

**Christoph T. M. Krause**

## **Vasili**

**I had come to kill you  
... and ended up in your arms instead**



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... and ended up in your arms instead**

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**This book is dedicated to Roland Idaczyk**

## **My Father. The Secret of his Life.**

My father Kurt died of cancer. It was a long road and yet it had been foreseeable.

He was born in 1923 and at the age of 18 had already been sent into a mad World War, first to France and later to Russia.

Throughout his later life he had never spoken of his experience, apart from that he had been a radio operator behind the front.

As a young boy, I, his son, listened with more or less interest, as my focus as a teenager was more on the guilt that my parents' generation supposedly carried during the Third Reich.

Ignorant as I was as a young person, I hadn't realised that the actual generation of perpetrators must have been that of my grandparents. My father, like his entire generation, was cannon fodder for those grandfathers and grandmothers.

It wasn't clear to me, but if I had really thought about it or just consciously looked at the figures, I should have been able to see that they themselves were teenagers who couldn't help the madness of the National Socialists. On the contrary - they were victims themselves.

As I said, my father never spoke about this time, let alone consulted a psychologist.

The time of war was suppressed, there were more important things to do after the war, e.g. fueling the economic miracle or raising a family.

Later on in life, this method of forgetting took its toll on him. The cancer ate away his soul, but also his body, which, contrary to expectations, would continue to function for a very long time despite the turmoil of war and post-war hunger. Kurt would live to be 89 years old.

It was only on his deathbed that he told me his story, not so much about the war, which only framed this story, but about himself and what he had lost or never found again:

***The secret of his life.***

I was the only and first person to find out about this.

After his revelation, I fell into a sort of mental helplessness from which I was slow to recover.

This is his story as he told it to me on his deathbed.

# Hope





## **My own Beginnings.**

My life began well protected in Adenauer's<sup>1</sup> post-war Germany during the economic miracle (Wirtschaftswunder).

My father was employed and earned "good money" back then, as they say in the Rhineland.

My mother started an apprenticeship at Miele<sup>2</sup> at the beginning of the war in 1939 in the Third Reich at the age of 14 and familiarised herself with shorthand and office work. She was one of thousands of young women who had found work and independence as a typist in a burgeoning company.

In 1951 she married my father, because in those days you only did that when you could "make a living".

And so it took another 5 years until common sense allowed them to bring a child into the world at the age of 31, which was then considered a late birth.

Whilst my mother did suffer from the psychological effects of the war from time to time, my father was a loving and quiet, reserved man, who only rarely raised his voice, and often only when my mother had pushed him to his limits with her annoying and relentless ways.

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<sup>1</sup> Konrad Adenauer was West-Germany's first chancellor.

<sup>2</sup> Miele still today is a German manufacturer of household machines.

Of course, I only understood the background of all these life paths and destinies much later, in fact much much later, and actually only when it was much too late.

So I grew up in a very sheltered and ideal world without considering any of these things and, looking at it superficially, without being burdened by them.

This only became problematic much later, when I hit puberty and suddenly many questions arose:

***“Where were you when Hitler plunged Germany and the world into the abyss?”***

***„What did you do or, in fact, not do to prevent all this?“***

***“Why did you not help the Jews?”***

And so on.

Of course, this provided quite enough explosive material, mainly because my parents shunned this topic like the devil would holy water.

Because if they had actually attempted such an explanation or if they had had to "look back" at the subject matter themselves, wounds would have opened up and their own sense of guilt would have made an objective debate impossible per se.

So there was arguing and fending off, "beating each other up", reproaches were made and justifications were shouted out.

An actual discussion in a constructive sense, an empathetic conversation or even understanding and comprehension were not possible in such a tense emotional situation.

And so, on the one hand, the bitterness on the part of my parents increased and, on the other hand, my lack of understanding and the inability to deal with it factually limited my own possibilities and abilities.

The subject was avoided more and more, leaving a very stale aftertaste on both "sides" that settled in, which determined the following decades and put my parents and myself in an emotional state of rigidity.

So the gap widened even further, a gap that was already larger as a result of generational differences than all later generations combined. Something akin to an own "Berlin Wall with barbed wire" developed.

So our family history fit like a glove into the "leadenn" time of the German post-war trauma.

This distance between my father and I, inherent in our father-son relationship, remained intact until one day on his deathbed, when suddenly everything that had ever been built as a barrier and distance fell away from him and accumulated into that one "moment" of opening up and honesty.

It was very fortunate that, although he was dying, he had enough time to tell his story calmly and in detail. His mind functioned with its characteristic sharp precision and persistence until the last moment.

It took me many years to absorb the burden of this lifelong silence, the horror of this great chasm and, at the end, the impact of the revelation.

It wasn't so much the content of the story itself, it was, as it turned out, crazily anticipating my own story. Had I known that my father's story would in some insidious way become my own, that chasm could have burst like a bubble decades earlier. As someone once said: "Would have, could have, should have!"

The fact that I heard such a story on my father's deathbed and never once anticipated its magnitude shook me to the core of my soul.

I have to admit that I struggled with it and if I hadn't gotten the help my father had denied himself, I would have literally given up on it.

Now read for yourself, dear reader, what unexpected things there are in life. In comparison, the pandemic we currently have to endure seems like "peanuts".

Of course that's not true, a pandemic that kills thousands can't be compared to something like that,

when looking at it from a politically correct point of view, as well as intellectually speaking. But emotionally it feels that way to me and please forgive me for that.



## His Parents, my Grandparents.

My mother kept bringing up short episodes or hints about my father's family history in conversations, without ever going into detail. Apparently, she was afraid of too many questions. She certainly didn't want to get involved in any unpleasant discussions with her children.

So my dying father began his story with his own backstory, as I had never heard it before:

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"You didn't meet your grandfather because he died before you were born, so I'll tell you about **him** first.

This way you will be able to better understand my life. Above all, it will become clear why you were born in the first place and why you are living in Cologne today. Because without your grandpa, neither I nor you would be here at this very moment.

The founding of the German Empire under Bismarck (in 1871) happened just 20 years previously and the turmoil of the Weimar Republic<sup>3</sup> is still a long way off.

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<sup>3</sup> The Weimar Republic was the first German democracy after Germany's king had resigned (1919-1933).

It's a pretty tranquil time on the Moselle. A time, when, in Kindel [*a small place opposite Kinheim<sup>4</sup> and near Kröv*, added by the Author], one was cut off from the outside world in terms of transport and as a result was "behind the moon".

The Moselle Valley Railway<sup>5</sup> (one of the first railway lines), since the opening of its first section on April

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<sup>4</sup> "*Residents in 1905: 1,034*". Quoting internet sources: (Wikipedia), see "Internet Sources", No. 01..

<sup>5</sup> "*The Moselbahn AG, founded in August 1899 by the West German Railway Company, was granted approval in June 1901 to expand a standard-gauge railway from Trier to Bullay. Finally, on August 21, 1905, the last section of the Moselle railway from Bernkastel to Bullay was ceremoniously put into operation with great sympathy from the population in Lösnich, which also connected Lösnich to the Moselle railway network. The Moselle Railway now served the Moselle towns between Trier and Bullay over a total distance of 102 kilometers. The journey time was about 3 ¾ hours at about 40 km/h [...]. According to the May 1912 timetable, eight trains a day in the direction of Trier and seven trains in the direction of Bullay stopped in Lösnich-Kinheim [...]. For the train journey to Trier, the trains needed about two and a half hours [...]. The former station building was erected exactly on the district boundary between Kinheim-Kindel and Lösnich. Part of the waiting room and the service rooms were already in Kinheim's district. The railway line of the tracks below the village of Lösnich parallel to the 'Gestade' is still clearly visible in some areas today. The track system at the Lösnich station consisted of three tracks: the continuous main track, the crossing track and the free loading track. The points were set via a hand-operated signal box at the station building. Two platforms and the loading road provided access to the tracks. There was a concrete ramp with a loading crane on the free loading track [...]."*

2, 1903, is now connected to the surrounding area and, above all, to the Roman city of Trier, which for a Moselle resident at the time represented something like “the big world”.

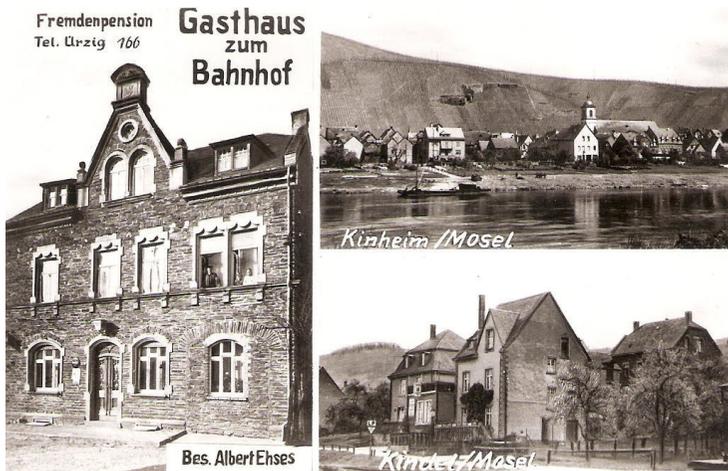


Image 01

With the last decade of the 19th century, a century was slowly coming to an end, which had already brought some revolutionary technical and scientific innovations to mankind.

For example, photography was already revolutionary enough; but industrialisation promised people glorious times of work, bread and technical innovations.

The Moselaner, who had stayed in their ancestral place for centuries in order to make ends meet

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Quoting internet sources. See „Internet sources”, No. 02.

through hard work on the fields or in the vineyards, were now better able to breathe the air of the “big wide world” in one of the nearby cities, going beyond the winery, inn or bakery in the village.

Everyone knew that the next big city was Trier; to commute to a new place of work there was difficult with the Moselle valley train and took two and a half hours, but at the same time it was the epitome of progress. Some went straight there if they had the necessary confidence, courage and money.

But grandpa Johann Baptist wasn't quite there yet...



Image 02

Grandpa was born on December 10th, 1891 into a family with five children who initially saw themselves committed to the centuries-old Mo-

selan tradition of winemaking and the art of baking. In addition, at the beginning of the 20th century, our family tried their hand at in-house hospitality with a garden restaurant<sup>6</sup> at the back, directly on the Moselle valley railway line and near the Lößlich-Kinheim train station.

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<sup>6</sup> “Gasthaus zum Bahnhof”, which opened in March 1908

This was a great location for something new like gastronomy, almost boldly modern, they served local delicacies from their own bakery to rail travelers. Grandpa was the second of five siblings and he would have become like everyone else if it hadn't been for his "physical disability": Grandpa had a spinal curvature from birth, a "hump".

Later, everyone tried to be fooled into believing that grandpa had contracted this handicap when he fell down the stairs leading to his parents' terrace. But no one could have seriously verified this claim, if they were interested in it at all. It was better to keep quiet about it.

Grandpa was the way he (always) was, and that was bad enough anyway.

And that was also the reason why grandpa didn't become a vintner or a farmer, a baker or an innkeeper; he certainly wouldn't have been able to do these jobs physically.

From a social point of view he was more of a fighter type from an early age, someone who would not put up with anything after he had been teased enough in the village.

He was of very small stature, for the hump forced his rather handsome appearance to a "height," or rather depth, which gave him a view of the world a little from below.

But after a certain age, which we call "puberty" today, he no longer wanted to "buck"! He wanted to go out into the world and give it his all.

***„I, Johann Baptist, will be better than all of you here in Kinheim on the Moselle. I will be a civil servant!“***

he is supposed to have exclaimed once.



And so, at the age of fourteen, he moved out into the "big wide world", first to neighboring Kröv, until he ended up in Trier in the early 20th century in 1920, a century that had a few surprises in store, and not just for grandpa.

Image 03

Surprises were no longer only of a technologically "revolutionary" nature, but of a more somber nature. Because the 20th century was preparing to turn the whole structure of a culture that was thousands of years old upside down and to confront the people of the new age with the greatest challenges and rejections that they could not even remotely have imagined at the time.



**Image 04**

## The „Golden“ Twenties



Image 05

Grandpa had made it, he was now a civil servant and in 1921 he married your grandmother, Rosa Mathilde Longen from Ruwer (born on May 31, 1898). To this day no one has really been able to explain how he managed to win over this great woman.

Grandma was from the Mosel herself, but came from a family whose members considered themselves to be what some would describe as "better".

The fashion and spirit of optimism of the 1920s had turned a Moselle woman into a twenty-two-year-old, albeit small, "grande dame".

She was so beautiful that no one could even remotely hold a candle to her. Her husband should not only be smaller than her, so that she would always tower over him. He should also be wealthy and be able to sufficiently finance their thirst for the big world. He couldn't be ugly, but a small physical defect would suit her very well.

Image 06



Image 07



That's how your grandmother Rosa Mathilde, known as Tilly, met your grandfather at a tea dance in Trier, the "big city" of that time and region, as was customary in the roaring twenties. They celebrated exuberantly and had the feeling that today they belonged to each other and tomorrow the whole world belonged to them....

However, this attitude towards life was in no way of a political nature<sup>7</sup>. No, people enjoyed the dawn of the new era, just as everyone would enjoy a new beginning after a crazy war, exuberant and completely apolitical.

Until recently, only the Kaiser had been involved in politics, and he had abdicated. There had been the Great War, but that had now been forgotten, it was a new era, music and fashion were new and what happened in the Reichstag in Berlin and what had been founded shortly before in Weimar was far removed from that city founded by the Romans.

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<sup>7</sup> "[...] *Level-headed seriousness, fanatical loyalty to principles and stubborn obedience are not compatible with the Moselle country's innate love of life, with its tendency for casualness and humour. Where laughter is more popular than a stiff posture and, as in the whole of the Rhineland in general, every violent pathos quickly awakens the desire for carnival mockery, there is sterile soil for an authoritarian regime.*"  
Essay by Dr. Bollmus, Reinhard: Trier and National Socialism (1925-1945). In: Düwell, Kurt/ Irsigler, Franz (ed.), 1988: Trier in the Modern Age, 2000 Years of Trier, Volume 3, p. 573. Trier, Spee Verlag.

Rosa Mathilde was striving for more and, in accordance with her new status, she wanted to enjoy a little of the breeze of the big, wide, chic world.

Image 07



Grandpa gave her everything she needed, because wasn't he very lucky, being a "hunchback" and marrying a "grand", pretty lady?! Didn't that make up for the

defect he hated so much?! Didn't Tilly outshine that little hump? Didn't his value increase automatically?

He did everything for her, e.g. he impressed her with cars and motorcycles.

In April 1927 he had a beautiful house built for "her" in Trier at Seniastrasse<sup>8</sup> 20. He had each room in the three-story house near Trier's southern train station fitted with a bell<sup>9</sup>, which Tilly operated centrally from her living room on the first floor and by

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<sup>8</sup> The name 'Senia' comes from "Vicus Seniae", a proven Roman street name in Trier (after a municipal street sign in the Seniastraße in Trier) /

*"In Roman times, Senia was an important center [...] of the province of Liburnia [...]."* [now Senj in Croatia, added by the Author] Quoting internet sources (Wikipedia). See "Internet sources, No. 03.

<sup>9</sup> Information provided by the former homeowner Hermann Lehnertz (as of 1999) on the bell system; in 2014, the system was removed during a full renovation.

means of which she could summon the staff; a seamstress did all the unpleasant manual work.

But after moving in on October 1st, 1927, the many staff became just one "girl" and the many rooms ultimately became "only" 3 separate apartments, of which Tilly was only allowed to live in one.

Rather inconveniently, the other two rooms had to be rented out, since times were now getting worse:

In 1929, at the time of the great global economic crisis, the Reichsmark currency was worth very little and prices had risen endlessly. However, the house was already under construction and this could no longer be reversed, and when it was occupied in 1927, unemployment in the country was already so high that even a civil servant could find himself in dire need.<sup>10 11 12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *"What was the situation like in Trier? In Trier, the number of unemployed people began to rise as early as 1928. While the number of unemployed people looked after by the Trier employment office was 155 in 1927, by 1928 it was already at 1575, [and started, added by the author] to rise to 3577 in 1930 and 5235 in 1931 and reached the enormous number of almost 7000 unemployed in 1932. But there were also those who were excluded from unemployment insurance. By the end of 1932, the municipal welfare office had to continuously support a total of 5,132 parties with 13,954 members - that was 18.8 percent of the total population of Trier."* Zens, Emil: History of the City of Trier During the First Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Volume 3, 1928-1945. Trier 1973, p. 33.

## „A Thousand Years."

Grandpa had miscalculated. Despite 17,000 RM [Reichsmark, corresponds to a purchasing power value in 2021 of 4,860 Euros<sup>13</sup> (rounded up), added by the Author] in equity, which consisted of his compulsory portion of the parental home in Kinheim in the amount of 10-12,000 RM [2,860-3,430 Euros] and a grant of 5,000 RM [1,430 Euros] from the "assets" of his Rosa Mathilde, the remainder of the total construction price of 42,000 RM [12,000 Euros]

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<sup>11</sup> *"When the world economic crisis set in shortly afterwards, the situation of the Trier economy became threatening. This was expressed in a speech by the President of the Trier Chamber of Commerce on January 14, 1930, when he declared, among other things, that the year 1929 had been 'a year of the most difficult struggle' 'I'm not saying too much when I say that it is almost a mood of desperation that has taken hold of our economy everywhere. Wherever you look [...] you see the same picture of desolate depression. Certainly, all over Germany the economy isn't doing well. But I'm not exaggerating when I say we're a few degrees worse off."* Ibid. Zens, p. 287.

<sup>12</sup> *"So, the job opportunities continued to shrink and the number of unemployed rose more and more. In 1930 the figure was 3577, and in 1931 it was already at 5235. In addition, the bankruptcy of the Trier commercial bank in November 1931 meant that over 30,000 savers and depositors lost their money. The cause was an excessive participation in industrial investments and the resulting lack of liquidity. The crisis at that time was reflected throughout Germany in the fact that, in July 1931, the stock exchanges were closed, and foreign exchange controls were introduced."* Ibid. Zens, p. 287.

<sup>13</sup> Quoting of internet sources URL: <https://www.dm-euro-rechner.de/die-reichsmark/>. DM Euro Calculator: Die Reichsmark. Last updated 29.01.2021.

was worrying him. And this, despite the construction price already having been subsidised by his employer.

Grandpa's total debts amounted to around 60,000 RM [13,950 Euros] in 1933, the year the Nazis "seized power".

Even his employer, the mayor of Trier, could no longer sleep peacefully as a result. He proceeded to ask grandpa to give an account of how his debts had come about.

In any case, the mayor was not particularly impressed by his protégé, as he had been suing the city for years in regard to the civil service position.

Grandpa had become a civil servant at his previous employer, the administrative office of the "Suburbs of Trier" (which was later incorporated into Trier), in 1926 and the basis for calculating his salary seniority was dated back to 1917.

When in 1930, due to a municipal restructuring, grandpa was regrouped or transferred from the administrative area of the "Trier suburbs" to the city administration of Trier, he not only felt treated unfairly due to a reduction in his salary<sup>14</sup> by 840 RM

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<sup>14</sup> "*When Brüning became chancellor, the first thing he wanted to do was to take remedial measures that provided for increased taxation of all income over 8,000 marks and a reduction in the wages and salaries of civil servants and employees in the public sector.*" Ibid. Zens, p. 57.

[247 Euros] per year, but also as a result of the transfer itself.

In several lawsuits, he argued that the transfer position should be valued equally and that the retained difference or reduced earnings should be repaid.

This annoyed his employer so much that he saw his civil servant's mountain of debt as a welcome opportunity to "deal" with grandpa properly.

Grandpa had to justify himself and submit a total of three statements and declarations of debt.

Nowadays, one would think that it was not the employer's job to monitor the private affairs of their civil servant, but civil servants were the employer's or state's "subjects" and therefore accountable for everything that directly or indirectly affected their service.

Grandpa tried to explain his situation as a result of the political and economic misery of the last years of the Weimar Republic and therefore washed his hands of it. He was the victim of adverse circumstances. However, the city administration decided that grandpa's removal from the service should be

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*"In 1932, the downward trend continued. The emergency decrees rushed in; civil servants had to endure one pay cut after another, while clerks and workers were increasingly being laid off from their jobs. The number of unemployed rose to almost 7,000." Ibid. Zens, p. 57.*

considered as a disciplinary measure because he violated his official duties by being in debt.

All sorts of information was obtained to prove that grandpa was not free of debt, but no longer liquid due to unnecessary debts.

For example, administrative assistance was obtained from the road traffic office in the form of a list of all the motor vehicles grandpa had registered. For the period from September 1928 to November 1931, two motorcycles and two cars were officially registered.

Grandpa then tried to convince his employer that he was in debt through no fault of his own with references, for example from the Association of New Home Owners.

But all this was no longer of any use. Grandpa had lost his standing in the office. He was notorious for being a troublemaker and "litigious person" and his employer would have liked nothing better than to get rid of him as quickly as possible.

As fate sometimes has it, the mayor (himself a Nazi upstart) benefited from a circumstance that was to be fatal for many people in the 1930s: National Socialism.

In the 1920s, grandpa still had all the legal means of a young democracy at his disposal to enforce his rights as a civil servant, and as a disabled person

was in no way endangered or openly disadvantaged at the time, the brown dawn of the Nazis changed this abruptly.

Grandpa wasn't aware of this yet. He had no idea of the effects of this "movement" for himself and others, indeed for his entire people.

So it happened in January 1934 that Grandpa became sluggish through all the lawsuits and the inherent injustices and inconsistencies towards him. He no longer saw the need to do his work more conscientiously than necessary, and something happened that was to become symptomatic for the foreseeable future:

People were trying to find errors in him, and what was worse, he eventually had to give way to the adversities of the time, albeit initially fighting with confidence and defiance.

It happened on January 2nd, 1934, the Nazis had been in power for almost a year, that Grandpa was caught "going home early".

He had left the office 5 minutes before 1 p.m. and the mayor himself promptly noticed that he was missing.

The mayor gave him a warning and demanded a "responsible statement".

Grandpa attributed the fact that he left early to their two clocks working differently and again received a warning, this time final.

Now grandpa's fate took its irreversible course:

Grandpa made a comment to colleagues about the warning, namely to the effect that he regarded his employer as particularly petty, and that he appeared to be a "5-minute mayor".

Grandpa had the bad luck that, by 1934, his office was already infiltrated with SA spies<sup>15</sup> and that one of these spies immediately put his statement, which was considered a punishable insult against his employer, on record and reported it.

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<sup>15</sup> *"The inside history of the Trier NSDAP and the other NS organisations cannot be written for the time being due to a lack of accessible documents. A reference is permitted to the extent of the surveillance that emanated from these organisations. A single file case that has been preserved shows that the SD, the security service of the Reichsführer SS, apparently continuously reported on all events within the city administration (presumably also within all other authorities), which came to his knowledge through his spies, who were probably placed all over. No head of authority could be sure that information about them, their employees and their work was not continuously and perhaps even inaccurately reported. Many department heads found the courage and ways and means to ban such reporting, since it was not covered by formal law. But individual citizens could also see their interests affected by the tool of so-called 'political assessments', for which the local group leader or a higher official was responsible in the case of recruitment or other processes - without the possibility of counter-control or appeal to an instance of the judiciary. Ibid. Bollmus, p. 578.*

With his comment "I haven't been beaten up at the Kaiserhof yet" grandfather was probably referring to the unpopularity of the mayor amongst the population of Trier and suggested that he had been "beaten up" for that very reason.

Because in the well-known hotel/ restaurant "Der Kaiserhof" there had been an open rebellion by several students against the mayor who was dining there, who was then helped by Nazi henchmen who happened to be there. An extended brawl ensued, in which the outnumbered mayor took a beating from the students.

Possibly, by alluding to this event, grandpa tried to distinguish himself from the mayor in terms of "trustworthiness", which he had been denied in the form of his unpunctuality.

I cannot say whether this was grandpa's real motivation for his remark, but based on this incident he expressed his fundamental aversion towards his employer, the Lord Mayor, which was understandable for the reasons already mentioned (trials against his new employer, debt justifications, etc.).

Based on the testimonies of the so-called SA investigator Lauer and the negative reference of the local group leader Loser, in which he was accused of being a Marxist and SPD supporter as well as a center spirit in the same breath, it can also be assumed that grandpa's statement could also have

referred to the Lord Mayor's involvement with the Nazis, which had led to the attack.

Since these political insinuations about grandpa on the part of the authorities were probably factually incorrect (because Marxism, SPD membership and the spirit of the Center are usually mutually exclusive), it seemed to me that the authors used them as a synonym for blanket rejection and enmity or exclusion (perhaps also in regard to the disabled in this case).<sup>16</sup>

Grandpa's floodgates had opened. He had indicated indirectly, but unspokenly, that he was not a Nazi and that no one would "beat him up" for any reason whatsoever!

Grandpa wasn't stupid, he knew or guessed that the dawn of the brown reign of terror had already begun. He still resisted and showed himself, acted as he thought, but even at this point, he would not be able to resist much longer.

His first step was to call in sick after the incident at his office. Due to his disability, he quickly had himself declared unfit for work and was forced to take early retirement on September 1, 1934.

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<sup>16</sup> *"The vast majority of Trier residents were close to the parties that supported and carried the Weimar state (Zentrum, SPD, DDP)." Ibid. Zens, p. 33.*

He had one last go and opened a travel agency in Trier not far from the town hall, but the ship had already sailed for him in Trier.

Here, in the shadow of his former employer, his new independence did not start well for him. He finally gave up, but only here, in Trier.

Grandpa was smart. He left Trier, which had become his home, which he had loved and sometimes also hated because it had brought him so much trouble.

And that, my dear son, is why the two of us are speaking here today on my deathbed.

Grandpa's house had since been foreclosed to pay off most of his debt.

Grandpa had hoped to the last that his protestations of innocence would work and that he would receive another loan to restructure his debts. But his employer prevented all these attempts. His reputation was damaged and nobody was there to support him. In these times, who would want to admit that they would help a hunchback and a notorious Marxist and SPD supporter?!

Many already sensed that Grandpa was one of those people the Nazis were trying to weed out.

Who knows what would have become of grandpa in Trier had he not left the city in time?

Someone, who had caught the attention of the Nazis as early as 1934 had to be extremely careful if they wanted to survive.

But grandpa wasn't a coward who could have managed to be careful. He said what he thought, he showed who he was, he fought back where he felt the world owed him. Him, who had suffered in life already as a result of his "hump".

Grandpa suspected all of this, seized the opportunity, left Trier in 1935, as I said, and moved to Cologne, which, it appeared, was not particularly well disposed towards the Nazis.

His sister, your well-known and beloved Aunt Maria, had found him accommodation there at short notice, because she had gotten married in Cologne.

As you can see, the circle closes again!

In Cologne, grandpa set up a self-employed business, which made him desirable to others: he became a tax consultant and served all traders in the vicinity of his new home.

When times got tough and people went hungry, he always had food for our family and himself; the customers paid in kind and even I, his son, who was born in 1923, and your mother, whom I married in 1951, benefited well into the 1950s from his unbroken will to live and his all-encompassing smartness: at least they didn't have to go hungry!

In 1952, far too early, death came calling; he was loved and adored by our family until the very end. It's such a pity that you couldn't get to know him more!

Cologne had made life easier for him, but he also learned that standing up for law and justice and resistance to adverse authorities had its limits where bare survival/ life itself is at risk.

When looking at it in this way, if he would have become a typical child of the economic miracle, had he only had the opportunity to develop his skills and agility (despite his disability) under democratic conditions without danger to life and limb.

Grandpa is a role model for all those who don't dare to live, who don't dare because life keeps throwing "stones" in their way.

Grandpa had put up a fight, but not the kind of resistance one hears about at ceremonial events these days. He exercised the resistance of the "little<sup>17</sup> man".

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<sup>17</sup> In grandpa's case: in the truest sense of the word.

# Chain of Help





## Wehrmacht. <sup>18</sup>

In 1941, I was 18 years old.

That year I was drafted into the air communications troop "Horst Wessel ZG 26 Destroyer Squadron".<sup>19</sup>  
In the end, that meant leaving for Russia.

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<sup>18</sup> *Accompanying information on current affairs through quoting internet sources. See "Internet sources", No. 04 und No. 05.*

<sup>19</sup> *"The destroyer squadron 26 'Horst Wessel' (ZG 26) was a traditional Luftwaffe squadron during World War II. It emerged from the Jagdgeschwader 134 (JG 134), which was formed in 1935 and was given the nickname 'Horst Wessel' in 1936. After his violent death on February 23, 1930, as a member of the SA, a paramilitary combat organisation of the NSDAP, he was glorified by the National Socialists as a 'martyr of the movement'. [...] On May 1, 1939, the squadron received the final designation 'Zerstörergeschwader 26 Horst Wessel' (ZG 26 'Horst Wessel').*

*During the attack on Poland, the entire formation was stationed in the West and served there for air defense purposes, including above the German Bight. [...]*

*The squadron took part in the campaign against France in 1940, a larger part was in Rouen for a few weeks, and took part in the air raids on Great Britain in 1940/1941. The force was in Lille-North for a long time in 1940. In 1941 there were operations on the Eastern Front and after 1941 partly in Italy and Africa. [...] To reinforce the defense of the Reich, in the summer of 1943 [...] the members of ZG 2, III./ZG 26 and III./ZG 1 in Wunstorf and Bad Lippspringe were merged into a new destroyer squadron 26. In March 1944, ZG 26 moved to Königsberg in der Neumark. Quoting internet sources (Wikipedia). See "Internet sources, No. 06.*

So I was a radio operator, mostly near or ahead of the front, to clarify the situation. Later, when I had a family, I only ever said in answer to your questions that I was deployed as a radio operator behind the front.

This had contributed to the fact that fewer unpleasant questions arose.

*[Father chuckles softly...]*, added by the Author]

Basically, our goal in June 1941 was to conquer the Soviet Union. And for the Wehrmacht this meant by any means.

On the way, we also raided the countries “in front”, and especially the Ukraine.

I don't want to waste the remaining time boring you too much with the many details. But one thing was clear, even to me, in that we were waging a clear war of annihilation.

Anything in our way was taken down.

As a so-called by-product (a cynical word in this context), there were civilian massacres, especially if they were Jews.

Under our watch, once we had already conquered the territories, Ukrainian nationalists would do the “dirty work” and the killing for us.

In the meantime, we came to Volhynia and made it part of the "Reichskommissariat Ukraine".

Initially, the population understood the German occupation as a liberation action. Because it suffered considerably from the Soviet oppression. In particular, those who supported Ukraine as an independent state hoped that we would support independence from Soviet power.

Ukrainian troops even took part in our conquests, I could recognise them by their uniforms.

For a while, these forces were even given the freedom to set up their own state and social structures, e.g. their own police units, certain posts in the local administration or a newly established school system.

At the same time, these nationalist Ukrainians participated vehemently in the pogroms against the Jewish population.

Of course, our people only saw this cooperation with the Ukrainians as a means to an end, they were good assistants and soon the dreams of these irregulars were shattered. Moreover, they were seen as part of a people that was "*inferior in every respect...*"<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Quoting Kappeler, Andreas: Little History of the Ukraine. 2. Updated edition, C.H. Beck, Munich 2000.

Later, these supposed freedom fighters were disposed of by our people in concentration camps.<sup>21</sup>

In any case, there were a number of massacres that I know of and we as an Air Intelligence Force often had to "work behind" the killer units, backing up the "foremen" and facilitating safe communications.

Through this I saw the results in the villages and towns of the region.

Often, not a single inhabitant of the small rural settlements was left or alive.

We were often on site again in small groups after these actions in order to track down and report any remaining hidden persons.

So it was that one day I was "patrolling" with a handful of soldiers through a small peasant settlement near Volhynia called Zoryane and it happened that I was walking through houses or huts all by myself looking for survivors.

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<sup>21</sup> The [...] arrests and also shootings of officials and relatives [...] caused the Ukrainian side to rapidly decline further cooperation with the Germans in the Reich Commissariat [...] and in a leaflet dated February 1943 [it was stated, added by the Author] that "(t)he Ukraine ... is currently between the hammer and anvil of two hostile imperialists, Moscow and Berlin" [...] This became an "irrevocable demand for the Ukrainian people [...] to fight against both imperialisms" Ibd. Kappeler.

One day, I remember like it was yesterday, it was a Tuesday and the weather was exceptionally nice.

I was searching through an ancient half-timbered house in a courtyard that had a small vegetable garden at the back when I heard a noise in a cupboard in the kitchen.

Now, there were often rats or pigs who had stayed behind and were still in these houses.

With cautious steps and my rifle at the ready, I approached this damn closet. I had to be careful because if someone had actually hidden in there, it could have been extremely dangerous for me.

So I opened the door carefully, with the gun at the ready, and saw in the semidarkness an approximately 18-year-old boy who was crouching in the closet, trembling. He was so scared he whimpered out loud.

He was the prettiest boy I had ever seen. Although he looked scared, his face resembled an angelic creature.

Time seemed to stand still. You might be familiar with moments like that. Everything around you suddenly no longer exists. The focus of the whole body and soul is on this moment alone.

The danger seemed to have dissipated, the fear had suddenly gone. I had to pull myself together so as not to collapse in an instant.

Without thinking twice, I put down my gun as if of my own accord and grabbed the boy's arm and slowly and carefully pulled him out of the closet.

With great fear, but unable to act due to the shock of the discovery, he let everything happen without defending himself.

His dark brown eyes met mine and an unbelievably warm feeling went through my whole body. I smiled at him and gestured that I didn't want to harm him.

Even in that first moment, I felt a spiritual connection that gripped us both. Fear receded on both sides and an inexplicable familiarity gripped my soul.

You're probably wondering how this could even be possible? A man who lived his life as a straight man, with a family, and nobody ever thought of "anything like that"!

That's right. The first person to think that was of course myself. I didn't know what was happening to me. I had never thought of boys or men before this experience.

As if by an invisible hand and almost "naturally" I had always been interested in the opposite sex.

Well, I had seen or met handsome boys and noticed and admired their beauty. But there was never an erotic component. At least I was never aware of it.

It was just the unthinkable. There was just no such thing in my world. I had heard about it, after all I grew up in the Weimar period, and it was already evident here and there in big cities like Cologne and Berlin.

But in my environment such things were taboo.

Therefore I was, so to speak, uninformed and naive when I met Vasili on this beautiful winter morning.

Yes, I pointed at myself and said my name: "My name is Kurt, Kurt, Kurt," I stammered.

Vasili understood immediately and said: "My name is Vasili".

Vasili spoke a little bit of German, later I found out that he was Jewish and spoke Yiddish, a variant of German.

Vasili means "royal" and I got that feeling from him. Despite his torn and dirty clothes, which had suffered from being in hiding for days, this young man shone through the dirty facade. I felt like he was glowing from within.

I was blinded. Time stood still, everything happened in slow motion. My knees were shaking with excitement and I felt like I would collapse at any moment.

What was wrong with me? Was I crazy? How could that be? I had never imagined that a male being could capture me like this.

It was the moment that seemed to change everything. I felt like I was being reborn.

It wasn't the "normal" kind of falling in love, there was something extraordinary, something new, an awakening in the middle of war, in the midst of chaos. Death and suffering were right at the door, in the truest sense.

We fell into each other's arms. We forgot the danger, the death, the suffering.

We kissed and the sky opened up for me. I suddenly didn't care. If you had asked me if I was afraid of dying, I would have said no. Yes, I would rather have died immediately than miss this moment. It was impossible.

Destiny took its course with us. In great intensity we sank to the ground beneath us. We didn't think of the padding of a warm bed or the soft grass of a spring meadow gently swaying in the breeze. We made love right there. As we were, in all the dirt and misery that surrounded us.

I think this moment is an evolutionary moment! Everything about this process is faded out, the adrenaline creates security that doesn't exist, creates strength that doesn't exist and creates a future that doesn't exist.

It is **the** moment. The meaning of life, preservation of the species, albeit indirectly in our case, the miracle of oneness. I experienced this moment with this intensity and originality in this way for the first time in my life and, you will be very surprised, probably never again in this form. Not now anyway. I will die soon.

That's why, as I slowly came to, I knew that everything was different now. I knew I had to do something to preserve, even save this moment.

But **what** could I do? I suddenly realised where I was...

I was in the middle of a war. It was my job to kill, I wasn't allowed to do any of that; nor to have any contact with a native (i.e. victim), let alone fraternise or even "copulate" with him.

My head was spinning. I was unrestrainedly overwhelmed. Suddenly I had to think for two.

How could I save him? How could I save myself? Slowly, the world began to turn again, time began to move on. Just as slowly, I woke up from my very real dream.

We talked. He had just turned 18, like me. The war had changed everything for him. His whole family had been murdered. He only survived, because he was out in the forest collecting wood during the pogrom.

He heard the screams and went into hiding for two days. Only then did he dare to return to his house.

His family lay murdered right where the Nazi henchmen had killed them.

Father, mother and five siblings. His 80-year-old grandmother was also among the victims.

In desperation and with no idea what to do, he had waited another two days until he saw me coming into the house.

My son, that encounter changed everything. It reinvented my life, I was someone completely different but for the first time in my young life I felt like myself.

This feeling was archaic and profound, filling every corner of my being.

If I had to die for it, I would have done it willingly. I became invulnerable, strong as a bear.

**'I had come to kill someone like Vasili and ended up in his arms instead.'**

And so I decided to act.

## **The Decision.**

I wanted to save Vasili, but how? How would that work?

Escaping with him was unrealistic. We would never have made it. Also where to?

An escape across the Black Sea, e.g. to get to Turkey, would have been way too far and too dangerous, especially during winter.

The other direction would have led through Poland to the Baltic Sea and that was not feasible either.

This only left the option of fleeing head-on.

I had a company commander whom I knew from my training days in Gütersloh. We had become friends and trusted each other blindly.

Although, like me, he was a soldier in the Third Reich assigned to commit atrocities, at heart he was not a sadistic murderer like many others in the Wehrmacht.

So I hoped that he would come in useful. He trusted me and I him. It was a possibility, the only one and the last.

I explained all this to Vasili, who of course had great reservations about handing himself over to Beelzebub himself. But he trusted me and finally agreed. I

promised him not to reveal his whereabouts for security reasons.

The first farewell came, faster than expected.

Vasili cried and I joined in seamlessly. A moment that seemed to last forever and yet only lasted a few minutes. For us, time had stood still and yet a whole hour had passed.

I walked back to my military vehicle and drove back to base.

My heart was pounding in my chest, I was sweating even though it was bitterly cold and the feeling of fear and uncertainty was stronger than I had ever experienced before, nor since.

Our tents could be seen in the distance. There was a lot of activity. Vehicles came and went, soldiers ran back and forth.

The moment of truth was near. Time began to slow down again, the outside noise became duller, and I could no longer feel the cold or warmth.

I was merely functioning, like a robot, and went to the command post in the main tent and entered.

Captain Idaczyk was standing at a large table in the center of the room, conferring with his aides. They were all bowing their heads over a large map of the area whilst discussing something.

The moment I entered, all heads turned and looked at me.

"Captain Idaczyk, I have a report to make, may I speak to you alone?" It's confidential!" I said.

Without really understanding what I was doing, a surreal strength rose up from within, the adrenaline made me forget everything around me, I only heard the voices of the others as if under water. I no longer noticed the temperature or outside noise. A surreal scene played out as if in a tunnel. I just thought: "All or nothing!"

Captain Idaczyk smiled and said: "Have you found a treasure?!"

At first I didn't understand what he meant, but at the same time I felt incredibly caught. I thought he knew everything! How could that be? How could he know that I had found the treasure of my life?

As soon as I pushed that thought aside, I realised it had to be a coincidence.

"What do you mean?"

"You look so happy, did you finish off the poor Ukrainians again?"

Everyone laughed and turned back to me.

What should I answer now? Without attracting attention, without blushing or stuttering? A moment when time, again, seemed to stand still.

Then, without thinking, I said: "The treasure has been found!"

Everyone laughed and the topic was no longer of interest.

Captain Idaczyk put his hand on my back and gently pushed me towards his private room.

He opened the door of the built-in container and immediately closed it behind us.

# Together





## **Captain Idaczyk.**

Captain Roland Idaczyk was a handsome young man of 29 years. He was older than me and I had already admired him for his physical strength and strength of character when we were training in Gütersloh.

He had a gentle disposition, but was also incredibly disciplined and able to ascertain his wishes.

However, he was never brutal, mean or sadistic like many others who felt superior through their rise in this army and used their newfound strength and position against those below them and were happy to abuse their position at times.

Roland was different. From today's point of view, he could have been gay, but then he tried hard not to let anyone know.

If anyone had found out that a member of the Wehrmacht had been a gay soldier, he would have been shot according to martial law.

Homosexuality in the Third Reich meant death or rather execution.

It was therefore clear that if that had been the case, Roland would have done whatever it took to confirm the opposite, whatever that was.

Roland asked me to sit down. He was probably expecting a succinct report, like that I hadn't found anything else on my patrol on the edge of nowhere.

I got straight to the point:

"Roland, I need your help," I said, my voice shaking. "I want to rescue someone I care about from this hell! Would you be willing to do that for me?"

Roland was startled, but his face showed curiosity and benevolence.

Then he said something that caught my breath: "What's his name?"

Desperation and hope boiled up in me at the same time. What, did he know? How could that be? Am I that obvious and predictable?

"We know each other!" he added. "We're friends and we both know that we're not averse to beautiful things!" I winced at the word "things" but knew what he meant. We couldn't really pronounce the "things" so that's what we called them.

"Yes," I said, "that's true." "We've just never talked about it," I replied. "It was never necessary," he answered. "Just tell me where he is and I'll see what I can do!"

The only thing I could say was "Thank you, Roland!".

Roland smiled and said: "When this is all over, I still want to be able to look you in the eye, if I had known all this earlier and if we were at peace in the old days," he said suddenly, "I would have become your sweetheart!"

I smiled back in embarrassment, but was once again completely overwhelmed by the force of this statement and could only squeeze out a "thank you" again.

He then explained to me what he intended to do.

He would personally pick up Vasili in his half-timbered house, equip him with a Wehrmacht uniform as his assistant and then send him on a troop transport to Poland to the Baltic Sea coastline. However, he would have to be on his own there, because he couldn't organise a crossing to Scandinavia from here. However, he would give Vasili the address of an old friend in a coastal town there who could certainly take care of everything.

How exactly he wanted to accomplish all this, I could no longer perceive, my brain switched off, it was all too much. Trusting him blindly, I let it go and said goodbye with a gesture of familiarity and gratitude.



## **First Reunion and Goodbye.**

I drove back to the half-timbered house. Vasili was waiting there already, as I had told him how long it might take.

Wide-eyed, he waited for me to finally start speaking.

I told him about my captain's plan and although it all sounded completely improbable, almost like a fairy tale, he immediately agreed. After all, what choice did he have but to trust me and Roland completely?

Trust during the war was something that actually no longer existed. Nobody trusted anyone anymore. Everything was different.

On the other hand, in their desperation, people had no choice but to go for what was offered to them, sometimes in the face of the devil.

Only those who were lucky could hope. Like many of the ones we destroyed, who went into the gas chambers. They, too, had had to surrender to the inevitable. They walked into the gas with their heads held high, because they "trusted" us Germans to the extent that they could never have imagined that anyone would send others to the gas chambers.

Vasili trusted me and therefore also Roland. What else could he have done?

I told him I would bring him to Germany when the war was over. Nobody knew how long that would be. But we hoped that it would end at some point.

Up until that point I had hoped, indeed could not have imagined otherwise, that the final victory would come naturally.

Now everything had changed. For the first time I hoped for an end to the war, but without an ultimate victory. Because a thousand-year Reich under Germany's world domination would have meant that people like us would be destroyed. I knew that, even though no one had ever actually said it.

Even though it would take time for the war to end, maybe even years, what would that be compared to the loss of a loved one? I would wait, and if I had to, forever.

Vasili had no choice to stop and think, there was only this chance. He accepted it and that was the last time I saw him.

I still dream that he might be alive. Now I will only be able to take him with me in my heart. Maybe I'll see him again up there...

# The Inner Eye





## **Missing.**

Vasili was picked up and Roland reported that he had been taken along with other soldiers as part of a troop transfer to the Baltic Sea.

In the days that followed, Roland kept checking on Vasili, as a friend of Roland's was the senior commander in this squad, so Vasili was well looked after.

What luck, a support chain had formed that saved a life. How many more chains of this kind were there and how many more chains could there have been, had people been more courageous and humane?

Waiting for news from Roland was unbearable and was getting on my nerves. I would have preferred to desert and just run after him.

I struggled with this dependency that I felt. I was controlled by an external force, and everything was different. Nothing had the same meaning as before.

On my patrols I hoped that I would not run into anybody else, I was traumatised. Everything I had ever believed in and that seemed to define my life had collapsed like a house of cards.

I suddenly questioned everything. What was Germany doing in Russia, and what in Ukraine? Why were people being killed who hadn't harmed

anyone? What about the Jews, why did we hate them so much?

What had become of my fatherland? Why all that? And what's wrong with me? Was I gay and why? Or was it just a phase, a particular situation during war times and the resulting confusion? What about women? And what about family?

I didn't have any of the answers, not yet.

In the end, I didn't care about any of these thoughts. I was only able to feel. These feelings were there, and I instinctively felt that they were real and justified. They were life, they were me.

All of this had confused me terribly. It had literally dragged me into a deep abyss, but that was the only way I could begin to understand what life is all about, it's about truth and love. Only these two things matter, nothing else. This is how Vasili made me what I later was and what I still am today.

Now you will ask what all of this means for you.

Apparently, we were all different in some way in our family line.

As early as 1589, an ancestor was burned as a heretic in Pölich on the Moselle, where our lineage came from. This is known because the central archive in Koblenz has an 80-page file on this heresy

trial. I could not read this file because it was written in very old "cursive script".

A transcription would have been expensive, and the text would have been difficult to understand. As a rule, witchcraft and heresy trials always involved accusations of harmful magic. But maybe our ancestor was also gay, who knows?

Then, as far as we know now, it was my father's turn, your grandfather's, this time with a physical disability that made him special.

Then it was me with "my" Vasili story and last but not least you came on board, who, probably as the first and only one of our lineage, added an own identity to all this and lived it openly and honestly from the beginning.

A long journey of transfamilial coming-outs, spanning across generations until today, finally reaching full legal equality.

You are the first to be married and free to live your identity as **you** wish without fear or threat to your life.

I was just a tiny building block on this path and I'm still immensely proud of it.

Back to you:

One thing (I mean being gay) does not exclude the other (being straight).

Later, after the war had ended, I decided to be with your mother, as it just happened. I didn't have feelings of exclusivity or thought that I could only do one thing or the other.

The only thing I could blame myself for is that I didn't support you enough as you found the path of your own identity.

I stayed silent to isolate myself, to forget the pain of fate and never have to think about it again. Then you had a similar "problem" and everything came rising back to the surface.

I regret not talking to you about this sooner. Mother didn't know anything about it either and she would not have coped with it. A gay son was enough for her.

But who knows, maybe I would have been ready for it today, because it is and will remain my life, even if it is coming to an end now.

Vasili has remained missing, the messages stopped upon reaching the Baltic Sea coastline.

I had wanted to spare you the end, as Vasili was murdered afterall.

My friend Roland could no longer protect him. His arm hadn't been long enough.

Vasili, as I learned later, was shot dead in broad daylight on his way to a ferry to Scandinavia. Patrolling SS men had stopped him and asked for his papers. Vasili got scared, as of course he had no papers. He ran away in a panic and was murdered from behind.

My heart seemed to stand still, time stood still again, and I had tunnel vision, as if the Grim Reaper was coming to get me personally.

My world collapsed. What Vasili had triggered in me had already caused my "old world" to collapse, now the new world was collapsing as well.

In 1945 I was captured by the British as a prisoner of war. I was completely drained and just waited for my execution (as I thought). Nobody knew what the British would do to us. I expected death by hanging.

To be honest, I almost didn't care at the time. I dreamed of being reunited with Vasili.

But fate had other plans, I was released soon after. Nobody explained to me why and how.

I headed home and soon after met your mother, but that's another story and there's no time for that now.



## **Escape.**

My escape from Ukraine with the help of my enemies was incredibly unsettling.

We drove in a long convoy at night. I couldn't count the vehicles. Since Poland was occupied, there was most likely no danger from the outside.

Captain Roland had given me a reasonably fitting Wehrmacht uniform and although I felt safe in it, the idea of traveling in the uniform of my potential butchers made me very nervous.

The soldiers in the platoon I was traveling with were all very young. You could see from their faces and their postures what they had endured already at such a young age.

Nobody asked who I was. The German soldiers obeyed their superiors and when they were told that they had a fellow passenger, they didn't ask. They were too busy looking out for themselves.

I was able to make out that the platoon was on its way to the Gdynia military port by the Baltic Sea. There, the port was to be further stabilised and expanded.

My thoughts revolved around what would await me there. Would I be able to get on a ship that would take me away from Poland, and where would the journey lead?

I had never been away from my village, it was all so new to me.

The world seemed like a big nightmare to me, it was all so unreal. The military was everywhere. The streets were full of dirt and mud, it was raining non-stop.

The most important thing was that I was given food and drink. The field rations were reasonably edible and I was happy to be in supposed safety. What is more bizarre than being able to leave enemy territory with the enemy. I felt like I was in a Trojan horse!

The thought of Kurt is what kept me going through it all. This constant feeling of fear, the stomachaches and the tension were almost unbearable. But meeting Kurt kept me alive. Otherwise, I would probably have given up or shot myself.

Now the world looked rosy and warm even though it was gray and cold. Oh, what love can do! It was my elixir of life, my salvation. But I didn't know that yet, I was still on my way, so much could still happen!

The route to Gdingen (today Gdynia) was about 1,500 km and took some time with all the military vehicles, as they only moved slowly. It was a three-day drive.

We stopped at the roadside on the way and at night we set up camp in military posts. Poland had been

occupied since 1939 and so the military infrastructure was in place.

The constant jerking and rocking in our jeep-like vehicle bothered me. I wasn't used to it, since I had never ridden a car in my life. I had only ever driven our tractor for field work on a regular basis. Even though it had also jerked across the fields, it was only for relatively short periods of time.

On the third day, we finally arrived at the port of Gdynia.

One cannot imagine all that went on there. Hundreds of ships were in the port, going in all directions or just arriving.

The port still looked fairly new and modern, having only been completed in 1922 (as I found out much later).

My conductor pulled me aside after we exited the vehicles at the port.

"We'll find a ferry for you. At the moment there are a number of patrol vessels sailing as far as the Swedish coast. I'll talk to a friend of mine who's stationed here coordinating these ships."

Fate was on my side once again. The chain of helpful people in the midst of this chaos and the hell of a World War did not break.

I wasn't religious, but it made me ponder. Why was I so lucky all of a sudden? Who was looking out for me? I didn't have any answers. I thought of Kurt, maybe that love empowered me to attract all that was good?! Who could say, who could understand, but it happened!

Suddenly, everything happened very quickly. My platoon leader came up to me in a jeep and shouted, "Get in!" and we were driving through thousands of soldiers pacing back and forth in the port area, past buses and armoured vehicles, past warships moored at the wharf.

After about half an hour of driving through this commotion we reached a medium-sized boat with no military markings, it appeared to be a private boat. My platoon commander explained to me that as a patrol boat it deliberately had a civilian appearance so that it would not be shot at immediately upon entering Swedish waters.

We got out of the car and went onto the boat via a swaying gangway. Immediately, we were picked up by a very friendly-looking soldier, I couldn't see a rank designation.

The uniforms looked different than those of my "comrades".

The soldier, his name was "Pruskowski" (which I found strange, after all it was a Polish and not a German name), explained to me that they were

headed for Sweden to carry out a reconnaissance mission there. They couldn't land on the Swedish coast just like that, so they would try to get me to the coast with a dinghy at night.

All of this was music to my ears, but at the same time I felt a great deal of fear rising up inside me. The whole plan seemed ludicrous and sounded like a spy novel. But I was very young and I was tempted by the adventure, which in my case was a struggle for survival.

A strange feeling of great anxiety and irrepressible happiness overcame me. My inner tension seemed to tear me apart and I was only able to cope with it all by pushing the fear aside.

"My" platoon leader said goodbye and I hugged him briefly and thanked him.

Who doesn't know that moment in life when everything you are and what you feel is culminated onto the soul in this one moment and penetrates to the outside. Where your entire existence is at stake and multiple people guide your destiny and make sure you survive?

Be it a doctor who operates on your heart and gives you the chance of a new life or a life-saver saving you from drowning?!

My platoon leader was one of those people, as was Kurt and later Roland. People who will do whatever

they can for others, who will risk their own life or even sacrifice it to help you.

These are the heroes of our time, no, the heroes of all times. I had hoped that one day they would be honoured, the many who helped during this chaos, in this hell.

Wistfully, I waved to the platoon leader, who was already on his way back to his world in his vehicle, a world in which he had to murder and pillage, although he didn't know why it was all happening, who had taken it upon himself, to save an enemy of his country, an inferior subhuman being like me.

Did he know the story about Kurt? Or had he helped without asking? Had he simply acted out of friendship towards Roland? Or was he just a good philanthropist.

All these questions went through my head, waiting for answers that didn't come.

I was taken below deck and given a place to sleep in a double bunk bed. There were four other bunk beds. The room was stuffy and tiny, but I didn't care.

I was so close to freedom, it would only be a few hours. The boat captain with the Polish name explained to me that it would take at least 11 hours before we would reach Swedish territory.

I lay down in my berth and slept for a few hours. I was exhausted like never before. The tension slowly left my limbs and only then did I feel the effects of everything.

The adrenaline retreated for the time being and released me into a coma-like state whilst still lurking in the background vigilantly, so that nothing should happen to me on the last stretch.

Slowly the hell of the environment disappeared from my consciousness and I slipped into a weightless state of a very deep sleep...

# A Long Way



## **Saying Goodbye to Father.**

My father died two days later.

I was very fortunate that I was able to sit next to him and be with him.

Death came softly, just as he wished. I felt he deserved it that way.

He had "confessed" everything, his debt towards the fatherland in fulfilling his duties, which he had wanted to settle. After all, he had been too young to question and understand all of this from the start.

He had discovered himself, something, which was unexpectedly within him and didn't stay on the surface for long.

He had tried to save someone, albeit out of love's selfishness, but what's wrong with that? The rescue is what matters, right?

The tragedy of his life was that he had believed that Vasili had not been rescued. But at the same time, this tragedy turned into another kind of happiness, the starting of a family, and ultimately my own existence in this strange world.

In the end everything happened as it should have done. My father didn't let himself be pigeonholed, he had loved a boy and yet he later loved my mother and me.

One does not exclude the other, these parts form a whole, shaped by the world around us, which can move in one direction or the other and is never solitary.

It is diversity that defines us all, now more than ever.

Let's hope that it will continue to prevail and put an end to egalitarianism and oppression!

## **Crossing.**

Someone woke me up military style.

A sailor led me to the upper deck. There was a dinghy on the deck already. Long ropes led up to a steel frame that turned out to be a dinghy lift. I couldn't see much, it was still pitch black. All the lights on the boat were out.

"The coast is right in front of us!" Pruskovsky said quietly. "You have to get in now."

Without much thought, I climbed into the dinghy with one of the sailors.

It was quickly lowered into the choppy sea. Had I not held on straight away, I would have been washed overboard.

Pruskowski put a life jacket on me before boarding and patted me on the shoulder with a friendly smile and said goodbye. "Take care of yourself!" he whispered to me. "You can do it!".

Dense fog obscured the view. The sailor seemed to know what he was doing and in which direction he had to go. His moves and hand movements seemed confident and professional. With a steady hand he steered the outboard motor, which was humming quietly.

Of course there was a risk of being spotted, but Pruskowski had explained to me that this stretch of coast was sparsely guarded, at least that's what they had found on their patrols.

Barely 20 minutes later, he landed the dinghy on a sandy stretch of coast. He gestured for me to jump out and he was gone again. He disappeared into the mist of the night.

I was completely on my own, for the first time in a long time I was all alone.

But I had managed to get out of the occupied part of Europe, freedom was within reach.

Now I had to be careful not to be picked up by coastguards or soldiers and arrested as a spy. Those were my first thoughts in that moment. Where should I go, what should I do?

Soon I heard voices in the dark, coming closer with frightening speed.

"Don't move, we are coming for help!", these voices shouted.

Although I didn't understand English very well, I knew what they meant. I think everyone understands the word "Help".

I was afraid again, of course, as I didn't know if they really wanted to help, but what else could I have done than to wait for what was coming.

A small group of soldiers surrounded me. Again and again they said "Help!". They took me to a nearby military vehicle, and we drove into the unknown.

# Lonesome



## **Camp Life.**

After some time, I was taken to a refugee camp run by a Swedish aid organisation. The soldiers from the beach handed me over to this non-governmental organisation. They had said that they had been instructed from "over there" to pick me up on the beach.

I was unable to find out more. Apparently, there was a network that no one knew about. It became my network of survival. The chain of help had become a whole network and I was free! The constant threat of death was over.

The camp was called "Krampen" and was located northwest of Stockholm and south of Skinnskatteberg in the middle of the forest.

As I learned later, Sweden struggled with refugees for a long time, especially with those who were Jewish.

I was housed in tents with many Russians (there were said to be around 2000 Russians in Sweden). Apparently, I was also considered Russian, as I came from a sister Soviet state.

We were given clothing and food, and most importantly, we were free and safe.

As I slowly began to recover from the rigours of the escape, concerns resurfaced as to how I would ever be able to reach Kurt again.

Through all the hectic turmoil of the past few weeks, I had completely forgotten his last name. Would I have the chance of finding him again?

Sweden has become my home over the years. I never returned to Ukraine, and I avoided all the other countries on the “mainland”, as if the war had never ended there.

I started working as a field hand and worked my way up to a point, where I could one day take over an old farm.

Harvest was in demand, more than ever. People were incredibly hungry, especially after the end of this insane war. Hungry, not just for food, but for humanity and justice, for peace and freedom.

I never married, I longed for Kurt for a long time, but had to admit years later that I would probably never find him in my life.

All attempts via the Red Cross or other authorities in Germany were unsuccessful. Maybe he died or his cover was blown because of me?

I became old.

But I never forgot that one day during the winter of 1941 when Kurt and I made love.

That one encounter saved me, had shown in a few moments what and who I really was and what my place in this world would be.

I hope I'll see him again sometime, here or wherever we humans go when we cease to exist.



## **Message from Vasili.**

In 2003 I received a message from a lawyer in Stockholm. The letter, written in English, came completely out of the blue.

The lawyer was writing on behalf of an 80-year-old Swede named Vasili Nebaba.

Vasili had apparently been trying to find my father for years and finally obtained my address with the help of various organisations that specialise in missing Wehrmacht soldiers.

This was particularly astonishing, as I had changed my name upon marrying my husband in 2001.

The lawyer was unable to say how they managed to identify me as his son.

He suggested that we meet, so as to plan a reunion with Vasili.

Completely overwhelmed that Vasili was still alive and would now even be standing in front of me in person, these news filled me with joy, but also with some disconcertment.

Together with the lawyer, I planned my trip for the following month.

As I said, I was overjoyed, but at the same time I was overcome with great sadness that my father

was no longer alive, as otherwise he would have been able to experience this reunion himself.

On the other hand, I don't know if it would have been good for him. It might have even killed him, as after everything, he could have felt that he had lived his life "wrongly" all these years.

I caught myself being sceptical out of my own dismay. Because what would it have meant to me, if my father would have been reunited with his teenage lover and then perhaps would have regretted having fathered me.

I was ashamed of these thoughts, as I was only thinking about myself!

Anyway, my father was dead and now it fell to me to see this "thing" through to completion.

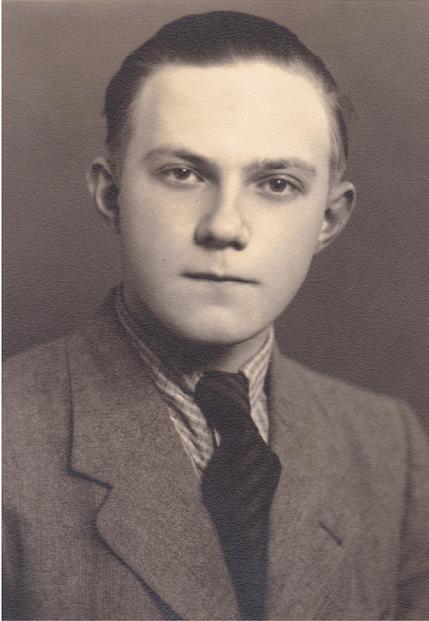
# Farewell





## Message of Mourning.

Two weeks after the lawyer's letter, sad and unexpected news reached us.



**Vasili** had suddenly died. A meeting was no longer possible.

It had all the markings of a true tragedy. An end without a happy ending, an unfulfilled love had died with its protagonist.

Ultimately, this is how myths are created.

The myth of a great love between two unequal people and worlds that were initially hostile towards each other and were forced to be part of a worldwide machine of destruction, whether they wanted this or not.

And then the myth of a long chain of support of great people who became heroes of the time.

Many of them, unfortunately not all, are honoured today in the Jerusalem Holocaust Memorial "Yad Vashem" as "***Righteous Among Nations***".

But many, very many indeed, remain unnamed.

May some of these unnamed ones be given a name with this novel.

We only got to know three of them:

Kurt  
Roland  
Pruskovsky

whilst there are many others, who remain unnamed.

## Epilogue.

The experience of my father's "confession", his and thus also my family history, the death of this important person that was his lover, gripped my soul in a profound way.

It showed me the genetic connection that had run like a thread through three generations of my family:

My grandfather, who had a handicap and thus became a "victim" of his time, my father, whose past revealed a great burden but also extraordinary things, and ultimately myself, as I, at least, am able to live out my "specialness" openly and in peace.

It shows a development that was determined and conditioned by the respective events of the time, but which at the same time led to a positive change.

This gives hope for mankind. Development literally means "a reverse winding up of complexity" in order to favour and enable change and advancement.

For me, it shows that "development" is worthwhile, even if it takes time and causes a lot of suffering on the way to facilitate change.

Today, I at least benefit from full civil rights; just a few years ago it was completely unimaginable to be able to get married and live freely as a gay man!

That alone seems to justify personal suffering and renunciation, even if neither my grandfather nor my father were unfortunately able to benefit from this development.

That's why I'm grateful and humbled that I was able to get to know their lives in more detail and that I became aware of the progressive, great times we live in despite all the adversities.

<b>Photo Credits</b>	
<b>Image Reference</b>	<b>Image Description</b>
Repetitions are abbreviated	Johann Baptist = grandpa, short GP. Rosa Mathilde (Tilly) = grandmother, short GM.
Image 01	GP's birthplace, on a postcard (left), part of the family's estate.
Image 02	" Lösnich train station 1963", by JS Lonscet: Own work. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons.
Image 03	GP's birthplace, postcard belonging to the family, made available and with the kind permission of "Aunt Erika", who lived there until her death.
Image 04	GM in a beach chair, photo belonging to the family's estate. Date of creation unknown.
Image 05	GP's birthplace, photograph belonging to the family's estate. Date of creation unknown.
Image 06	GM and GP as a young couple, photo belonging to the family's estate. Date of creation unknown.

<b>Photo Credits</b>	
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Image 07	GM, Christmas 1922 (handwritten note on the back of the photograph). From the family's estate.
Image 08	Vehicle „ <i>La Licorne</i> “ <sup>1</sup> , in the photograph, there are GP, GM and their son Kurt (the author's father), photograph from the family's estate.
Image 09	“ <i>Alone, ghost, boy, lights</i> “, from <a href="http://www.pixabay.de">www.pixabay.de</a> , Pixabay no. 666078. <b>Caption in the book: Hope.</b>
Image 10	“ <i>Adventure, height, climbing</i> “, from <a href="http://www.pixabay.de">www.pixabay.de</a> , sasint. Pixabay no. 1807524. <b>Caption in the book: Chain of help.</b>
Image 11	„ <i>Homosexuality, rainbow, man</i> “, from <a href="http://www.pixabay.de">www.pixabay.de</a> , geralt. Pixabay no. 1686922. <b>Caption in the book: Together.</b>

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<sup>1</sup> A French car, made around 1935.

<b>Photo Credits</b>	
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Image 12	<p><i>“Discussion, sadness, man, acts”</i>, from <a href="http://www.pixabay.de">www.pixabay.de</a>, whoismargot. Pixabay no. 2912424.</p> <p><b>Caption in the book:</b> <b>The inner eye.</b></p>
Image 13	<p><i>“Human, man, alone “</i>, from <a href="http://www.pixabay.de">www.pixabay.de</a>, stocksnap. Pixabay no. 2567395.</p> <p><b>Caption in the book:</b> <b>A long way.</b></p>
Image 14	<p><i>“Alone, man, sitting“</i>, from <a href="http://www.pixabay.de">www.pixabay.de</a>, SJJP. Pixabay no. 814631.</p> <p><b>Caption in the book: Alone.</b></p>
Image 15	<p><i>“Couple, Autumn, setting sun“</i>, from <a href="http://www.pixabay.de">www.pixabay.de</a>, pixel2013. Pixabay no. 3798371.</p> <p><b>Caption in the book: Farewell.</b></p>
Image 16	<p>Photograph courtesy of Dimov, Alexander, Berlin. Handwritten note on the back: <i>“[...] March 1941 1941 17 years“.</i></p>

<b>Photo Credits</b>	
<b>Image Reference</b>	<b>Image Description</b>
Image 17	<p>“<i>Bidding farewell, old</i>“, from <a href="http://www.pixabay.de">www.pixabay.de</a>, Myriams Fotos. Pixabay no. 2890801.</p> <p><b>Caption in the book:</b> <b>Looking ahead.</b></p>
Image 18	<p>a. Template (sample): Tredition Publishers.</p> <p>b. “<i>War Casualty</i>“. Adrian Hillmann. Photo from <a href="https://www.stock.adobe.com">https://www.stock.adobe.com</a> No. 36439676</p>

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# Looking Forward



