Mexico with her husband and opened a leatherware shop there. When I was in the orphanage I had the opportunity to visit her. We spent some lovely times together. She played the guitar and we were singing folk songs. I especially remember the song 'Enjoy life whilst there are still violets blooming. Pluck the roses before they die.' I met her with my wife in London when she made a European tour.

One day Walter said to me, we are going to have a little party with some of the boys from the orphanage; you'll meet amongst others Baumgartner. You remember him, he used to sing with you quite often. He now goes three times a week to a singing teacher. He was once an opera singer all over the world. Apparently Baumgartner told him about you and this man wants to see you.

So we had this party and were singing some revolutionary songs together. Baumgartner asked me then whether I am prepared to meet Mr. Golz. I was delighted because my voice was getting rusty. So we went to Mr. Golz and his wife who always accompanied her husband on her piano. I sang one of the opera arias I knew. Both of them said that it would be a pity if I give up singing. And so I had three sessions a week. Although I told Mr. Golz I had no money he said it does not matter.

One day two young people came to visit their parents. Their son Paul and their daughter Martha. Paul was very nice and friendly and Martha gave me such a warm smile that I immediately fell in love with her. I especially liked her voice. I asked her whether she sings alto parts in operas. Her mother said it's pity she doesn't, her voice is wonderful but she had enough by just listening to us. Martha told me later that she works in a girls' home and sleeps there as well, but she comes to visit her parents occasionally. We observed that she started coming more often and soon we became lovers.

What happened before Martha came was completely forgotten. There was only one person for me and that was Martha. I always accompanied her to her kindergarten which was quite near the Vienna woods. When we parted in the evening I was a lost soul. Her father was against me but her mother was solidly in favour. When we talked about marrying her father did not allow it, but her mother said sooner or later she will have to get married. He is 26 years old and she 25. But soon the time came when I had to go and leave her behind.

Now, I must add the following. When Martha's father was singing at the New York Opera, her mother knew that she was going to have a baby so they said they must get married quickly and they would tell everyone that this will be a seven-month baby. Now it happened that she was a seven-

month baby, so when Martha was born her parents had been married for only five months.. That had a bearing on the story because she became an American citizen. Later when the Nazis marched into Austria, they were able to go back to America and were saved.

When I was interned in Canada, Martha found out through my great-cousin Hanna, with whom she was in touch, and came to visit me.

The last day of Austria's freedom - March 1938

The pressure on Austria in Spring 1938 became serious and it was at this moment that Schuschnigg decided to listen to the Labour Movement and to start to resist the Nazis. The Parliament which was closed for 4 years was re-opened. He made his famous speech, which he should have made after his colleague was murdered by the Nazis. It should have been Schuschnigg who at that time should have restored democracy and re-opened Parliament for the whole nation but it was better now than never. He knew that these 100 members in Parliament could not do the fighting and so he turned to the Labour Movement on whom he could rely. He declared that from this moment all liberties of a true democracy are restored.

We did not forget the past and our thousands of comrades but in spite of this memory we did not want to spoil this opportunity. Then we all sang Red White Red until our death. Some of the Austrian and German Nazis did not like it at all because they were worried that on Sunday the 13th of March we would be voting in favour of a free Austria and the Plebiscite. When Hitler was told what had happened he ordered 200,000 troops to invade Austria on the 11th March.

This was the end of Austria. From that moment on there was panic amongst the Jewish population. Many people were murdered on that day alone. What happened after the whole world knows now.

I could not find my mother nor my uncle so I made my way to Mrs. Schrenk who lived far away from the main trouble. She had heard on the radio what happened and suggested that I should leave. Firstly because for her own safety and then for myself. I took my little rucksack, my shaving tackle and some underwear. She in the meantime prepared a nice large sandwich with butter and sliced sausage. She cried all the time.

Before I went she said to me, good luck my adopted grandson. And then I went to see Martha's parents. I told them that I have to go to Czechoslovakia now. They hoped that with the help of the American Embassy they would soon be in the USA.



CHAPTER 14: BACK IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA - 12 MARCH 1938

Then I said goodbye to Martha. She was in tears. I embraced her and expressed my hope to see her one day again. Even her father was sorry for both of us. He got used to seeing us together with the aid of her mother. She gave me something to eat and some salad which she made with a little bit of sugar and salt. I am still preparing it the same way. Then we parted and I went on my way to say goodbye to Walter. Unfortunately he was not at home. My last visit was part of the way towards the Vienna woods, to see my boss.

He pulled me quickly inside the shop and warned me to leave the country very quickly as some suspicious characters were asking for me. He told them that I do not work for him any longer. So they went again and he hoped that they would never come back. He went inside the house to which the shop was attached and then we sat down and he explained to me how to get to Czechoslovakia.

He warned me to keep away from the Austrian villages because the Austrian farmers may betray me. Walk by night through the woods and sleep there as well. I have done that before he said where I met a lovely Czech girl. I never regretted my hard journey. Now here I still have some Czech money which will be of no use to my any more and you won't need Austrian money. So we shook hands and he wished me good luck. So I left another good friend.

I followed his advice and was able to enter Czech territory very tired and hungry. I made my way towards the first house. The door was opened before I even reached it and a man came out and invited me to enter quickly. He said I know why you are here, I can see you are a refugee. Go next door have a good wash and shave. When I came back there was some coffee on the table and some of their wonderful bread and cheese. I knew the quality of their food and it disappeared very quickly. Then I had to tell him about the happenings during the last days of my stay in Vienna. Then he wanted to know how it was that I spoke the Czech language so well. He certainly was keen to know, for obvious reasons, all about Moravska Ostrava and how the Secretary of the Party knew two years in advance what is going to happen in Austria and after that to the C.S.R.

I also told him that I have to see some important person in Prague first before I go to Moravska Ostrava. He was very much impressed by what I have told him and explained to me that the people here in the area have to be very careful because Hitler had warned the Czech Government not to allow refugees to enter Czech territory otherwise he will treat this as a hostile act. So you understand, you may have been in deep trouble if I had judged you otherwise. And then the door opened and three men entered and shook hands with me. Then one of them who had a cart offered to take me to the further train station, so that I am far away from this area.

I said good bye to the first man and to the rest of the family who suddenly came out from nowhere to say farewell to me. I was really touched by it all. The person who took me to the station got the ticket for Prague for me so that I could just jump onto the train at the last minute in case some nosey person sees me. Once I was inside this train I was secure. Only too late I found out that they have paid that ticket. In my little rucksack was bread and sausage and that wonder, Pilsner beer, made in Pilsner, CSR. This time I did cry. I found a note in the rucksack which said, when Hitler tries to conquer our country, he won't have it as easy as in Austria. Little did they know about international politics and treachery! I had to change into another train which brought me straight to Prague.

Prague and Moravska Ostrava

When I arrived in Prague I was so impressed by the beauty of the city that I nearly forgot the purpose of my journey. Then a man came to me and asked me whether he can help me - in the Czech language. I immediately awoke from my enchantment and told him that I am a refugee from Austria and I was told that there is a special office in Parliament where people have to report. He was so impressed to hear me speak in Czech - although less than perfect - that he offered to take me there and to show the right person whom to address. I thanked him, we shook hands and then he disappeared. I waited in the queue until my turn came. I said that I speak the Czech language, which pleased them very much. I told also about Moravska Ostrava and what happened and that the Secretary there had advised me if I ever have to come back to the CSR from Austria that I must first come to Prague to register here because all the names, reasons, politics etc. must be here (for certain reasons).

He was a bit suspicious and rang the Secretary of the Party in Moravska Ostrava, Svoboda, with whom he had a long chat where all that I had told him was confirmed. I was allowed to speak to the Secretary (Svoboda) where he told me that I shall be sent to M.O. in a week's time, where a lot of work is waiting for me. The problem was that the refugees to the CSR cannot speak the language and the local population does not want to speak German. Perhaps few do! The Secretary in Prague asked me to help here for a few days.

There was one hostel which was established in the outskirts where some translating was required. Lists of food were made in both languages etc. The German refugees got Czech-German dictionaries and easy to learn basic Czech booklets. I stayed there for one week and dinned it into their heads that the Czechs would help them more if they tried to learn. After a week I got my fare to Moravska Ostrava and some clothing and underwear.

CHAPTER 15: MORAVSKA OSTRAVA - 20 MARCH 1938

Before I continue this part of the story, it is necessary to explain that the government of the CSR could not help the refugees openly because it was under strong pressure by the Nazis. All help came from the voluntary organisations and political parties. Any help which was given by the Government was free train tickets or the distribution of German-Czech dictionaries, or the free entrance of swimming baths etc. Foremost were the political parties of all shades. Usually they had meetings where they discussed all the problems and amenities which were available in each town and village. It was a pleasure for me to observe how all the parties and voluntary organisations worked together for one aim.

In circumstances which I already told in a previous chapter, I finished up in the office of the CP. I did not go anywhere else because I knew these people already and they were keen to use me for the purpose with which I agreed and where I could really be helpful. So when I entered the office I really felt at home. I first met Helena who gave me a hearty kiss but immediately warned me that she had a boyfriend who is a head taller than I and that they would get married soon. Then she took me to the Secretary of the office where we shook hands and immediately started to discuss the plans which he had worked out. Whilst we were talking Helena brought some piping hot coffee and her own home baked pastry. For these alone, never mind anything else, one would have fallen under her spell.

The Secretary said, don't call me Svoboda, just Franta. Then he laid out the map of the area. First, the little town, Fridek Mistek. "There," he said, "is a house available for 10 people. At the moment there are no beds, but only mattresses and blankets and pillows. Only cold water until all the repairs are done. There is a gas cooker, cutlery, cups and plates. It has been arranged that the refugees will have midday and evening meals at the local guest house until they will be able to cook for themselves if they feel like it. Breakfast they can have at the hostel. The gas cooker will do for that purpose. Bread and anything in this line will be provided daily. The big problem was beds. They had not arrived yet. The refugees would have to sleep on the floor on mattresses but covered with plenty of blankets. Coffee, milk, sugar and bread or rolls will be provided by the local bakers. Now, I know that they will be upset when they find that there are no beds but it will be up to you to explain our difficulties. You can rely on the Burgomaster, he will do his best to provide all the necessary things. Now you go to your Helena and come back in the morning by tram so that we can be at the station before the refugees arrive."

Of course we were there in good time and just had to wait for 15 minutes. Then we saw ten worried faces looking round so we raised our arms and moved towards them. Then we met, shook hands and their faces lighted up. Now it was up to me to lead them towards the train which took us to Fridek Mistek. In the train they were chatting about their experiences. At F.M. we got out where the Burgomaster was already waiting. He shook hands with everybody and led us towards the local restaurant where a wonderful meal was already prepared. No need to explain that after a quick wash and clean they enjoyed this meal.

In the meantime our Secretary discussed with the Mayor the situation in the house where the new arrivals would stay and I had the awkward task to prepare them for the shock which awaited them. So, when we finished the meal I took them to the house whilst the Secretary went back to M.O.

The Mayor came with us so that I could lean on him when I had to show them round the house, but the first thing they observed was that there were no beds, only mattresses. One man behind the backs of the crowd shouted, where are the beds? Then I had to explain to them that we were informed too late that you would be coming but the beds would be delivered in a few days time. You will have plenty of blankets to keep you warm. I told them also that at the moment there is only the cooker which can be used for their breakfast but there will be plenty of fresh bread and butter, coffee, tea and milk but not much sugar. Another moan from somebody at the back, the same man. The others were cross with him; one of them shouted back to him, what do you want? these people are doing what they can, be glad that you got away alive! And then they apologised for him.

The Mayor explained in Czech to them that the people here are doing their best. They were very pleased when I told them that tomorrow they will also be able to have a good bath and swim in the local swimming hall and two meals a day. Also the heating in the building will be repaired. Chess sets will be brought and other amenities.

Then they asked me whether I shall come and see them again. I said yes, at the moment but that I shall soon be busy in each village surrounding us finding room for more refugees. In the meantime I shall gladly have a game of chess with anyone here. I also told them that the local Burgomaster will want the names and some details of each of you. They were not against this because they had nothing to hide; only our grumbler shouted, why should we? This outcry made me very suspicious of him and I had a serious chat with the Major. Next day I went to M.O. in order to tell the Secretary about this man. I had a strong feeling that he was smuggled into the country with the aid of the Nazis. He had to be watched.

Summer and Autumn 1938

My next job was to try getting at least one refugee into each village. This proved to be a great success, not so much because of my pretty face but with the popularity of the Mayor. Of all the eight villages, every local Burgomaster was prepared to take the responsibility to have one refugee. It was understood that they would be helping on the allotment or doing other little chores. Occasionally they would repair his shoes or buy him a pair of cheap trousers. There was hardly any trouble.

Most of the local people worked at the Vitkovice Ironworks. They left early in the morning, had their main meal at the factory and then had another meal at home. The only trouble arose when some of the boys were after the girls and vice versa. But these problems were solved in one way or another. None of us was sure what the future had in store. Where I stayed, the village was called Baško. That was right in the centre of this area. I got a bicycle which took me everywhere and occasionally to F.M. I saw the Mayor quite often and told him all about the activities in the villages. I got to know the Mayor's whole family and was always well treated.

Once a week I reported to the office in M. Ostrava and told him all there was happening. I was particularly worried about Paul, the grumbler. He kept disappearing for a full day and I wondered whether something could be done to stop him. He promised to think of something. This was also the time where there was a lot of trouble in the west of the country where the Sudeten Germans lived.

One day Paul tried to have an affair with one of the women in Fridek and he was caught. This was his undoing. He was beaten by the local people and the husband of course and put into prison. What happened to him I do not know but the atmosphere in this area deteriorated.

In the meantime circulars were sent to us telling us that in view of the dangerous situation, that Germany could occupy the country, we should fill in forms to state to which country we would like to go because we would be the first victims once the Nazis occupy this country.

13th March 1939 - Goodbye to CzSR

Of all the refugees, the Austrian Schutzbund, which had to flee Austria when they were defeated by the Austrian Mussolini-type fascists, decided to go to the Soviet Union in order to be incorporated into the Soviet Army. At first the Rumanian Fascist Government refused to let them fly over their country, but a bit of sabre rattling by the SU made them give in. We, the others, had to make up our minds. Many Jewish and German refugees chose France. The rest of us chose England. Later when the war started and France was occupied all these refugees who chose France were put in a concentration camp by Marshal Petain and were murdered by the Nazis.

For some reason or other we were last on the list. Some were able to get through Poland to England before the Nazis occupied the CSR but quite a few others were stranded in the villages and in Prague. Once the Germans in our area were gone, I was left all alone, but I was not forgotten. My luck was that the Nazis were not yet properly organised and so I was able to move about. I left Baško and went to live in a little house near F. Mistek where I could stay all on my own if I wanted.

One day when I wanted to go to this house I saw two Gestapo men going towards it. The local people also saw them and quickly took me to their house. I had to stay there for a few days whilst the husband of the family got in touch with the Secretary. One day he came to fetch me. We both thanked the family and off we went. On the way he explained that "They will have been after you and somebody will have told them. Now you have to go to Prague, but you will enter the train stop after M. Ostrava. This train always stops there, also on the way back. You must keep this in your mind because when you return somebody will be waiting for you to take you and others to the woods which will lead you towards Poland. But first you must go to Prague which everything will be arranged according to plan. You will know by now that the Nazis are in Prague already but still trying to find their way - without the help of the Czech people."

I took all this in because I knew danger was waiting but also that this was the last stage of our journey to freedom. I arrived in Prague and after a few minutes a young man asked me, do you know Frantisek? I said, yes, I know him very well, he is a good friend of mine, probably yours as well. That's fine, he said, come with me. In this way he knew that I am the person whom he expected.

I met the organiser, a very intelligent and energetic man. First he gave me something to eat and drink but at the same time he explained what he expected me to do. He explained to me first that many people have already gone to England, but many still have to wait their turn. "We are doing our best out some of you will have to wait a bit longer. I want you to take three refugees to my allotment on the outskirts of Prague. You will stay there a few days until we shall call for you. When you arrive there somebody will show you which of the huts you may use. I want to warn you strongly not to leave the hut because these huts may be watched. As soon as your time comes you will return to me."

When we arrived at the village we got out of the little train and somebody was already waiting for us. He gave us a smile and pointed in the direction of a big hut. As soon as we opened the door there was already all sorts of food on the table. I always enjoyed the healthy type of food which the Czech

people liked. Next morning when we opened the door there was more food left by the villagers. I shall say it again and again, the Czechs were just wonderful.

After we had eaten and drunk some coffee which we were able to make we had a chat about our experiences and I found that others were not as lucky as I was. One of them lost his way and found that he was going round in circles until he met a Czech who walked with him until they came to this man's village. They gave him food and drink, a little map on a piece of paper so that he could find his way to the next village. Everywhere he came they helped him until they reached a bus stop where he got a bus which took him to Prague. I felt humble when I heard everyone's story, so I did not say much about myself, but afterwards we thought the Czechs will have nowhere to go and especially those comrades and friends who were helping us now.

After three days we were told to return. The other three were taken somewhere else but I had to see the organiser again. When I arrived at his office there were six people, amongst them a woman who was the wife of one of the refugees. I got something to eat and some coffee, they must have eaten before me and we all got a parcel of food for the journey.

None of the six could speak the Czech language and so I had to translate all what he said. "This man", pointing at me, "speaks our language, apart from German, He will take you to the border of Poland and if you do as he tells you then you will be able to sleep peacefully in a big hotel in the city of Katowice. About in a week's time you will be in London. We have got great confidence in him so please do as he says." To me he said, "Vilem, Comrade František thinks the world of you; I hope that you will do this important job well. You will meet him one stop before Moravska Ostrava where somebody will take you to the woods and will show you the way to Poland. He will take you only a short distance and your instinct ought to help you to reach the Polish side. Here is his name and address. One warning - nobody is allowed to talk because every word can be heard in the woods. You have two enemies there, on the right hand side are the Polish gendarmes. They are poorly paid and if they catch you they will sell every one of you to the Nazis. On the left hand side are the Nazis themselves. You must stress it very seriously in your mind not to talk and try not to stand on broken branches on the path. All your lives are at stake."

Last days in CzSR - England, here we come

I put the papers into my pouch and told them what the organiser had said. They promised me to do as instructed and we were off, but we shook hands first. I said to him that for you it will be worse, but I am sure that the whole nation will fight the Nazis.

In the train everyone was excited but I was worried about some of those who were with me and I decided to paint a picture of happiness which they would enjoy in England if they follow the organiser's instructions. At the train stop before M. Ostrava I could see the Secretary and Helena. We all shook hands and said goodbye. They were very good friends. Then the boy came and took us to our destination in two separate lines.

Before we entered the wood I stressed it very strongly to them, not to speak until we are in Poland. We watched every little branch so that we don't stand on it. After about a quarter of an hour I looked back but the boy was gone. That meant that we were now left on our own. That couple said, he has gone. That annoyed me and I went to see him and told him very quietly but firmly that I would leave them behind if they say another word. They followed me quietly until we were at the other side of

the wood, then we could see quite a few people coming out of a little church. We were on Polish territory! Saved!

I went to a man and asked quietly in Polish, whether he could tell me where that man lives whose address I had. He showed me his house and I knocked at the door and a man let us in. He told us to sit down and await the arrival of the train to Katowice.

CHAPTER 16: 26 MARCH - FROM POLAND TO ENGLAND

The man was one of these people whom I met in the mainly southern part of Poland who spoke Polish and Yiddish. He could understand German and so we were able to converse with him. There were quite a few of this tribe in this area and they were worried too, especially since Czechoslovakia was occupied by the Nazis, but they helped us to reach our destination. He gave us food and drink and allowed us to wash and shave (apart from Magda, the wife of one of our group, of course!).

We had two hours to spare for our train and so he was able to prepare us morally for our future experiences. Then he exchanged our Czech money for the Polish zloty in case we needed some when we arrive in Katowice. In the meantime some of his pals came to have a chat with us. We felt very much at home with these people and also very much protected. When our time came to get our train one of them had already purchased our tickets and came with us. We thanked our friends and entered the train. After a few stops we had to change for the main line train to Katowice. That's where our friend left us, having made sure we were on the right train.

When we arrived we were taken straight to the hotel where our identity papers were checked. A porter took us to our hotel rooms, two in each room. After a good wash we had to come down to the main hall where we met about a hundred refugees. We were telling each other our experiences and found that these were nearly the same for all of us. I thought of many others who were still fighting their way through and wondered whether the gap where we had slipped through was still intact. We were astonished at that wonderful organisation and the many helpers which were involved. We left Prague at 10 am and we were all in bed by 10 pm in Katowice.

Katowice 27th March 1939

In the morning we were told that we shall leave Poland from Gdynia in a few days time by ship but we have the opportunity to get some clothing etc. free. It so happened that a lot of Jewish emigrants (mainly shop keepers) were leaving Poland for South America. They will be on the same ship as we but in the meantime they were trying to sell their goods as quickly as possible. We the refugees will be able to get clothing and underwear also a pair of shoes free. We have to write on the lists what we wanted and these will be stamped first by our organisers. The local people will have to pay at a much reduced price for most of the garments. This was a very good idea because the shop keepers could not take the shops with them. As most of the owners spoke Polish I again was able to help my group and some others. The day arrived when we went by train to the ship and after a few hours we were on the way to England.

After we were out in the middle of the Baltic Sea we started singing and were very happy but when we approached Denmark there was this Skaggerak, a huge rock which made the sea very rough and, poor me, I was terribly seasick. My pals came to me and said, "Can't you organise another sing song?" "No," I said, "I'm going to die."

After we had passed that rock I was much better but I did not feel like singing. A day after we arrived in London the emigrants changed their ship for Argentina and other South American countries. In London everything was arranged to take us all to the various hotels. I shared a room with one of those who was on the ship with me. The rooms were very small and there was only a cold water

tap, so this man starts moaning, how can I shave myself when there is no warm water? I rang the bell, a girl came in and asked, what do you want? So I said to her, "Warm water pliss!" She brought the warm water and I said to him, you see, never worry!

London and Manchester

The emigrants who went to South and North America and naturally those who remained here in England were the only ones who survived the Holocaust. We were well looked after. The next day after my arrival in London I received a letter in which there was a note to invite me to see a gentleman on an urgent matter. There was his address and that was all. Why he did not come to see me at the hotel I did not know.

There I was in the middle of London with that piece of paper in my hand. I felt stranded. A man watched me and came to ask me where I wanted to go. I showed him this piece of paper. He read it, called a taxi, showed him this address and paid him the fare back to my hotel which I told him where I was staying. I was so impressed by this gesture that I still think today about it. I told everybody the English people were wonderful and I even found this generosity in Manchester.

I went to this address, knocked and a lady let me in, asking me of course whether I am W.S. I said yes (another word I had learned). Then I saw the gentleman in his room, completely crippled. He was the person who dealt with all Jewish refugees (a great task). I had to show him my papers and he then gave me a sum of money for which I had to sign and also a railway ticket for Manchester, Sale. He apologised for not coming to the hotel but I hoped that I will understand. He also wanted to give my money back for the taxi but I told him that a man whom I have never seen in my life had paid it for me. I told him also that I have never seen so many wonderful people. Remember, he said, there are more good people in the world than bad ones.

Then he asked the lady whether she has anything to offer me. She had prepared some coffee and a home-made cake which I enjoyed immensely. I stayed half an hour with him whilst the taxi man was still waiting to take me back.

CHAPTER 17: 1939-40 - SALE

All this made a great impression on me so that even today I think of it and tell others. We did not stay long in London, the hotels had to be emptied because of the great football match of the year between England and Scotland. Some were sent to the various cities. I landed in Sale, Manchester, Sylvan House, Broad Road. A big building with plenty of room for forty people.

When we arrived there was a lady called Mrs. Walker. Behind her followed her husband. She spoke English only and most of us could hardly understand her. She was very energetic and immediately decided that I should run this hostel. I asked her, why me? But I cannot speak any English. I pointed at a couple. Magda, who came with her husband and could speak the language very well. No, she said, I have decided that you will do it.

And so, once again, I had a job forced upon me which I must admit did me a lot of good. I learned the language faster than most of the others because I had to do the shopping and report to her the outlay and bills. But I still discussed with the Magda couple about the food and other matters. She was pleased that she didn't have to do the job and was very helpful otherwise.

Most of our refugees came from Vienna and I observed that those who spoke with a strong Viennese dialect had difficulty with the English language. We got used to this type of life and started with the idea to get in touch with the local population. There was a piano in the house (not 100% grand) but it was useful. So we organised a party and invited people to visit us. One of these was the head of the local Grammar School and he brought others along. Magda played some music and then I sang my favourite Schubert songs. The whole thing was very well organised and so began a very happy relationship with the English community.

The Head of the Grammar School wrote me a letter which I still have and asked me whether I could sing some of the Schubert songs at the Grammar School in Sale.

We got used to the more organised life here. Soon the invitations started. I was invited to a Fish Merchant. Here I found out how little I knew of the world and the customs of people. So I knocked at the door and the lady opens it and says how do you do and I said, I do well. She looks at the husband behind her. Then she said, if you want to wash your hands it is upstairs. I said to her, Madame, I have already washed my hands and showed them to her. She said to her husband, go tell him, so he takes me upstairs and says quietly, if you want to use the toilet...

That was my first lesson. At the table, she asked me whether I have seen Hitler. I said no, I am glad I have not seen him! That was not interesting for her and the halo over my head must have disappeared. I could feel that she was disappointed. There was more to follow. We had our meal and there was fish on the plate. Remembering the orphanage I said I am sorry but I don't like fish. Saying this to a fish merchant is like putting a red rag in front of a bull. She put some fish and some other things on the plate and I ate some and it was delicious. She was delighted to see me eating it. Then she asked, would you like some more and I said oh, yes, please. She gave me some more but told me to say please and afterwards thank you. I got all red in my face and felt like a little boy.

And then I made a fatal mistake. I asked for another helping. She was very amazed and said first you said you don't like fish and then you want a second helping. Shocking. One will understand that I was

never invited to this house anymore. And to be quite honest I would not have gone there, neither for love nor money. But I learned something new. You must be able to adapt to the customs and conditions in the country where you are bound to live without being a slave to it. This is one of the reasons why I was able to make friends.

There was a time when we were allowed to work. That means only in agriculture and greenhouses. So I found a place in Sale where I learned to water the flowers. There were most wonderful flowers but they started to grow vegetables. Obviously that was necessary towards the war effort but my job was not for food, so one day my boss asked me to water some delicate flowers. He said make a good job of it. I was so keen to water them that I destroyed half of them. When he came back he saw the damage I had done and was very angry with me but he realised that I didn't know anything about flowers and taught me how to do it properly. I learned it and was also able to earn some money.

One day I was invited by the Headmaster of the Grammar School to sing some of my songs. His wife accompanied me. After some of the songs he asked me whether I can sing some English songs. I said yes, Rosemarie! So I started singing, "Oh, Rosemarie, I love you, I am always dreaming on you." Everybody was shocked - not the boys and girls, they had a good laugh. The Headmaster came to see me and said, what have you done? you made it into a rude song. So I explained to him that these words mean the opposite in English. On means of and of means on. So he explained this to the audience and they all had a big laugh.

One day the Anglo-Austrian Friendship Society organised a great concert in Manchester. I was asked to sing amongst other songs, some Schubert songs. That was a great surprise for me and I was very proud of this honour, but I did not know that some of the organisers had invited Lotte Eisler to sing the same songs. Now, she was one of the finest singers in the world and a specialist of Schubert and all the great composers of Lieders. (She came from Vienna, and landed in New York before the Nazis could catch her and her composer husband.)

When she heard about that stupid idea, she said, "If he sings, I won't." So there was a great upheaval. I decided that I am going to see her. I knocked at the door of her room in the concert hall, she shouted to come in and I entered. She shouted "Who are you?" and I said, "I am the person whom some stupid fellow wanted to put next to you as a Schubert singer. Naturally I shall not dare to sing next to you, of course I won't sing, I shall only be pleased to listen to you and learn. Somebody has made a mistake when he heard me sing in Sale at the Grammar School, so please forget this incident." She had a good laugh about it and everything was all right. Then her husband entered and she laughingly said, "Hans, this is Willi Silber my greatest competitor." And she told him all what happened. She was interested to know where I had studied singing and when I told here about Professor Lirhammer she was amazed because she knew him well and congratulated me. Anyway, she sang like a goddess and I listened very carefully and learned. There were passages where you felt like crying when Schubert was at his saddest and Lotte was able to bring it all out. I went back to Sale a new person.

In 1940 after the fall of France, the Government thought that we were a danger to Britain and decided to intern us. Some women were interned on the Isle of Man but most of us were sent to Canada and Australia. The hostel in Sale was closed down and we were led to our ships. Luckily enough I was on the ship for Canada and others were on the way to Australia on the Donnera. That ship was bombed by the Nazis and everybody on it died. Our ship landed safely in Canada. Only there we heard the bad news of the Donnera.

CHAPTER 18: CANADA! OCTOBER 1940

Our ship was much bigger than the one we had when we came from Poland and so we had a much quieter passage. But I must admit that I was very quiet and slept most of the time. How glad I was when we arrived in Quebec. There we changed into a train which took us for many, many hours to a small place called Niagara Falls. On the way we saw thousands of trees, all dead and rotten. What a shame that nothing could be done to save them.

There is was very cold, especially when quite a lot of us slept in tents. I got kidney trouble and had to go to a hospital. When I came out I was allowed to sleep in the hall. Shortly afterwards we were sent back towards Montreal near a town called Sherbrooke (they had to prepare this place properly to make room for us). The Camp Commandant, an extremely nice person, made a speech to welcome us and hoped that we make the best of a very unpleasant situation.

All our papers were in the office where these were perused by the clerks working there. Some of us had to work in the kitchen, most had to make nets for the army and I was very lucky to become the Camp Electrician. That was much better than sitting for hours making nets. The food was excellent and plenty. I especially liked the Canadian honey of which I still dream today.

All went well until the British Government decided that we are enemy aliens and therefore it would be right to send proper Nazis into our camp. As soon as these arrived we started a hunger strike. The Camp Commandant was very annoyed at this stupid decision. He knew that there would be trouble and he would not tolerate it. The Nazis were sent back to the Prisoner of War camp as proper enemy aliens!

It must be explained that some of our members in the Socialist Movement had called the meeting which decided about that hunger strike and influenced our Camp Commandant to act. This was a great victory! My tools were downstairs in the cellar where all the gadgets, water pipes and electrical meters etc. were located and it was here where we met to discuss events in the camp. I had also a lot of opportunity to meet our Camp Commandant, mainly to discuss what had to be done, repairs or new installations, but soon we also had private conversations.

So I had to tell him a lot about my life and he got to know me more. He was keen on improving our life in the camp. This opportunity came very soon. Every day after work I used to walk along with one of the many intellectuals we had, Professors, lecturers, teachers and people of all trades, and naturally many students. It so happened that one of these students tried to commit suicide. He was unhappy that he could not carry on studying and would never have a chance to achieve something. One can imagine that the whole camp was in uproar.

One lecturer who was very much upset started moaning. He said to me, there you are, we are Jews and are always persecuted, and he was moaning and groaning. So I looked at him and said, why are you not trying to have a chat with these students and teach them here? So he looked at me said, yes, of course I can do that! But he said we have no material. I said to him you get all the other professors and lecturers together and you could easily start a mini university! He said, yes, that is a good idea but we have no material. I said to him, look, I have a very good relationship with the Camp Commandant, I shall speak to him about this problem. After all there are quite a few Universities in Canada, he may be able to help us. He is very friendly and approachable.

Now, you have a chat with all these people and find out whether they are prepared to do that, and I have a meeting with the Camp Commandant about some more work here and I shall approach him.

That's what happened! He was very keen to do that and called all the Professors etc. together and asked them to write some lists out which could be used in teaching. Privately he said to me that it was a good idea and that he would try to get something for the other inmates. He asked me what else do you think would be useful? I said, there are many things which would be appreciated. First, chess sets - we could have chess tournament. Footballs and musical instruments. There are musicians as well here. There are two great pianists and a very famous violinist. So he had a good laugh and only said, I will see what I can do.

A month passed and they grumbled: "All these fancy ideas! I always knew that nothing is going to happen." They were very pessimistic. But unfortunately we Jews have to be like that because of the bad experiences of the past. But, suddenly, one day, everything came and more. Teachers here as well! The professors were in heaven and all the students were happy. They were able to pass degrees by the Canadian Universities, so that when we went back to England they were able to carry on at the universities without having to start from scratch. This was a great achievement, and we certainly had to thank the Commandant for it. Football teams were formed and they had a chance to play and organise chess tournaments. My favourite game! The musicians got a piano for the two pianists, there was also quite a good library and everybody was satisfied. If I have done nothing else in my life I was proud of having been able to be of some use.

On Sundays we always had a concert and some of our cooks made some of the most delicious apfelstrudls (apple pie the Viennese way). Amongst us there was also a great footballer who played for the Jewish Football Club, Hakuan, in Vienna. This club won the Austrian Championship twice running. I also joined one club in our camp but must regretfully report that my team usually lost between 10 or 5 nil. Once only we lost 1-5, that was a great 'victory' and everybody was cheering, but I was compensated in other ways when I played chess in our championships.

One day something special happened. I was informed by our Camp Commandant that I have a visitor and I would be pleased to see that person. It was Martha. So her mother was right. She forecast that I would meet her again and there she was! It was my great cousin who was in touch with her mother and together they found out where I was. One can imagine how happy we were to see each other again. The person who was supposed to watch us, closed the door and left us alone. Nothing nicer could have happened to me. So we embraced. She was then 30 years old and I was 31. But as she always was practical and down to earth she told me that as soon as I am set free there will be a job waiting for me in Ottawa. Then she said we would be married and there would be no more gallivanting for me. Of course I agreed (what else could I do?) but what we did not know that when we were released we all had to return to England. That was the rule and nobody could do anything about it.

Goodbye Canada - back to Europe

Our stay in Canada came to an end, when it was decided by the British Government that we were not dangerous after all. On the contrary, we could be very useful in the war effort. I was sent to Leeds as Manchester had their quota of refugees already. What I did first was to apply for a visa to go to Canada or USA. Both consulates refused me permission to enter their countries. I sent Martha these letters but she did not feel like coming to Europe and so ended our relationship.

CHAPTER 19: 1942 - LEEDS

We soon got integrated into the Leeds community. We got our ration cards and reported at the police once a week. We were not called enemy aliens any more but refugees from Nazi oppression. I soon got a job as a maintenance electrician and became a member of the ETU. I quickly made friends with my mates - some of us lived in an old building for a very cheap rent. In the meantime we became member of the Anglo-Austrian Club which at that time was only a type of Friendship Society. The Secretary was Greta, a lady who has been in England for several years already. She worked as a supervisor in the huge kitchen of the CWS factory. This by the way was a real boon because the women who worked there had good food and paid very little. I am not sure whether they had to leave some of their stamps of their ration cards. Her aim was just to make friends with the English people but when we arrived we discussed the matter of our future work and decided that there are more important things to be done than just to make friends. We wanted that all our able-bodied youngsters should join the British Army and fight against the Nazis. This idea spread through the whole country where refugees lived and we were able to get over 200 volunteers together. We had a Journal called 'Zeitspiegel' - The Mirror of Time - which was also sold in other towns.

Having mentioned our journal I must mention as person who became very dear to me. She was the youngest sister of Greta who has been working for a high ranking police officer in Weybridge. She used her free time to learn shorthand and typing. When she finished her course she came to Leeds to live with her sister. She worked for a famous chemist, Timothy Whites and Taylors. It was she who wrote that poem and called it The Mirror of Time. She stuck a lot of newspaper slips around her body and then she started to recite. "As you can see on my attire, I am a paper. You can set me on fire."

What really happened was that she set *me* on fire. She looked so sweet that from that moment on there was nobody else any more. Her sister was very much against me and tried every trick and lies to separate us. In her eyes I was a down and out etc. Trude was looking after the youth and I after the rest of our members.

We decided that our young men should join the British Army, but were told that we could only be in one unit - the Pioneer Corps. This we refused to do, because that was not a fighting unit. After several letters and discussions, we achieved our aim and were able to join fighting units. This is how I finished up in Glasgow with the KOYLIES.

We had to change our names so that if we are captured we would be considered English or Scottish soldiers. So when Trude and I got married we were still Silber, but when I joined the Army we chose the beautiful name of Sheridan. Trude, because she loved his poetry and I because I admired the beautiful actress Ann Sheridan.

My life in the army - Started 28 October 1943 - Finished 28 October 1946

I got my uniform and believe me I looked like a down and out, or like the Good Soldier Schweik (a Czech soldier in the Austrian Army in 1914). But soon I fitted in with the young recruits. In our hut there was a whole platoon. Apart from our breakfast we got cocoa at 10am, that was brought in a big kettle. We all had a mess tin to get our share. There were two bullies who pushed their way in

first and filled their mess tins to the brim. Everybody was grumbling because there was less left for the others. I didn't like that and next morning I said to the others, this cocoa is for all of us, yesterday there were some who did not get any cocoa, so I shall pour out enough for everyone. The others were pleased apart from these two bullies and so it lasted because I had the others on my side, but two enemies. They hated me.

A few days later our Sergeant trained us in unarmed combat. He explained, imagine you are on duty at night. It's dark and you can't see the enemy. You have to listen carefully and when he gets nearer you have to get him down on the floor. I want two volunteers who will be blindfolded and have to get the others on the floor. Any volunteers? Silly me raised my arm. As soon as that big bully saw this he put his hand up and everybody was worried for me. The Sergeant blindfolded me and then the other fellow. At this moment I remembered the good old days in the orphanage when we were wrestling instead of going to sleep. I was standing quietly and just listened, whereas he stormed towards me in order to do me some harm. But I had the advantage to hear him and got his arm, turned round and threw him on the floor.

He was so annoyed that he pulled his band off and wanted to hit me, but the Sergeant stopped him and said don't touch him, he had done it as it should be done. You don't go like a bull because that is the best way to be killed. They all worried for me since then, but those two bullies were caught stealing and sent to the glasshouse (military prison).

My next adventure was a self-inflicted wound. We had this horrible porridge, burned and full of salt. Everybody was moaning about it. The captain who was on duty comes round to every table. He says, any complaints? Silly me gets up and says, "Yes, Sir." "What is it?" "That porridge, Sir, do they have to put so much salt into it and burning it every day?" And the others are all ready, waiting for what's coming. The Captain says, "See this door? That's the way to the kitchen and you go in and see the Sergeant in the cookhouse and tell him how to cook it for a full fortnight, and you can start now!" So that was my punishment for opening my mouth. The others had a good laugh about this and warned me - never to complain. But I could not understand why they ask us whether we have got any complaints. There was always some silly victim.

Now, I entered the cookhouse and there the Sergeant was already waiting for me. He showed me a large bag of potatoes and said, can you see these potatoes. I want you to peel them so quickly that they boil in your hand. After a few days he says to me, where do you come from? I said from Vienna, I volunteered to join the British Army to fight the Nazis and here I am sitting and peeling potatoes.

After this all slowed down and he became very friendly. One day he said to me, I have told my wife and my neighbours about you. They all want to see you. As soon as the fourteen days are over I will take you to see my family and friends. He lived on the outskirts of Glasgow.

The day came and one can't imagine how nice these people were. They all shook hands with me and wanted to give me bottles of whisky which I hardly drink. Then there were biscuits and small loaf of home made bread. At the Sergeant's house there was a lovely meal awaiting for me. You told me once, he said, that you are keen on music. I said, yes, I like classical music and operas. He said, next week I have got a special treat for you. The Scottish Orpheus Choir. The singing was so beautiful that I can say that I never heard any singing as well as this particular concert. So it was worthwhile to complain, otherwise I would not have had such a wonderful treat.

Every Tuesday a Lieutenant came to our hut to give us a talk about 'Why we are at war'! This was a booklet printed by the War Office, ABCA, short for Army Bureau for Current Affairs. He knew so little that the soldiers were falling asleep while he talked. Then he asked whether there is anyone to ask a question, or say something. So I put up my hand and said I would like to say something, having been involved in the underground movement I learned a thing or two.

When I started speaking everybody became interested and listened to what I had to say, how Austria and the other countries were overrun and we in the underground movement had to fight a losing battle. Even the Lieutenant became very interested. Then I answered questions and the hour was over. The Lieutenant thanked me and went straight to the Camp Commandant to tell him about it. He called me to his office (luckily I learned by then how to salute properly). So we had a long conversation about myself and then he asked me whether I would be prepared to use the ABCA pamphlets to speak to every platoon in the camp and to add also some of my experiences. From then on, to whatever camp I was sent, a letter was following to the next Commandant to use my experiences to tell our soldiers. I have still copies of these letters.

The next day I got my first stripe and I became a Lance Corporal. Then, unfortunately, I had an operation after which I could not do military exercises or any hard jobs. I was medically downgraded from A1 to C2 but I still was able to give lectures to the soldiers. This time, however, on a higher level.

I was sent to a special camp in Scotland where soldiers and officers were sent to recuperate from wounds they received in the war. My speeches were not only about the war but also about the peace to come when I received from the camp commandant Lord Beveridge's plan for a better future. The listeners were very enthusiastic and hoped that the next Government would adopt this plan.

After this I was sent to Leeds to attend an Army Education Course to become a teacher. This suited me well because I could visit my wife very often, although I had to live in an army camp near Otley. As I still had my single stripe as a Lance Corporal they tried to make me train the soldiers but I was not good at that, so I was sent back to Leeds to complete my course, after which I was sent to Portsmouth.

Portsmouth and Peterborough (Yaxley)

It seemed that the military authorities did not know what to do with me so I had to do a course on store-keeping. Before I completed this course I had to report to the Commandant who had a letter from the War Office appointing me to be Staff Sergeant in a Prisoner of War Camp near Peterborough. I got a new uniform with the insignia badge on my arm and a railway ticket to Yaxley near Peterborough.

There I reported to the Lt. Colonel who introduced me to the other officers and explained to me my duties. My job was to write regular reports to the War Office, translating, being present when there were some complaints on both sides, translating at any occasional trials of prisoners for misbehaving, etc.

The prisoners had to work on the fields for the farmers near Peterborough or Yaxley. Each week I was driven to the various farmers by one of the officers for various reasons. I usually saw the

spokesman for the prisoners and had to write down any complaints which I reported to the Camp Commandant. The officers usually stayed with the farmers, probably for a drink etc. It seemed to me that they all liked to be on the roster. Even our Camp Commandant wanted to be on it.

Once in winter when there was snow all over the countryside, one German soldier disappeared. He had an affair with one of the farm girls. Eventually he was found. At his trial his excuse was that he was looking for flowers in the snow. The Major who had no sense of humour, sentenced him to several weeks of prison.

One officer, whose duty was to control all the vegetables grown by the prisoners, had a map of the area and marked it with pins. Red pins for beetroot, potatoes with yellow pins, cabbages with green pins etc. Of course everybody was making fun of him. One day I said to him, if those pins disappear one day, will you know who had pinched them? The next day all pins had disappeared. When he had to leave the camp he gave me two little boxes of those pins and said, here they are, now you will be happy. This man misunderstood my joke, he certainly had no sense of humour.

The Major did not like me because he could not understand how I could become a Staff Sergeant without going through the ranks, like everybody else. He asked me once when he was in his bad mood, what have you got what other's have not? I said, "I speak five languages and the War Office uses my ability. You know when I was away for two weeks I went to Preston. There was a POW camp for Italians. The interpreter there was poorly and I had to do the job for a while. Besides, this is usually a Captain's job what I do but as I am at the moment not a British Citizen I can never become an officer, but here in this camp I must have some authority because the Jerries like authority, especially the British Crown. I represent Britain here. I get all the answers from them which our War Office desires to know." Then he said, "Why do you go to Peterborough with *our* soldiers? You are fraternising with them." "On duty they have to respect my rank," I said, "Off duty we are all doing our best for the country and enjoy ourselves." I also reminded him that I nearly put one of the soldiers on a charge when he had to take some POWs to the Cambridge hospital and did not post the documents I gave into the proper place. This man quickly obeyed. "I knew you would have had a case against me for being soft with the lower ranks", I said.

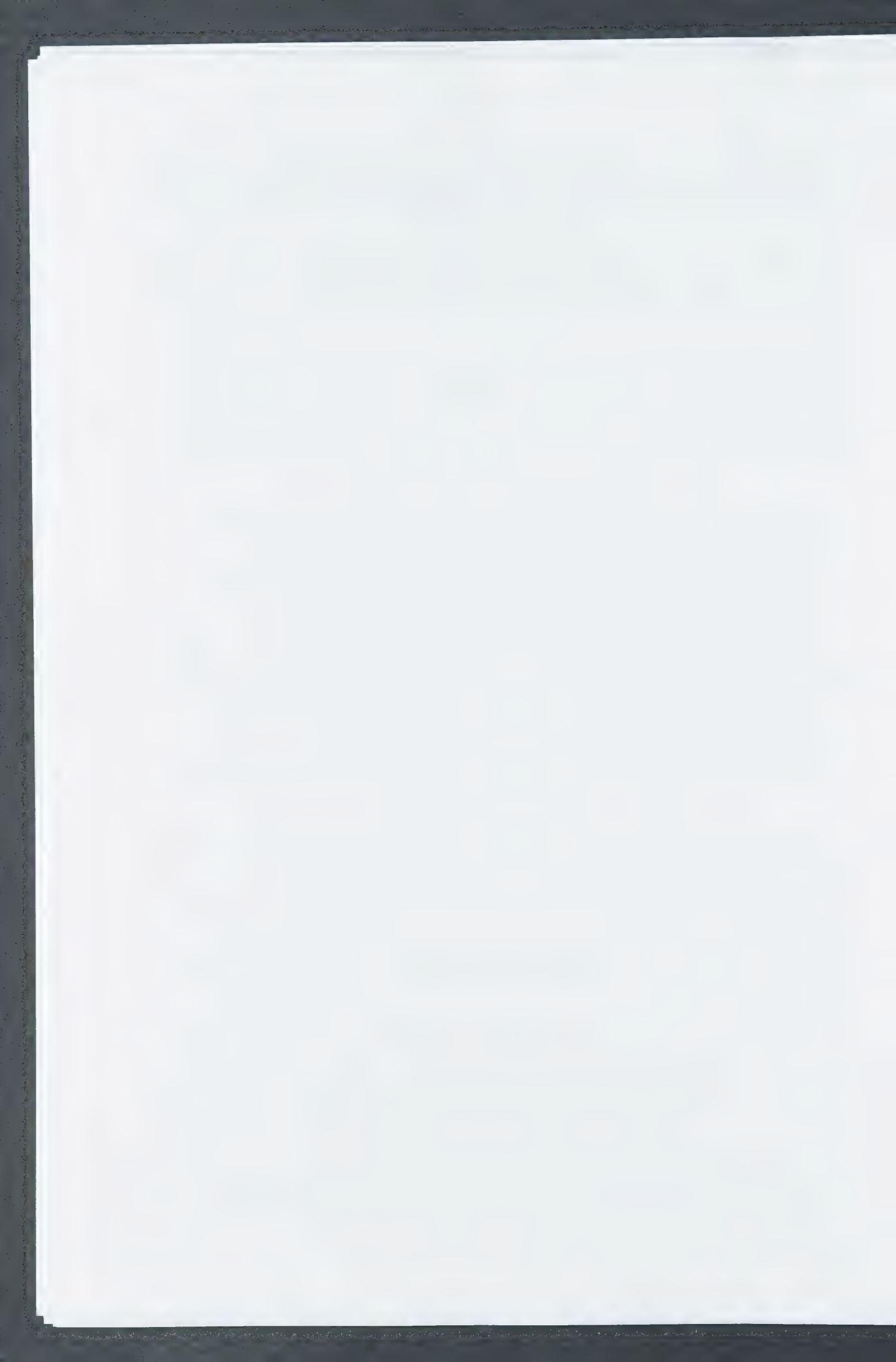
One day the order came from the War Office that the British Doctor and I should write a list of all those prisoners who were poorly or had special reasons to be first to return to Germany. The war was over. Our English Doctor conscientiously did as demanded but the German Doctor made a list of his own and gave it to me. It was a list of prisoners who were in very good health, but known Nazis. Our Doctor did what his conscience dictated him and sent his list of those who were really poorly. Soon after the German officer came into our room full of wrath and said, "I bet it was he", pointing at me, "the Bolshevik!! who told you not to send my list." Our military doctor was very angry and told him to leave the room and first to apologise. He said that easy little word, sorry, and left.

The camp was soon to be closed down. Then I had a letter from the War Office asking me whether I would like to stay a bit longer in the Army as an Interpreter in Vienna. I asked permission of my Commanding Officer whether I may go home to discuss this letter with my wife. He said, yes, but come back on Monday because there will be a lot of work awaiting for you. I promised that I shall be back with the first train from Leeds.

At home we were both pleased to see each other. Then I showed her the letter. She said, if you like to go back to Vienna, I shall follow you but reluctantly. Let's see about the conditions. I wrote that one of my reasons why I would like to go back to Vienna is to find out what happened to my mother and

all my relatives. The answer was quite simple: We are sorry we cannot have a person working here who would not have his mind 100% at such an important job. I rang through from our camp and read this letter to her. She was very pleased and relieved.

Soon afterwards we both got our British Citizenship and when her sister came to visit us we said to her, there comes the bloody foreigner. She laughed and said I shall get it as well. We never regretted that step but we went to Vienna and the Austrian countryside very often.



CHAPTER 20: BACK IN GOOD OLD LEEDS - 6 OCTOBER 1946

When I arrived at the railway station in Leeds, there was my little wife waiting for me. I could easily recognise her because of her size. She was so sweet looking. As a matter of fact I called her my child or just Trude. We both had a lot in common because we both lost all our relatives apart from Greta, her sister, who was 10 years older and myself who had a great cousin in Mexico. So we understood each other well and never argued. She would have liked sometimes to have an argument but I was not keen on that because it is so easy to fall out and hurt your partner.

At home there was an official last letter hanging underneath the lamp, demoting me to a miserable Private and promoting herself to General and reminding me that all the galling would now be over. We embraced each other and had a really good laugh.

After a few days I got myself a job with the CWS as an electrician. I had to travel, mostly by bus, to all the CWS factories, rewiring the old electrical installations. I tried to be at home by 7pm but it was always impossible, especially when I missed buses and had to wait for an hour or two. So I left the CWS and got myself another job.

This one lasted only 5 minutes. What happened was that the owner of the small electrical shop sent me to Chapeltown to have a look at the house to be rewired. The owner of the house asked me to have a good look round. There was not much to see in the rooms but when I went to the cellar there was a right mess. The wires were loose and rotten and the gas meter was next to the electric wires. There could have been an explosion any minute. When I said this to this man I made it clear to him that I would change all this and that there would be no more danger, he ran upstairs to the telephone and shouted into it, "You, my own brother, have cheated me. I shall go to a proper big firm etc." When I arrived back at the shop I was paid some money but got the sack. That was a lesson for me.

My next job was at Burton's the famous clothing manufacturers. My job was to check the whole electrical system and then to service those installations which needed doing. There were many Jewish tailors working there, who originally came from Russia in 1905 where they had these horrible pogroms. Many of them handed in the USA but most of them came to Britain. They spread right from Glasgow to Leeds and London, their language was a mixture of Russian, Polish, Yiddish and English. Nearly all of them preferred working in clothing factories, and here at Burtons they congregated, but later most youngsters went to University and married Christian girls and spoke the true Scottish or Yorkshire language.

I stayed at Burtons for a few months but left the firm because they wanted to send me to London as there was a shortage of electricians. There was a time when I worked for the YEB where my first trouble started.

A new electric power station was built at the outskirts of Leeds. Most of the building was already covered but we had plenty of fresh air. We had some problems with the Foreman. Now, unfortunately there was a lot of trouble because of the petty attitude of this Foreman. Some men were in the Union, others were afraid to join and the worst of it all was there was no Shop Steward. So this foreman could do anything he liked. He made difficulties when we had a tea break, he continuously shortened our mealtimes, gave us our wages in the last minute, etc., etc.

I had a chat with some of them who were still in the Union and asked them haven't we got a shop steward? They said no, nobody wants to do it! So I said, let's have a meeting after work so that the Foreman has no excuse to stop us. We had this meeting after work whilst the Foreman disappeared with his little car. Nobody told him about this meeting. Then I got up on a little box and urged them, first to join the Union so that we are 100% and asked them to elect a Shop Steward who would represent all the men. "This man treats us as if we are all slaves, this must stop, I was always told that the British worker is a proud man, let's show him! First we need a Shop Steward and I hope that everybody joins." Then I jumped down and waited what they are going to do.

One young electrician jumped up onto these few bricks which were lying there and proposed that I should become the new Shop Steward. He himself would collect the Union money. All were in favour to rejoin the Union, only a few hesitated but joined the next day. The same evening I went to the Union meeting and told the Chairman what happened. Some of our lot were also there and they confirmed what I had said. I got a lot of Union cards and was able to hand them out during our tea break. The Foreman was fuming and swore that he will get me the sack but he could not do anything about the established fact. He knew that if he starts trouble that the boys would go on strike, which would slow down the process of building the new power station.

For a while there was peace but one day when he had to go to town, he looked at my installation, pipes and wiring and said, you are very good in spouting but you are a poor craftsman. I want you to take all this down and when I come back I want a completely new installation there. And off he went to town. Then I said to my work mates, "See this job, I think it is OK and I am not going to touch it and see what he says." When he came back, he looked at the job and said, "Now it looks much better. Look how much damage you have done. The other material will now be ruined." So I told him then, "My work mates are my witnesses that I have not touched this installation at all but if I had done what you ordered me to do there would have been some damage. And now I am going to telephone to our boss and tell him what happened." And off I went to his office in order to telephone. He ran fast to his office and did not let me in.

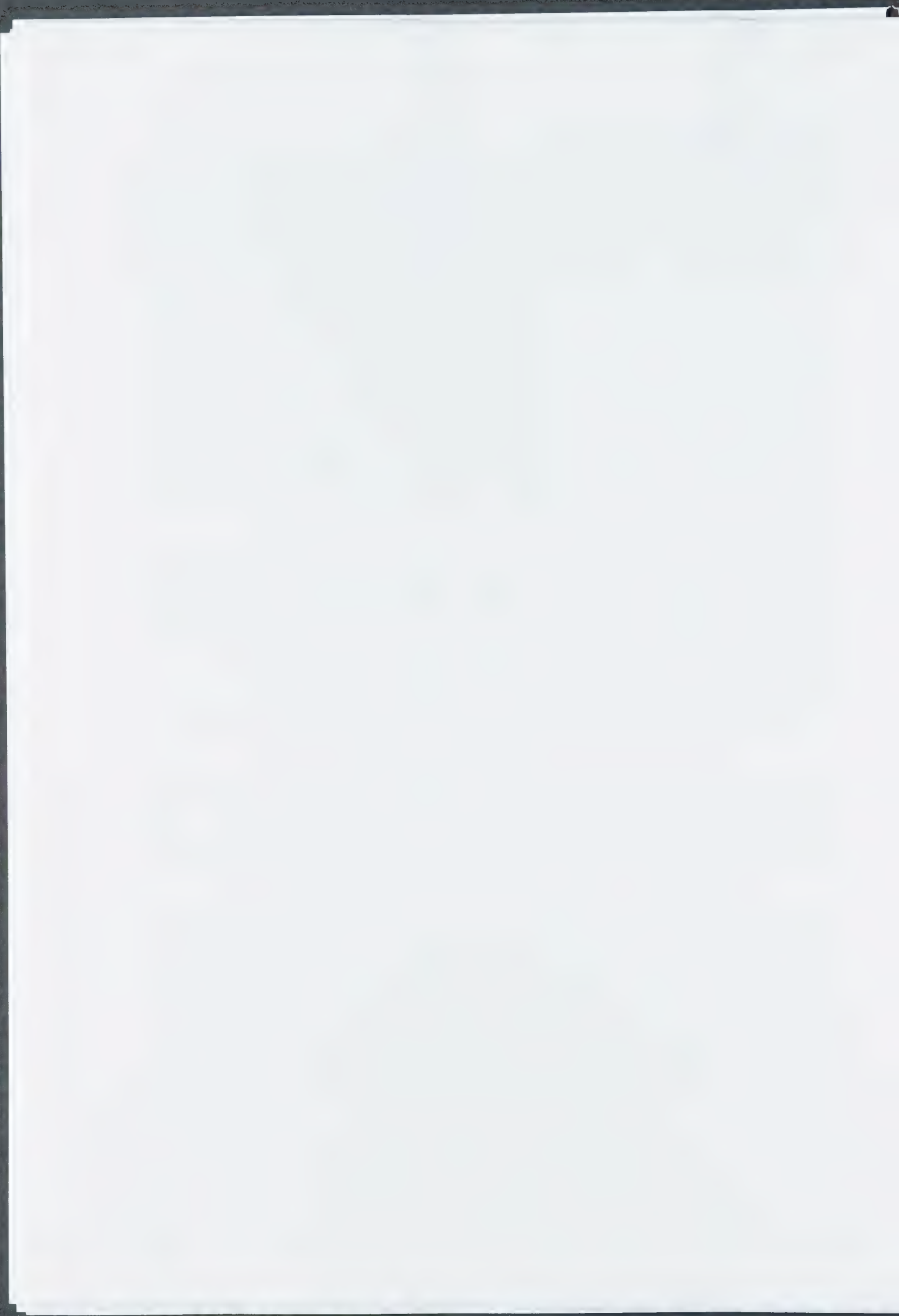
The next day the manager came and looked at the job, then had a quiet chat with the Foreman and I was allowed to stay. But a few weeks later, I was told that there are now less people needed at the power station and that I shall be able to carry on working in Leeds itself doing house to house installations. This was a poorly paid job. After a few weeks I left and started work for a very big firm - English Electric. This factory was between Leeds and Bradford.

Whilst I was working for all these places I carried on going to night school, improving my knowledge. This helped me to achieve a higher stage in my responsibilities and thus I got the job in the Test Department. We had to test ordinary motors but also bigger and more complicated ones which went to the Atomic Power Stations. All these had to be tested thoroughly. At that time we still used slide rules. The motors had to be partly dismantled and the wiring checked before we gave them a good run after assembling it again. Some of the large motors had to be run over 24 hours. Then the motors were, one by one, dismantled and thermometers stuck into various parts. If the heat was too high then the motors could not be used. So it was a very difficult and responsible job. Our wages were only slightly higher than those who assembled them in the work shop.

Bradford - English Electric 1956 - 1960

So of course our lot grumbled because the assemblers got a higher bonus than we, so that there was hardly any difference in our wages. The attitude of the management was that testing was a necessary evil and that those who assemble them should get the higher bonus. Up to the moment when I arrived nobody dared to ask for a higher bonus or, which was more logical, an increase in our wages. This grumbling went on until I was well established at English Electric. Grumbling and acting are two opposites. Everybody is afraid to tackle the Manager, although we call each other by our Christian names. Once again, during our dinner hour we discussed our woes but nobody volunteered to speak to the manager. Then suddenly they all said, what about you Bill. I told them straight: the last time you put me forward you let me down. This time I want you all to sign this paper that you support my approach to the management in order to increase our basic wage etc. They all signed and I went straight to our manager. When he saw me he knew what it was all about, so he says to me, how is it that it is never one of the others? I wonder whether you are not a Russian spy. That made me laugh. I said, if I were a Russian spy I would have joined the Tory Party, making anti-communist speeches and certainly would be against the Unions. As this man had a sense of humour he started laughing and said, if you were not such a good worker we would have sacked you long ago. Then I said, why do you still keep me on B grade since I started here if you are so satisfied with me? And so it happened that not only did we get a higher wage but I got my A grade after all.

I stayed for four years. I could have stopped there until my retirement but for the 4 weeks day shift and 2 weeks night shifts, also the buses to Leeds from Bradford were always full and I had to walk a few miles very often towards the Leeds terminus, summer and winter, and on night shift I often fell asleep and finished at the other end.



CHAPTER 21: LEEDS - MY NEW JOB

One Sunday afternoon my wife and I decided to have a little walk. Not far away from our house was the Ridge. There were plenty of benches and we could look down and enjoy the nature around us in all its glory. At the bottom of this ridge was the famous Yorkshire Switch Gear Company, all surrounded by green. I said to Trude, these people who work here must be very happy, they could sit there during dinner hours, have their sandwiches and eat in peace and listen to the birds singing their jolly songs. Trude said, why not try and get a job here. It's only 10 minutes walk from our home and you even would be able to have a short meal at home. You are on night shift the next 2 weeks so you would be able to see the manager tomorrow morning. I said, what a wonderful idea. Little did I know what was waiting for me.

So next morning I went to see the manager and asked him whether there was a job available for a skilled electrician. He asked me whether I have got a job and what my qualifications are. I said that I work for English Electric in the Test Department. When he heard that he said you can start tomorrow and bring your papers with you. Of course that was impossible because I had to give a fortnight's notice.

That's what I did. When I saw the manager he was very much surprised and said he was sorry because I was a very reliable worker. And then I told him quite openly that one of the reasons was the horrible night shifts and the bus service after work. The buses came full of passengers from Bradford and very often I had to walk to the Leeds terminus and that the firm did nothing to help to provide a better service for those who had no cars, or by getting in touch with the Bradford Bus Companies.

My new job: Yorkshire Switch Gear Co.

When I entered the Y.S. Co. there were two shocks waiting for me. One was a complete surprise. There was a woman who lived in the Woodhouse area. When she saw me she shouted, this is the man who brings me my Daily Worker every Saturday. I did not need to advertise my politics, and naturally the management heard it as well.

When I wanted to put on my overall before entering the proper work place I found myself transported into the 19th century. There were just a few hooks, a few buckets and some towels and the most horrible toilets one could imagine with square pieces of newspaper. But on the wall was a Government poster, the Factory Act, which distinctly made it clear that any firm which does not abide by the rules of this Act will be heavily fined and may also be closed down after a first warning.

When we had our first tea break at 10 am I went to see the Shop Steward and asked him whether he had anything done in the past about this and he said, yes, I have seen the manager several times, but nothing happened. then I had to go back to my job. Later at 12 o'clock I spoke to him again, he refused to talk to me about it. When the workday was over everybody was running towards the few buckets to get some hot water from the tap and snatch a few towels. It was anarchy. I did not wash my hands there, but made my way home.

There were several of my new mates who went the same way over the ridge towards Headingley Lane. We chatted a bit and somebody said it is a disgrace that we have to go home with dirty hands. So I said, I can't understand that nobody has done anything about it. The law is on our side. You have got a Shop Steward, he should have done something long ago. Anyway, I tell you this, I have been working at English Electric and they had to give in several times because we all stuck together and supported me. These here know the Shop Steward is soft and does not want a proper showdown. Here we are in the right and we ought to use the law. Then we parted and I went home to meet my dear wife.

While we had our meal, which was 100% as usual. (People say love goes through your tummy - how partly true this is!) Trude said to me, "You are very quiet." I said, "Don't worry, we have a lot to speak about and I shall need your help", and I told her what happened including the 'Daily Worker' episode. Then I said to her, "Do you remember when I was in the Army and I wanted to come home for a few days. I always asked the Captain or later the Colonel for a pass out for 3 days or so, never the sergeant who would have to go to the Captain anyway if he wanted to! So this time I would like you to write a letter to the General Manager of Yorkshire Switchgear in person. Not to the manager because he is afraid like all the others in the management of the GM. "

In the letter I explained that "I have only been at this factory one day and that I was shocked to find 19th century conditions for cleaning one's hands, very few towels and dirty toilets. Most people go home without having washed their hands. There is a huge Government poster on the wall which clearly and expressly insists that all factories have to provide adequate washing facilities and decent toilets. Any firm which does not provide these facilities will be very heavily fined. There is even a danger that in the worst cases the factory may even be closed. I hope that you will not misunderstand this letter as wanting to gain some benefit. It seems to me that nobody has drawn this problem to your attention. If I am sacked for daring to write to you I can only say that English Electric was sorry to let me go because the firm valued my qualities. Thank you for reading this letter."

The Managing Director never answered my letter, but I worked for them for 20 years until my 65th birthday, a day before Christmas. Within a week workmen came and started building the facilities which were required. The day after I had seen the General Manager the Manager came to see me and he was very angry. He wanted to know why I went over his head to the General Manager. I explained to him that apparently the Shop Steward saw him many times and nothing happened. He did not sack me, perhaps because he could not but he punished me by not allowing me to work in the Test Department. The next best job was wiring huge switch gear. This job was interesting but I would have preferred testing because this helped me to develop my knowledge of electricity.

When the next election for representing the work force came I became Shop Steward for the ETU members and he represented only the AEU which was a much smaller group. A year after I became the Shop Steward Convener. After another year a regular monthly meeting was held with the management, which dealt with various problems. We were able to solve many problems without having to use the last weapon. At the meeting were usually 6 or 7 of us and 3 from the management.

It so happened that when an apprentice got into trouble the foreman always sent him to me. He said if he doesn't help you nobody else will be able to. My attitude towards the apprentices was simple. When they were sent to me I did my best to help them. I treated them as equals. I showed them all I knew myself. They were never asked to bring me tea or do all sorts of unnecessary chores. They had to learn a trade and become useful citizens.

There was one boy whom I could not help because he was caught stealing copper but at the other hand there was one whom I nearly hit but changed my mind. He was the one whom I met years later at the Provincial Building Society. He was standing behind me and patted me on my shoulders and shouted in front of all, "Hello, Bill. Do you remember you saved my job when I worked with you?" When I looked back at him I hardly recognised him, nearly two heads taller. Everybody had a good laugh, only poor Trude had had a big shock. It could have been different she said. Later he told me that he had a very good job now and was married with two children. This was compensation for me. It was worth having this positive attitude towards the younger people.

One day the cleaning ladies came to see me complaining that the management had sacked 6 of 12 of them but never increased their wages. They started at 5 am to clean all offices and windows in the factory. Can you do anything for us, they asked. I was very sorry to hear this but I reminded them that I have asked them several times in the past to join the Union but they never wanted to join. Everybody was paying their dues, but they did not see the necessity to do this, as they don't use tools. I told them that they are part of the employees and their tools are the brush, warm water and ladders from which they could fall, especially when they are tired. Anyway, they decided to join and we walked together towards the manager's office. He stood on the balcony and saw us coming and shouted down, did you have to bring bloody Sheridan along?

The first words he uttered when we entered his office was, he won't help you because you are not in the Union and you cannot be because you do not handle tools. But he got a shock when they told him that everyone had joined and that Bill promised to stick up for them. In order to shorten the conversation I made it clear to him that their tools were brushes and everything else to keep the place clean and they have to carry buckets of water and ladders. They could slip and break parts of their body. On top of it there were only 6 of them instead of 12 which forces them to work harder at 5 o'clock in the morning as they have to complete their job before the main work force arrives. He knew all this of course and said he will think about it. One of the women said, all right, Sir, we shall not do any cleaning while you think and they all started to leave the room. Even in the General Director's office nothing was touched. They came to work at 5 am as usual but did nothing. But the poor Manager must have got an order, probably by the General Director, that they should get their increase and also two more helpers. It was not just the Union which won them this victory, but they themselves who courageously stood up for themselves knowing that they had support.

Shortly after, the General Director called for me in a different matter. Yorkshire Switchgear Co. decided for the first time to take part at the International Trade Fair in Hanover. He asked me first to translate our pamphlet into German so that they could use it at the Fair. Of course I would get extra pay for this. The next thing he wanted me to do was to go to the Fair and act as a translator for the firm with one of the Directors (Mr. Rumfit). When I came home I told Trude about it, but stressed very strongly that I only go to this Trade Fair if she agrees. She said, yes, of course you go there. You must not miss this opportunity.

I was able to translate most of our pamphlet with the aid of a technical dictionary which Mr. Rumfit got for me before he arrived at the Hanover Fair a day before it started. In the meantime, before he arrived, I found our stand empty, no electricity laid on or a list of the Directors of the various power stations. I telephoned the manager of the Industrial Fair and complained about this fact very strongly, especially when all the other companies had everything done for them. I purposely spoke in German so that he had no excuse to pretend that he can't understand me. I also asked for a telephone directory to be able to get in touch with all the Directors of most of the power stations to inform them that we are here with a modern type of switchgear. None of them knew about our existence.

I did this because our Director had not arrived yet. We only had three more days before the opening of the Industrial Fair.

When Mr. Rumfit arrived I told him what happened. He was very annoyed with the German organisers but thanked me for my initiative.

In the meantime our switchgear was fixed in position and all worked well. We then made our way to the Head Manager's office and complained about the unfair treatment which we got and also about the accommodation which we got, three hours drive from the hotel for one group. It was a small but pleasant hotel and extremely good food. Mr. R. stayed with us and did not isolate himself. He could not do it otherwise because I had to translate or order the food they wanted.

At the Fair itself Mr. R. wanted me to be always with him so that I could translate anything connected with business or just ordinary talk. Amongst various managers I met one who came from Vienna who was the head of the power stations there. I introduced Mr. R. to him and they did not need me there because this man spoke perfect English. Mr. R. told me later that this man was very interested in our type of switchgear because we had more safety devices than the Germans and was cheaper.

I never found out whether Vienna ever bought any switchgear from YSE but a Swedish Director ordered some. He could speak well English. He said to me, you English are funny people, it seems that we have to beg you to sell us your machines. The German ones have less protection gadgets, and are more expensive. The German salesman, a man just a few years older than I, said to me, your German's very good, and was very inquisitive, but I did not put him wise. I must admit I felt very uncomfortable in his presence. Then he wanted to know why we use so many safety devices. I said, that is natural in England because we do not want anybody to be killed and to have to pay compensation. He said, if anybody gets killed it his own fault. I was not surprised at him saying that. Besides ours were still cheaper than theirs. I can say that it was a wonderful experience having been there for a fortnight.

I have learned a lot but I was still glad to be home!!! As the saying goes 'East, West, home's best' and it was wonderful to be with my dear little wife.

Years went by and not much changed. At Xmas 1975 I had my 65th birthday. With permission of the General Director a wonderful birthday party was arranged in the big dining hall of the staff. About 200 people were there. I was presented with a lovely fountain pen which I still possess. The General Director made a speech and said amongst other things: I watched Sheridan when I walked along the balcony. He always had his nose to the grindstone or showed some apprentices how to do a job. He stuck up for you many times, even if you did not always deserve it.

CHAPTER 22: HOW WE SAVED 380 HOUSES FROM DESTRUCTION

One of my most interesting experiences in life was the battle with Leeds City Council to save our houses from destruction. It started with a visit by one of our neighbours, Mrs. O'Carol. She was very upset because she read in the Yorkshire Evening Post that 380 houses in our area will be considered a clearance area within 10 years. It meant a slump in the value of our houses to 30%. As I didn't read this paper I did not know anything about it. I asked Mrs. O'Carol whether anything has been done about it yet. Yes, she said, a South Headingley Residents Association has been formed several weeks ago. She is the Secretary and a Mr. Archer was Treasurer. I immediately joined and became a 'temporary' Chairman. And then a Mr. Parry joined us, who used to be with the City Council Architect. He advised us in many important matters. Then we had this meeting where we decided to invite the Council to explain why they are in such a hurry giving us only a fortnight to protest.

We immediately had several 100 small leaflets printed which were quickly distributed by our members. The leaflet was short - 'If you don't want your house to be destroyed, come to our meeting at Brudenell School. Our Councillors will also be there'.

Just before the meeting we gave several people a slip of paper with several questions on and stressed that there should be no shouting or swearing because this would only give the Councillors an excuse to abandon the meeting. At this meeting were 10 Councillors and they were astonished to see so many people in this hall. Some people had even to stand. I introduced the Councillors in a short speech: 'We have called this meeting in order to save our homes. but we also want this area to become a better place to live in. Improvement of houses, more trees, safe road crossings etc. Above all we want to press the Council to remove the stigma of the time limit 1976-86. At the same time we want this area to be declared a General Improvement Area. Our houses here are in a much better condition than other areas and could be improved at a much smaller cost than the destruction of perfectly good house. We also urge our Councillors to listen to the people who elected them and report their plans in time so that we can either approve or reject them. This would be true democracy!'

The Councillors listened. After this speech I asked those members who already had their questions prepared to start putting them to our Councillors.

1. Q: How many people in Leeds are without a home? A: There are 3 to 4 thousand people homeless.

Next Question: How many new houses are going to be built before *our* houses are going to be destroyed. 2nd Councillor: None at the moment, was his answer.

3rd Question: Where are we going to live when our houses are going to be destroyed. Answer: Start looking for houses in a different area!

That was a silly answer and it caused an uproar. I got to my feet and asked our people to restrain their anger. Our Councillors were not able to answer our questions satisfactorily but promised to study their own proposals and our reaction to them. In the meantime one of the Councillors came to my house and said that the houses around us were in good condition and would not be touched

and he would see to it that only 2/3rd of the area were destroyed. This made me so angry - that this man tried to bribe me - that I ordered him out of our house.

In the end our persistence won the day and all houses in Leeds 6 were left and are still there, apart from the school which was destroyed later and a new one more modern was built. The Council took our suggestions very seriously and the improvement started. But in our paper 'Headline' (some copies I still have at home) we urged people *for their own sake* not to let their houses deteriorate. Last year, when I visited Leeds again, I was pleasantly surprised to see most of them in good condition.

Our monthly journal was still sold in our whole area and even in other parts by other organisations.

I want to stress here that the person (Mr. Parry) who used to be with the City Architect helped us a lot when we were facing the Councillors. He knew what was going on there. We also had a shop where volunteers sold secondhand clothes and many other things, but the best and most useful success started when we were able to get eight lawyers who once a week gave free legal advice to anyone who came into the shop.

But our main activities were varied. This was possible because we had 20 members on our Committee. My policy was to encourage everyone to do what he or she liked best to do. One person for instance - a head teacher - surrounded himself with about 15 volunteers who covered the whole area to visit every pensioner. They made sure that the milk bottles were outside the door, they went shopping for them, brought them books from the library, took them to hospital when necessary, had chats with them and so on. One woman who has been living in India knew the Urdu language or other Asian languages and taught the Pakistani women to speak English. Others sold our paper 'Headline' from house to house, including Trude and myself. Some prepare our 'Headline' in their houses. Also in our house. I was not allowed by Trude to do that because I was very clumsy. It took me half an hour to put one letter a proper position in, so Trude said, you just make the tea and bring some cakes to the table.

Once a terrible thing happened. A little girl fell from the swings in Hyde Park and was killed. Her head hit the concrete on which the pillars were fixed. It was a sad affair and something had to be done. Some of our women got together and worked out a set of drawings, how to improve the playground and all the gadgets, including supports so that the pillars were fixed deep in the soil without the dangerous concrete. The Council was so impressed that their Engineers immediately used the drawings for the new safe swings etc. Even Meanwood Park, whose playground was three times as large as the one in Hyde Park got new supports for the gadgets. When Trude and I watched the children playing so happily and the parents not to have to worry, we thought how great it was having so much influence that the Council listens to us. At that time it was possible to have successes. It is different today.

Trude and I had of course more than one iron in the fire. We had an allotment not far from the factory when I worked. After work we used to go there and did a bit of digging or planting some seedlings or any job necessary. After an hour or so I went home and there was always a smashing meal waiting for me. She could cook, because she learned it in a place near Salzburg-Mond See where her parents had a hotel. She brought all her cookery books and some gadgets with her.

On Saturday morning I used to sell the Morning Star and some raffle tickets. It happened that one of the readers won £100. When I went to see her I of course gave it to her. She was so pleased to get it and said, now at last we shall have a fine holiday. I was pleased for her but next week her husband

was there and he was very angry. He shouted why the B.H. did you give that money to my wife, it belonged to me and not to her. I said, I am very sorry, I didn't know because my wife and I share everything, don't you want to have a holiday together? No, he said, I shall be bored stiff, and you don't come to this house any more. So I learned that not all families have the same relationship, unfortunately!

CHAPTER 23: JULY 1985 - AN IMPORTANT DECISION IS MADE

My wife and I lived a very hectic life. Apart from all the usual jobs which every family had to do, we were still involved in the Community Association, there was our allotment, then there were evening classes for Trude and I was teaching German three times a week. I really should have retired from teaching but I was asked to carry on until a substitute could be found. Apart from the income, which was useful when we went on holidays, it gave me a lot of pleasure to teach grownups because their main aim was to speak the language when they went to Austria or Switzerland on holiday. Then there was my Saturday sale of the Morning Star. After dinner, the allotment. Sunday, the thorough cleaning of the house and in the afternoon the allotment again. One day we decided that we sit down and discuss our future. This was triggered off by the death of Greta, Trude's sister. She died of cancer very suddenly, soon after her husband died and so we had no more relatives apart from our son who lived in Lichfield with his wife and two children.

We had been there several times and we always liked to go to this small but beautiful city with its lovely cathedral. It was clear to both of us that our future life should be in Lichfield. Trude rang our son and asked him whether we could stay for a few days at his house as we had decided to live in Lichfield if we can find a house which would suit us. He was in favour and his wife as well. A few days after we took the train to Tamworth where Peter was already waiting with his car. When we were nearing Lichfield we saw the Lichfield Cathedral with its three spires.

This always reminded us of Vienna because there they also wanted to have another two spires together with the St. Stephen's Cathedral which has a 138 metre spire. This happened over 300 years ago. The two spires were started with great enthusiasm until they reached the heights of over 30 metres. Then the Turks arrived suddenly with the aim to destroy Vienna in order to conquer the south-western part of Europe, but here they were stopped for many months because of the heroic defence of the Viennese citizens. Suddenly it looked like the Turks would achieve their aim when they were able to breach some of the defences through underground passages. It looked that Vienna would fall and the way to the south and western parts of Europe would be open. Suddenly help came from Poland. King Sobicsky came with a huge army through the Vienna Woods and destroyed the Turks. In their haste, they left many bags of coffee and so it happened that Vienna was the first city to open a café, but had no money to carry on building the two spires. And Lichfield, I was told, is the only city in the world having a cathedral with three spires.

When we arrived at Peter's house, a nice meal was already prepared which we very much enjoyed. As it was still light Peter took us round to a few streets, just to have a look whether there are some houses for sale, but these were all like Peter's house - one floor, high steps. Trude did not like any of them, mainly because of the high steps which she swore that she had had enough of in Leeds. The next day we went to the other part of the town where we found a cul-de-sac with ten bungalows. These attracted us straight away and there were two bungalows for sale. We stopped at one of them which had a beautiful garden. Trude was so enamoured with this one that she said I want this one. As soon as she had said it the door opened and a lady came out and asked, are you interested in buying this house? And Trude said, yes, we are. Like Queen Victoria!

The lady, Mrs. Bond, showed us round and pointed out to us that there is also a dining with special heating for the winter (Baxi gas fire and electric heating) for this she would not charge us anything. There was also a sliding double glazed door, leading to the garden. There were masses of flowers

growing and plenty of various fruits, including strawberries. A huge damson tree and at the back there was a greenhouse with tomatoes and grapes and to top it all a garden shed with all the tools and necessary gadgets. All this was surrounded by huge trees. When Trude saw all this she started crying for joy. She said, Willi, there will be a lot of work here for both of us, but it will be better than our allotment.

So Mrs. Bond took us to the main room where she got a cup of tea and some beautiful fresh strawberries. Then she showed us the two bedrooms and the bathroom all in pink condition. We did not haggle about the price when she told us. The next day we settled everything with the estate agent.

In the meantime Mrs. Bond telephoned the estate agent and told him not to sell the bungalow to anybody else, only to us. My son was worried, thinking we were too hasty but Trude reminded him that she has been working in this line for many years and had a lot of experience. We said goodbye to Mrs. Bond and to our family and hoped to see them in 3 months time. Then we returned to Leeds and told our friends the good news. A new Chairman was elected and the organisation had to get used to carrying on without us. Nobody is irreplaceable! There is always somebody coming up with new ideas. Before we left there was a farewell party organised. Photographs were taken and we were given a nice present; an original Leeds Pottery set made between 1770 and 1881. I thanked the organisers for this wonderful present which we cherished very much.

When we returned to Leeds we started our plan of action and there Trude was at her very best. She went first to her former boss, who was very pleased to hear the good news and promised her that he will arrange everything necessary for the sale of the house and the removal of all the furniture etc. left over. He also advised her to make sure that we leave the house a day before this first of October in order not to have to pay the next quarter or half yearly Community Charges. this was a very good advice.

Then we had to start thinking to prepare as much of our garden produce into our freezer, making jam etc. There Trude was at her very best. Before I stopped with my delivery of our papers I got myself in to real trouble. We used to sell tickets with football teams playing at next week's football matches. The man who guesses the proper results would win a certain amount of money. One of my customers won £100. When I went to his house next Saturday only his wife was in. Being used to our system where everything belongs to both of us, I gave the money to the wife. She was ever so pleased and said, now we shall have at last a nice holiday. She thanked me for it but not he when I came next week to his house. When he saw me he swore at me with the worst swear words he could find and very nearly wanted to hit me. But his wife held him back and said, he didn't know, be glad we have got it. He says that he shares everything with his wife and they can have a nice holiday together. Anyway, I started to go home and he shouted after me, don't you come here anymore or I will break every bone in your body. One can imagine that I never went there again. I learned that everybody has different ideas about marriage and habits.

CHAPTER 24: LICHFIELD, HERE WE COME!

Now began the main part of our preparations for the removal of our furniture and garden produce. We knew what we wanted to take with us and organised our duties accordingly. Trude saw to the furniture we could sell and to the removal people. My job was the freezing of various vegetables and fruit. All these went into the freezer chest. That was a continuous job. I made also various jams which were put in strong jars and then in boxes. But we also went, in between, to our various friends to say goodbye to them. Some brought us jam jars which we very urgently needed. Others came to the allotment in order to get a lot of red currants for making jelly for their next bazaar. The three months shot by like a flash. We knew that we could not take all the furniture with us. There would be no room in a bungalow. But we were able to sell a lot.

The removal people came in good time. Some of our frozen things went into a freezer compartment a day before we left. Our friend Bill Evans took us both to Lichfield in his car, where our son had the keys of the bungalow and garage ready. The removal people came half an hour later. In less than an hour everything was in position. Luckily enough there was room for the freezer chest in the garage and also in the dining room for furniture. Our friend wished us all the best and hoped that we would be happy there. If we should want to visit Leeds now and again, we would be heartily welcome. We thanked him for everything he had done for us in the past and promised to come to Leeds once we were settled. Then the first thing we did was have a nice cup of tea, a wonderful English invention.

Everything went smoothly. Nothing was broken. Trude was then sixty-five years' old and I seventy-five, but we looked forward to making the best of life as long as possible. Later our first neighbours came to see us, Mr. and Mrs. Bird. They immediately suggested that we should call them Bill and Jean. Naturally we agreed and told them that we are Willi and Trude (Sheridan). This immediately created a warm and pleasant atmosphere, then Jean asked, can we be of any help to you? So I said, yes please, we have got some trouble with the gas fire and are not able to light it. So Bill went down on his tummy and found the fault. After that there was no more trouble. In the meantime the ladies had a good chat and they quickly got to know each other. Jean told her about the Good Neighbour Scheme of which she is the representative in this area. Of course we joined for the yearly £1 which "ruined" us on the first day.

Then we met their daughter Amanda, an extremely intelligent young lady. Next morning she came across to our house and suggested that we should come with her to the Friary School where she is Prefect. We were there within five minutes. There she showed us their swimming pool which can be used by grown-ups as well. This was great news for us. We were very grateful to her for having pointed it out to us. In Leeds we had to go by bus, winter and summer and then over a bridge, then we had to wait for buses. But here! Five minutes walk! What great luck. We went three times a week and I am still going twice a week!

Our aim was to stop doing things and just have a rest. But resting was not in our blood. First we joined the English Literature classes, then French for me and Yoga for Trude. After that voluntary helpers at Oxfam and Cancer Research shops.

At the CRS there I met a lady who asked me to help her son in his German. He worked for a German firm which sold jewels in England in jewellers' shops. Occasionally he had to go to Germany where they had conferences. Of course only German was spoken. Here in England he attended

German classes but he needed more conversation. Of course, I gladly helped him, especially where he was very quick in grasping the basis of the language.

But our main job was the garden. There Trude reigned supreme. My job was digging and preparing the ground for the coming season and gathering the damsons which were left on the tree. I was still able then to go to the top of the tree. Trude was worried, but nothing happened. So, we were back to square one - busy and happy.

This reminded me of a colleague who retired at the same time as myself. I met him in Headingley and asked him how he is getting on. But he was moaning and groaning and wanted to go back to the factory to sweep the floor. Of course he was lonely. I asked him what do you do when you are at home and said, "Watching tele." I said, "Look, I have got an allotment, next to it there is one free, I'll lend you my tools and you can do something and be in the fresh air. I show you what to do and you won't be so lonely." But he did not listen. He just wasted away and later was found dead in front of the tele. This was a great shock to me and at the same time a lesson. Don't give in. Carry on doing things but rest in between, and take your age into account. And that's what we were doing here in Lichfield.

Trude and I made friends with all the families in the cul-de-sac. The occasion of my eightieth birthday was the catalyst. We organised a party and invited them all. My son and his wife Deborah came to help and it was a great success. From that moment on we started to know each other better after five years.

There were two more parties at the Adult Education classes which I attended and, unbeknown to me, the adult students had organised an eightieth birthday party as well as a Christmas party for me. This was a real surprise. In one of the classes there was a high chocolate cake and in the other a special bottle of Austrian wine. When they asked me to sing "Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht". I was reminded of the time when I, as a child, was singing this at the hospital in Vienna for the old ladies. It seemed to me that my wife had a hand in this plot. In the particular year we had more Christmas cards than ever - from Leeds, Austria, London and of course Lichfield.

But afterwards when it was all over Trude started worrying. It was all too good, this happiness can't last for ever, something bad is going to happen. (I was not surprised because originally her family came from Czechoslovakia and the Slav mentality was very often pessimistic, from past experiences.) So I said to her, come and sit on my knee and let's remember our difficulties. Have you forgotten all the bad and hard times we had together? The loss of our relatives, and how unlucky we were with our students which we had in order to pay for our house? We deserved a break and we must be proud and happy of what we have achieved. So be glad and stop being pessimistic.

But the blow came after two years - my little Trude died of cancer like her sister did. I could not get organised and so my son arranged her funeral and everything else. My neighbours were very helpful and friendly. Suddenly I found that I had more friends than I ever dreamed of. They invited me to their homes and gave me that wonderful, all healing, cup of tea. This, and my nature brought me back to a normal life.

Back to the past!

Before I carry on with my own part of the story it is necessary to tell part of Trude's story because it coincides from the moment when she was 4-6 years old. Her family used to have a small cinema. The very old fashioned type, when a pianist was playing all the time because these were silent films. I used to go to this picture house when I was visiting my poorer relations. There in front of the entrance stood a girl with beautiful black eyes and hair. She seemed to belong to the owners of this place. I thought that she was a very lively and beautiful child but otherwise I did not take any further notice of her.

Later, in Leeds, when we got to know each other, she showed me her photograph album and there was her photo as a child. So I asked her, did you every have a picture house? And she said, yes, this is me when I was a child. And I made a silly joke and said, "I always kicked her!" And she laughed and said, "Nobody ever kicked me!" So we both laughed and had a good time together. Of course I never did kick her. Then she told me that according to her doctor, Her mother was not supposed to have another child. But Trude came to prove the doctor wrong. Fate wanted it, that I should meet her. Her two sisters were not told about it and were sent to Czechoslovakia to stay with some relatives in order to hide the fact. After nine months they came back and had a terrible shock when they saw little Trude. Greta was 15 years older and Martha 17.

This type of picture house became old fashioned and they had to sell it. The father was a very astute business man and was able to buy a small hotel near Lake Mond See, not far away from Salzburg. There Trude went to school next door to the place where the Sound of Music was made. In Salzburg she went to a School of Commerce. Soon the black clouds of the Nazis came over Austria and a very hard and dangerous life began. Now, Greta was able to get a job at the CWS (Co-op) in Leeds. She was later able to get a job for Trude in Weybridge as a housekeeper, so both of them were saved. But the oldest one who had a boyfriend in Vienna could not make her mind up to follow her two sisters until it was too late. She and her parents and all the others were murdered in Auschwitz. The hotel was given to some Nazis.

After the war we tried to get the hotel back but the Austrian government told us that the people who got it are now the owners because the Hajek family could not pay the debt which they left behind. A Jewish lawyer whom I knew very well promised to do his best in Vienna but did not succeed. Although I suggested that we would turn the hotel into a holiday home for orphans it was not accepted.

We were not surprised to hear that one refugee who came back from America to get his superstore in Salzburg returned to the USA. He went back to New York because his shop was completely boycotted. He was able to sell it for a much reduced price. Many people got some compensation from the Austrian Government. Trude got a very small sum and I got nothing because I was too many years away from Vienna - luckily enough!

The only family left is a far removed cousin from Trude's side and my family here in Lichfield. I do not see them much because they are all very busy. The mother, Deborah, is the Deaconess of Lichfield Cathedral and writes the most beautiful sermons. She is very much liked in the church community and I would not be very surprised if she does not become one of the few women bishops in this area. Of course she is also otherwise also very busy, but there is her husband (my son) who is an excellent cook and much more versatile than I am. Several years ago he wrote a book on chemistry which is still sold in South America. The college (Sandwell) where he used to teach still sends him students.

Now, here is a special good example how two people can live together in harmony, although they have different religions.

Their children are very intelligent and study. Anna has been doing very well at Durham University. She told me last time when I saw her that a big firm in Durham is sponsoring her for another 3 years so that she may be able to get employment there.

Daniel is now in Cambridge and studies mainly computer science. He is keen on music, especially the piano. At school he used to help on many occasions when there were concerts and plays. I remember one day when our Victoria Hospital in Lichfield organised a money-raising event, there was some Scottish music and dancing. I was helping in one event to raise money and suddenly there was this lively music. I went there to see what's going on and there was our Daniel, dancing in a Scottish dress with a group of Scottish dancers. I was so pleased to see that because it reminded me of my young days. when I also took part in every event.

Peter himself plays the piano. In other words, it is a versatile family. Deborah's mother is in a home where she is very well treated and Deborah visits her whenever her busy life allows. The children see me whenever they come back to Lichfield.





TO Dr. Alfred Bader

924 EAST JUNEAU SUITE 622

MILWAUKEE WISCONSIN

53202



16. 8. 98.

Dear Mr. Bawler!

Thank you for having answered my letter so promptly. And so I respond to it with a copy of my story. 140 of which I have sold already, here in Litchfield and also to Leeds and London. I hope that you have received the letter from one of the Universities as I did not know your address yet. There you will find a shortened version with my Family and the story. Now that I have your address I am able to send you my book directly. I had help from a great friend of mine, who is the architect for all the buildings at the Leeds University. He checked my mistakes and produced the Master-Copy. Now we are ready to take our next step. You will observe that the cover looks very simple, but the people who bought the books are happy because of the content of the book and

the low price. 10£ instead of 20£
as one of the Publishers wanted. We
have no trouble about money and
so we hope to enter the next step. ISBN
etc. I shall certainly try to get your
book and as I know now the
writer I am sure it will be interes-
ting reading. My son, now retired,
when he was 50 years old, was a Senior
Lecturer in Chemistry.

Thank you for sending me your
letter so promptly, once again

Yours, Willie Sheridan
 kindest regards to your dear
wife