

# **A VERY ORDINARY LIFE**

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## Introduction

*Behold them seated in their glory  
The Kings of mine and rail and soil  
What have you read in all their stories  
But how they plundered our toil.*

There was a time when millions voiced these lines from *The International* and from similar songs, in dozens of languages, as popular tunes. Two generations ago multitudes of ordinary people in Europe and North America, men and women, old and young, workers, were the participants in and the constituents of a wide-ranging, heterogeneous socialist culture. Interwoven with various national, regional and more personal traits, this was not merely a political view but an integral part of people's day to day lives and beliefs. Sometimes the ideological concomitants of this culture were recognized, sometimes they weren't. This book is about a person who in various and to various extents was a part of that culture.

More particularly, this is the life history of a woman born in a working class district of Berlin in January 1901. She grew up in the Edwardian period and came of age in the revolutionary years during and immediately after the First World War. It is a story filled with remarkable reminiscences of life and work in pre-war and Weimar Germany, of emigration and of a decade of semi-migrant labour during the depression in Canada. It touches on the family life of a frontier camp worker, it deals with daily routines and changes, and also of encroaching old age. Interspersed throughout are the sometimes incisive and at other times obscure understandings of the major events and forces shaping the world in which she lived.

This book is a life history of my mother, her family and friends and class. It spans almost seventy years and was transcribed and edited from tape recordings. It is written in the first person

and in her words. The story details some of the drama and trivia in the lives of a number of ordinary people.

'What does it matter?' My mother's attitude toward her own life history is indicative of a certain modesty bordering almost on self-derogation. which many people feel about their own lives. It matters because our own stories are more alive, more meaningful and more capable of providing strength and support than any of the biographies of leaders or the National Dreams of statesmen and captains of industry. The experiences recorded here are part of a hidden heritage.

The events and responses recorded here may strike some readers as being of little contemporary relevance. But look around you - how novel are many of the conditions in which we find ourselves today? National governments and governmental agencies unwilling and impotent to challenge corporate interests as living standards stagnate and decline. The blatant and concerted sabotage of mild Social Democratic reforms by business interests and their attendant press corps. The unchecked plundering of wages and small savings by inflation and by speculators old and new. The blind and cowardly witch hunt against recipients of unemployment insurance and welfare payments during periods of recession. The multifaceted attempts to claw back all the social security benefits which have been achieved over the past two generations. The ease with which most Canadians accepted and lauded the imposition of the War Measures Act, with its attendant dismissal of all the rights of citizens, to round up a handful of kidnappers. The endless escapist romanticism of the lumpen bourgeoisie, now made fashionable and profitable. It's all happened before.

This book is not about makers and shakers or heroes. It contains no caricatures of men and women who unfailingly know and do the right things. It is not about people who never engage in petty squabbles, who have no fears and misconceptions. Instead it is about the real lives of real people, with their complex skeins of strengths and weaknesses, insights and illusions, hopes, frustrations and tenacity.

Above all else the outlook portrayed here was class conscious, even when class terms were abjured. This working class consciousness moreover was not afraid of and did not disdain to appropriate those elements of theatre, music and learning it found to its taste. At the same time, this outlook involved a rather strict discipline and morality of its own. It was not

tolerant of the lumpen proletarian or semi-criminal social patterns romanticized over by some. These were too threatening and too hostile to the interests of working people, in the past as today, and too often served as the bases for anti-working class attacks.

Despite the vivacity and wry humour with which the present account abounds, encroaching age, illness and isolation have led my mother to a feeling of alienation which to some extent colours this account. Old age does not necessarily lead to composure, acceptance and serenity. However, the general cynicism which sustained exploitation can produce has been resisted. The account is filled with examples of personal resistance to unacceptable conditions. As portrayed here such resistance appears as individual and rarely coordinated with broader actions. To some extent this is misleading and does not convey the mass actions which she and others involved in this story were a part of. My mother now dismisses much of such action, claiming she was never 'really' political. There is some truth in that view. However, it is also true that this account would have been somewhat different, with a greater emphasis on broadly political struggles, if it had been recorded ten to twenty years earlier.

*A Very Ordinary Life* is not a nostalgia story of the great depression nor is it a morality tale of immigrant incorporation into the Canadian mosaic. Still less is it to be read as historical exotica. It definitely is not a study of 'working class life' intended to be read by external observers.

It was recently fashionable for certain writers to discover and portray Canadian working class life, such as Lorimer's *Working People* and Robertson's *Grass Roots*. There, tricked out in the latest styles of social concern are the old hackneyed views of ordinary people by hucksters on the make. They portray Canadian working people as reactionary, stupid, intellectually illiterate - but 'the salt of the earth'. Apart from being scurrilous and patronizing these caricatures are nothing more than the old Tory stereotypes by writers who are contemptuous of the lives of real people.

Such commentators will probably feel that the insights and responses presented in this life history must be quite atypical. Anyone who doubts the authenticity of the present account may peruse the oral history collections now found in many social archives. There the voices of hundreds of men and women will

speak to the listener with an eloquence and power and humanity rarely matched by commentators.

I have not 'corrected' the descriptions of the historical events mentioned in this text nor have I injected my own understanding of them. Background descriptions of some of the more important events are provided in the appended footnotes here.

## **A Fair Warning**

To start with I have to warn you that I'm an old lady now, pretty well used up. In the last couple of years I haven't had many people to talk to so I'm all rusted in. Besides, there wasn't anything in my life, that happened to me personally, that was extraordinary.. At least nothing that millions and tens of millions of other people didn't experience themselves. I always lived a very ordinary life.

I remember a lot of things, little incidents that happened, what certain people were like. But much of it is sort of unrelated. If you're expecting any great analyses or lessons then you're out of luck. Because I don't have them. Never did. Except what should be obvious to anybody. There's only one lesson I've learned and that is to enjoy what you can when you can. Because if you wait you're often too late.

Memory is a strange thing. I wouldn't have believed it possible that I could remember so much. And the things I remember! I haven't thought about some of them since I was a young woman. You wouldn't think that after all that time those memories would be still lying around, unused so to speak. Oh, it's clear why some of the incidents stick in your mind. But a lot of them don't seem to have much rhyme or reason - songs, what somebody looked like, the most unimportant things. What I remember most clearly are scenes. The way buildings and streets and the countryside looked in a thousand different places and times. I really can see many of them in my mind's eye. But my powers of description just aren't up to doing them justice. Too bad.

I can only talk about what happened to me personally and to people that we knew. About great events that went on in my lifetime I can't say too much. In a general way I still remember what was said about what was supposed to be going on. But often that was just malarkey - historical malarkey now, I suppose. Besides, there are some things that you can't describe to anybody who hasn't experienced them themselves. And there are a few things too that I just don't want to talk about. They wouldn't change the story none anyhow.

It's funny how it goes. There are incidents which didn't last more than a few minutes, times that didn't last more than a few weeks or months. Some of them I remember as if they had happened yesterday. Well, not exactly yesterday but as if they

took place a few months ago. Things which happened forty, fifty and more years ago. Then there are other times, years and years, of which I remember nothing. Nothing worth mentioning at all. That's the way memory works I suppose. Sometimes there's a song or a name or a picture that brings back some incident and I remember everything about it. But if I'd sit down and purposely try to remember any of those events I couldn't, not for the life of me.

There are some people who I knew for years and spent a lot of time with and who were part of my life for a long time. But when I try to remember just exactly what it was we did and said there is nothing that comes to mind. And on the other hand there are people who you knew for a very short while, or who you only met once, but you can remember all sorts of things about them. When it comes to conversation that took place forty and more years ago, there I can only remember the general drift. A few I can recall pretty clearly, but usually not. This Pedro Martinez talks like he was able to remember every word what anybody ever said since he was a kid.<sup>1</sup> Well, that's not possible. Nobody remembers conversations like that.

Well, we might as well start from the beginning. I suppose a story like this should start where I'm born. Of course that's always hearsay. But we might as well get that out of the way.

I was born in January 1901, just missed being a birthday child of the new century. One thing I want to stress, that everybody should get straight, right from the beginning, I don't want anybody reading this thinking it's a tale from some dried up past. I and the people I grew up with weren't part of some dark age. We were part of modern times. And to tell the truth I think that some of the things we knew and did and appreciated were ahead of a lot of things that are in vogue today.



## 1. Rise Up To The Light [1901-1914]

### *A Child in the Tenements*

I was born in Berlin itself, Berlin proper, right in a house on Weissenburgerstrasse.<sup>2</sup> That street probably doesn't even exist anymore, either rebuilt or shot to pieces. There were nine of us when I was a kid: my mother and father, the three boys, Fritz, Kurt and Werner, myself and my sister Erna. Our grandparents, that is my mother's parents, lived with us until I was seventeen.

My mother worked most of the time, either running a small store or working as a seamstress. My father was a printer and he used to make a good salary, but he used most of it up himself on his different schemes and only gave my mother a few marks a week for the household. So she had to earn money to support us herself. Very many times I remember her sitting late at night by the coal oil lamp sewing dresses. She sewed to make some extra money and made clothes for us children too.

I must say, whatever other flaws she had, she always tried to dress us nicely and she took us out every afternoon for long walks in the park to get some fresh air. Actually, I didn't have much of a childhood because from the time I was ten I had to do most of the housework. I had to come home immediately after school to clean up the house and wash dishes and peel potatoes and help prepare the supper. I was the eldest girl and the boys didn't have to do housework, of course. I cleaned up and washed the clothes for nine people.

By the time I could understand things, when I was nine or ten or so, my father wasn't contributing very much to the household. When he was in a good mood he might bring home five pounds of the cheapest meat. That was supposed to take care of his obligations. Sometimes he gave a few marks for the rent, often nothing. And he treated my mother pretty rotten. The only nice things I remember about my father was that he took us kids out for walks on Sundays. We'd take a loaf of rye bread along and a big chunk of smoke bacon or sausage in a knapsack and then we could be out for most of the day.

We children didn't realize how badly he was treating our mother then. Sometimes we would find her sitting in a corner staring vacantly across the room. There wasn't the slightest opportunity or place for privacy. It didn't bother us kids too

much but it must have been hell for her because she hardly ever got out. She used to sit behind the door sometimes, in a space between the wall and a large wardrobe. There she would sit, still and staring. We kids would open the door and quietly peep in. 'Is Mama still sitting there?' 'Yes, still there.' No supper, no light, nothing. She'd sit there for hours sometimes. Contemplating I don't know what, either mayhem or suicide I suppose. She never said anything about it and it was certainly not one of the things that we kids would ask about. In fact, there were very few things which kids could talk to their parents about.

My father took off and vanished a few times. Once my parents had a particularly big fight and my father left home for a while. When he came back he lived in his print shop. He would still be around and he could still recruit my brother and me to help in the shop, but my mother wouldn't let him stay in the house. 'Good riddance', she said. 'I just can't stand it anymore'. But a few months later he became very ill with some sort of gall bladder trouble and my mother took him back again.

For a few years, from the time I was four or five until I was about eight years old, we lived on the edge of Spandau, on Goltzstrasse. There were two tenements on that block, a few small houses and the open fields. For many years that's the way it remained. But my mother had to make some money so we moved into the heart of the Spandau tenement district. That must have been about 1908 or 1909.

She rented a small store there that sold stationery, magazines, tobacco. Besides that she had a concession for a small lending library. One paid so many cents per book per day, it was literally a few pennies here and a few pennies there. How my mother and all us kids lived from the earnings of that store is beyond me. Boy, I'll tell you there is no worse way of making a living, if that's what you can call it, then running a little corner store. You're chained to that store like a slave. You have to be polite to some people who you'd like to tell off. Often we would keep the store open until late in the evening just because of the few extra pennies we could earn.

You couldn't say that we lived in a slum because most of the houses were well kept up even if old. There weren't those vast suburbs that you have today, stretching endlessly into the country so that you don't know if you're in the city or not. There were only a few small suburbs around Berlin and they were just for fairly wealthy people.

Most ordinary people, people who had to work for a living, lived in tenements. There were these long streets of tenement houses. Huge districts, whole cities within the city of them. The buildings were fairly low but they were crowded to the rafters with people. There was some space in the streets, which were pretty wide. Most kids played on the street, on the sidewalks that is, because even without cars and trucks there was a pretty heavy horse and wagon traffic and those were just as dangerous as cars. Some kids whose parents didn't want them playing in the streets spent most of their childhood stuck up in their apartments. But we took it all in our stride.

Most of the tenement houses were only three and four stories high. In some areas they were up to five stories but that was unusual. All the buildings were made of brick or greystone. Usually three or four buildings were set around an inner yard. You couldn't call it a courtyard because it was just a small area where garbage cans were kept and which gave access to the back buildings. Something like a square alley-way. Depending on the size of the building, there were four or more apartments per floor. There was very little light and the people living in the apartments off the street hardly ever got any direct sunlight in their windows. Most of the year everything was sort of damp and musty. You could actually smell that tenement air. Not smells of cooking or garbage but that damp sunless air. *Keller Luft* (cellar air) it was called. Although I've read lots of accounts of it, none of them ever really described it. But anyone who grew up in places like that, in Berlin or elsewhere, knows what I mean. People dreamt of the sun.

That drab sort of semi-daylight leaves its mark on you until the day you die. There was a Zille sketch I once saw when I was already a young woman that really caught that feeling of the tenements. Zille was known for that sort of thing even before I was born.<sup>3</sup> This was a picture of a little girl sitting on an alley curb and looking up at a beam of sunlight. The sunlight comes between two houses and only reaches to the upper side of the building, not down into the shadows where she was sitting.

Although most tenements were pretty clean and in fairly good repair, kept that way by the people themselves, they all had a sort of drab closed-in feel to them. Everybody called them *Mietskasernen* (rent barracks). Some areas were worse than others and there were some real slums too, in parts of Spandau but especially in Berlin.

Most of the tenements didn't have baths in the apartments, or even private toilets. There was one toilet per floor and one bath per building. Some didn't even have that, just a row of common toilets. a couple for men and a couple for women, down in the courtyard. Most people used chamber pots. If you wanted to use the building bath tub you had to get the key from the superintendent. People used public bath houses or washed in their kitchens. Like we did. There was no central heating and only cold running water. Many buildings already had gas stoves but we still used a coal stove and a big brick oven fired with briquettes to heat with. Many of the buildings already had electric light when I was a child but we also lived in places where we still had gas light. I remember my mother putting the mantles on the gas jets. And the first place we lived in Berlin we used kerosene lamps. Much of the street lighting was still gaslight until long later, into the 1920s.

The tenements we lived in sometimes had a backyard of sorts, but usually not. There was never any space you could call your own. I was always very fond of growing something, plants, some living thing, it didn't matter what. But there was never a chance to grow anything when I was a kid. Once I tried to grow something in a small strip of earth I uncovered under our kitchen window. I had to remove the cobblestones first, dig up the hard pan and put in earth. I planted a willow and during the spring and summer it grew into a little tree. I used to watch and tend that thing every day. One morning I came out and somebody had torn the willow out by the roots, had broken it in two and put it on our back step. It was probably the apprentices in the bakery two houses down, and I hated them. They also killed whatever cats they could find. Right there I decided that I'd never try to plant anything or keep anything living in those tenements. Not until after I got away from them.

Many people in the city wanted to grown something but nobody had the house lots that you have here. People were so starved for a little bit of greenery and garden that they tried to grow things in the most impossible places. Many people wanted a little plot, maybe a sixteenth of an acre on the out skirts of the city. Even if it was only to grow one strawberry or half a potato and even if they cost ten marks per ounce. 'Look what I grew in my own garden', people would say. You 'oohed' and 'ahed' that they had grown something themselves. And so did I.

There were quite a few garden plots that were rented out by municipal governments on the edges of Berlin. Usually each renter would build a little shed or shack on the plot where they could stay overnight. My father rented one of those plots for a couple of years. It was about an hour north of the outskirts of Spandau, not too far from the Havel River. The plot was almost pure sand with a few clumps of grass here and there. My father built a small shelter there of boards and lattices, big enough so that we could all squeeze in to sleep overnight. And then we started to build up a garden. We kids were sent into the neighbouring fields to get soil, especially the earth thrown up by moles and gophers; there were plenty of them. Then bring it in pails to build up the garden. We also used to collect *Pferde Apfel* ('horse apples' i.e. horse dung) on the streets in Spandau and bring it out to the plot in bags. Lots of people did. That and the green compost worked pretty well. The second year we had the garden finished and planted and things grew like wild fire.

I was six or seven years old at the time and played cowboys and Indians with my older brother and his friends. That was a pretty well favoured game; we were all hooked up on Karl Mai stories.<sup>4</sup> 'Old Sure Hand' and 'Manitou' and 'Uncas, the Last of the Mohicans' were constantly popping up. That was probably the best time of my childhood. But I also used to have a lot of fights with boys. Girlfriends I don't really remember at that time.

Once in a nearby field I found thirteen tiny kittens. They just had their eyes open. Well, I bundled them up in my apron and carefully carried them home. But my grandmother was home alone and she said, 'No, nothing doing. Out with them, out.' I was sitting on the curb trying to decide what to do when two neighbourhood boys came by. They were friends, but also enemies. Boys that age treated girls as if they were dirt. They said, 'Okay, we're going to get some milk.' But their mothers weren't having anything to do with kittens either. Not too far away was the canal where barges used to tie up. The boys said, 'Oh, we'll take them down to the barge men. they always like cats. They'll take them'.

Since I didn't know what to do I let them take the kittens. The boys ran ahead and me behind. When I got down to the canal they were in the process of throwing the kittens in the water. They had already thrown two in. So I fought with them, kicking and biting and scratching and trying to bloody their noses. Finally I

got the kittens back. Then I took them to all the barges along the canal; the barge men and their wives were always very kind.

About a block down from our store in Bruderstrasse was a little park, about the size of a house lot and fenced in with iron rails. It had a path and a few trees and a little lawn and a few benches. A policeman lived in a tenement just across from the park. Some of them were okay but he was an overbearing type. He kept kids from playing in that park, although it wasn't his job. He liked to think of himself as the guardian of the law around that neighbourhood. But we kids taunted him every chance we had, 'Our protector doing his duty again' or 'Old Mr. Schinke appears again' There was a children's song of long standing which we used to sing as loud as we could if we wanted to annoy him. It went 'You are crazy my boy, take off to Freidenau. That's where all the loonies are - you belong there too.' He often got mad and threatened us with jail, and we would laugh. That made him even more angry, which was pretty stupid of him. After all we were kids, what could he have done?

When they wanted to taunt me my brothers always called me Litte and they also called me *Weib* (wench). I was about eight or nine years old and to me that name was like waving a red flag in the face of a bull. In our building, on the main entrance, there was a very beautiful stained glass inset. Sort of a fanlight set in the middle of the door. It had a scene of fields with flowers, just beautiful. One day my two brothers held the door closed and started to call me *Weib* and wouldn't let me out. The combination of them using their strength to bully me, to lock me in like that, and to insult me, made me wild. Then one of them spit through the transom. That was the last straw. With that I hammered the fanlight out with my two fists. Surprisingly I didn't get cut. But then I got scared. I thought 'Now you're going to get it, but good.. So I hid in the basement. We were pretty poor and that window must have cost a tremendous sum. Well, I did get a licking but that was all. There wasn't as much fuss as I thought. The landlord was a pretty nice man and he just replaced the window with ordinary glass. I think he had a crush of my mother too and that was the reason he didn't make more trouble. She was a pretty good looking woman, and even young looking surprisingly, until she was well into her forties.

Sometimes my mother would send me out to the night market to do some shopping. I was always afraid to go in the dark but there was nothing for it, I often had to go. The same thing with

going down into the basement at night. Each family had a small space in the basement where they kept their coal and stored their things. It was always dark and spooky down there; you had to take a lantern along. I was deathly afraid of that basement when I was alone. But I used to sing a song that was popular then, about *Unter denn Linden*, and that would give me courage to go.<sup>5</sup>

Twice a week, usually Wednesday and Saturday, were bath nights. For me that was really something to look forward to. We had a big zinc tub that we stored in the basement. It was big enough for kids to curl up in, although the adults had to stand or kneel in it. You'd stoke up the stove and put on every available pot full of water. Then, one after another all of us kids would wash. Maybe every second one would get a change of water although there was fresh rinsing water for each of us. Those who didn't get washed one day would get a turn the next time. We were supposed to each get a bath once a week but I used to get in on all of the baths and often had hot sponge baths in between. My mother said, 'You're going to be sorry, you'll scrub your skin off. You'll get ill from washing that often.' There was probably something to that, especially taking hot baths in unheated rooms in winter. But it was mainly that taking a bath, especially if you wanted privacy, upset the schedule and was an inconvenience for the others, what with heating the water and dragging the tub in and getting the others out of the room.

On some bath nights my mother would buy eighty pfennig worth of bulk chocolate and macaroons and when a kid was finished with his bath he would get a handful of chocolate and go to bed. We very seldom had cake but each Sunday we kids would get ten pfennig each for cake. Each one of us had a special pastry we prized, I always bought two of what were called 'Pigs' Ears' (palms). Kurt bought Warschauer cake, you'd get a big chunk for ten pfennig. And Erna always bought 'Americaner', two big sugar cookies drenched in icing.

Our mother used to take us to the movies once every month or so. That was a fairly big event. They were silent movies of course but they had good organ accompaniment. It didn't matter much whether they were made in Germany, France, England or America. Most we saw were German ones but also quite a few French ones too, melodramas, suspense movies and historical - and I use the term loosely - costume pieces. They were the standard fare. The American westerns and slapstick movies also had a pretty good audience. There were some adaptations of

serious drama too. I recently saw a movie on T.V. that I remembered from that period and I wondered why we ever bothered going. But we all thought it was just marvelous as kids.

I learned to read before I went to school through copying Fritz' schoolwork. By the time I was seven I was an avid reader. I used to sit on the toilet and lock the door and read the books from my mother's store. Sometimes people from the building would hammer on the door and yell at me 'What did I think I was doing sitting on the toilet reading all day'? Or my mother would say, 'There must be something wrong with you. We're going to have to take you to a doctor' or 'You'll ruin your eyes.' But it didn't faze me. What did I have to do if I wasn't reading anyway? Either sit around or help with more work. I always had a book with me, at home, in school, and wherever I had to wait for five minutes, I read.

When I was ten it became my job to take the lots of magazines from my mother's store for exchange, to the agency which distributed them. Each week I'd go to downtown Berlin with two suitcases full of those magazines. We also sold paperback potboilers too - children's stories, westerns, there were plenty of them, and Karl Mai epics. It was quite a job lugging those things back and forth but I looked forward to the trip each week. The streetcar ride was about an hour and half each way, right through the city. It was a great outing. I saw different parts of town and different things going on. That, along with the Sunday walks, were the highpoints of my week.

There was also quite a bit of activity in the streets of Spandau. Travelling markets set up shop in different parts of the town on different days. There were organ grinders and travelling musicians who came through the streets. Each would have his own district. The organ grinders were the most common, some with pretty big organs on carts, others with small ones they carried, and some with monkeys. They would walk around and stand on certain corners or in front of courtyards for twenty minutes or so, playing their music. People would give them a *groschen* (dime) or maybe only a few pennies.

There were also street singers who had sheaves of large pictures on canvas. There would always be two people doing that. One would crank the organ while the other would turn over the pictures - there might be a half dozen to ten huge pictures. They'd point to the various characters and happenings that were supposed to be going on in the picture. The music was the



accompaniment. Sometimes there was a song made up to go with that story and the music. But mainly it was just lecturing, really a style of very stagey yelling.

*Eckensteher* (street-corner standers) we used to call them. Old crime stories or melodramas were their main standbys. Jack the Ripper was a popular theme. Another I remember was about a man who is travelling home through a forest when he's held up by a robber. As the robber is taking the man's gold he stops to ask whose picture he carries in a locket on his breast. At the stanza where the robber asks, 'What do you carry there on your white breast?' all us kids would laugh. Of course it's a picture of his mother, who else? At that the robber falls weeping at the traveller's feet begging for forgiveness because, naturally, it's his long lost brother.<sup>6</sup> Well... that was about the calibre of that sort of music.

There was a man and wife who came around our neighbourhood with an organ and pictures for a number of years when I was a child. They changed their stories every so often. They weren't as common in Spandau as in parts of Berlin and they were going out of style by the time I was a girl anyway. 'Old fashioned' we thought when I was twelve. Although whenever those musicians came around we kids went out to listen and watch. But that really went out of style before I left school. It was old fashioned and everybody likes to think they're modern and up to date.

Sometimes when coming back from school we used to hang onto the back of freight wagons for a ride. They were massive affairs pulled by a team of huge horses and piled high with kegs. Usually they had hooks around the sides and backs for ropes. We would hang onto those and ride for blocks. When the drivers saw us they would yell and curse but usually they were too preoccupied and there were a lot of blind spots anyway. One day we were hanging on one of these wagons, going right down the main street of Spandau, and who should be standing on the sidewalk but my mother. She seemed to be looking right at me. 'Caught in the act; I thought. But she didn't say a word about it.

That was just a week or so before Christmas. And each Christmas, when all the kids were small, my father would put together a book of linograph cartoons that he made himself, with ditties to go with them. There would be one or two pages about each member of the family and some things about neighbours and local happenings. Usually maxims and examples of the difficulties one could get into. Each child got one copy of the

book. Well, that year we opened the book and there was a cartoon of me hanging on the back of a beer wagon with a verse. 'Look around. Mother said don't go near the big horses. But Lizechen did. And so the horse bit the flowers on her head, and off her cheek it also took a bite. Now that doesn't look right.' There were cartoons about the danger of playing near the water and with fire. Each of us kids were pictured in there. My father was so clever and talented in many ways, but still a callous character.

### *Family and Neighbours*

In Spandau we had a kitchen and three rooms - the living room, the parents bedroom and the kids room. All five of us slept in that one room. There was a separate room where my grandparents lived and there was the store in front. In their room my grandparents had a *grude* (hearth) where they did their own cooking. They were in their room most of the time.

My grandmother would secretly buy meat and delicatessen, which was a real treat, and cook it for themselves alone. I suppose that if they had served it out to the rest of us there wouldn't have been anything for anybody. But it always made me mad. They had some savings of their own.

My grandfather started out as a carpenter or a cabinet maker or something like that. But for many years both he and my grandmother had a shop where they repaired dolls. They made fairly good money at that. My grandfather had sold the business and they had enough to retire on, not in comfort but enough to get by on for the rest of their lives if they were careful. Or so they thought.

I don't know what they thought about most things or what politics they had, if any. They themselves were Free Thinkers, that they were adamant about.<sup>7</sup> And that was a kind of politics in those days.

My father's parents were still living when I was fourteen. They were seventy, maybe older. That was a very old age then. He had been a hand weaver with his own loom and his own house in Thuringia, but that was long before. When I knew them they had two rooms in the Treptow district. That's a very old part of Berlin. They lived in one of those rooms. In that single room they had this huge hand loom my grandfather had brought along with

him when the emigrated to Berlin. He had been a linen weaver and they hung on a bit longer than the other hand weavers by turning out luxury goods. But in the end they all lost their livelihood through machine weaving. He did some hand weaving in Berlin, fancy table clothes, napkins and things like that. But the fashion changed and they couldn't compete with factories

There were those two old people, their daughter and her husband and their child, all in two rooms. Somehow they managed to scrape through by with what the children gave them and odd jobs and what little savings they had.

I guess you could say that my grandparents had seen and been part and parcel of the industrial revolution. But that was already past for them when I knew them. Some people reminisced about the past, I suppose everybody does. But my grandparents certainly didn't talk to me about it. They didn't engage in that sort of talk; at least I don't think so. Anyway, we kids didn't bother to listen to what old people had to say even if they had something to say. We were involved in our own lives and world. What was past was past.

That whole family all died off during the First World War, my two grandparents through pneumonia and some other illness, and their daughter too. Her husband was wounded in the war and died slowly over the course of two years. Only the child, my cousin, survived. She went to live with a great aunt. And that girl turned out to be a real monster, so sadistic that you knew she was crazy.

I guess we were all a bit mad, but stoic. Maybe you had to be. Illness, death and madness everywhere. Our family, my relatives and friends, weren't at all unusual in that way. Among almost all the families that we knew, including our own, there was always somebody who was suffering from what they would call neuroses today, or 'nervous exhaustion'. You had to make allowances for it. We took it in our stride as best we could. Somebody had to be pretty far gone before they were recognized as crazy.

Parents and adults in general didn't tell kids anything. For instance, in 1913 my grandfather died. Nobody told us kids anything, and we weren't babies anymore either. My mother told us all to dress up in our one set of good clothes and without telling us anything she took us way out into the country. We were out all day long, which had never happened before. At that very time my grandfather, her father, was dying at home. She didn't tell us anything. He died of pleurisy. We guessed that he had died

but until the funeral two days later nobody told us. His body lay in wake for three days. We were lined up by the door to say our last goodbyes to him. They took him to be cremated and that was that. Really pretty strange. Whatever you learned you learned by listening to what grownups said to each other and piecing together what you could.

When it came to sexual matters, either normal or abnormal, or about birth control, we were absolutely ignorant. We didn't even know how the body worked. No one spoke about such things to us. And that was the case with most people. My mother had never ever told me anything about sex. For instance, when I got to the age when I was to start menstruating, I still didn't know what to expect. It started one day when I about about twelve. One evening after a bath I'd gone to bed and started to bleed. Well, I thought I was going to die, I really did. I thought that something had ruptured inside me and I was going to die. I told my mother and she came up and gave me some sanitary napkins and all she said was 'You're a woman now'. That's all she said, no explanation, nothing.

Did I question her about sex? No, of course not. That was the time you didn't speak to your parents about sex, or about most other important things. And if you did ask them about it they wouldn't have answered you anyway. I didn't know anything. I don't even remember how I found out about sex and intercourse and the human body. Bits and pieces of gossip and from books. It was a very imperfect knowledge I had until after I was married. I don't know if things like diaphragms were available or not. Probably some people used them but most didn't even know of them. My mother certainly didn't, and she was in other ways fairly shrewd. Years later, when I was in my twenties, my mother talked to me about contraceptives and she said, 'If I had known what I'm going to tell you now I would never have had six children'. So there you are.

Until I was nine or ten years old all the kids had to help doing the housework. Everybody had to pitch in except Werner, he was too young. Each would have a separate task, peeling the vegetables, mopping, cleaning the house, washing. Sometimes it would be very pleasant if we were all together. We'd sing in three sometimes four part harmony. But when the boys were a bit older they weren't expected to do any housework. Then Erna got rheumatic fever. It was a pretty bad bout and after that she never had to help with the housework. So by the time I was ten

and eleven I did almost all the housework, except the cooking, myself. Erna always had very elegant hands while mine were always rough and chapped even when I was a kid. I never had ladylike hands.

Kids were thought to be the property of adults, not just in our family but by everyone. I'll always remember washing clothes. It wasn't like it is today - it was more like working in a factory. In fact, I never worked in any factory as hard as I did washing. My grandmother always came along to see that I washed the clothes properly. She'd help with the lighter work, like hanging up the wash and folding it.

Each of the tenements had an attic floor which was set aside for washing. Each family in the tenement got three days a month to do their wash. Smaller things like underwear would be washed out in a tub every few days. There was a huge stove with big vats. You fired up the stove to boil your clothes. You had to stoke the stove and carry coal up four flights and stir the laundry in the vats. Using a scrub board would have been easier but my mother didn't believe in that. She said they wore out the clothes. For two full days you would boil and stir and add and take out your clothes. In between you'd hang them on the clothes line in a big drying room. On the third day you take the washing down and fold it.

After that I'd take the clean laundry to shops that rented out time on mangles, great big rollers that were turned by crank. The clothes and other wash were put in piece by piece. When you cranked the mangle the clothes came out pressed. Even for a full grown woman it was a pretty heavy job; probably most men today don't have work that heavy. But I was only a child of ten, eleven years. They already had electric mangles but they were a few groschen more. They saved those dimes by my sweat. My grandmother was a real czar. 'Oh there's a pleat that didn't come out well. Put it through again.' She always used to tell others, 'Oh she's a strong girl, she doesn't mind'. How stupid I was. I should have rebelled. I was so tired that I could hardly eat during wash day, and that was pretty unusual for me.

There were *kneipen* (pubs) in every block of a main street. Lots of people went regularly. Mainly men but often with their wives and girl friends along. People of all ages. They would drink beer slowly and talk and play cards. Each *kneipen* had its own circle of regulars plus anybody else who came along, all usually from the immediate neighbourhood. It was a sort of club.

Although there were some which were real *kaschemen* (dives), more like saloons.

One place we lived was directly across the street from a pretty rough dive where you'd often see women coming to get their husbands before they drank up all their wages. It was like a temperance melodrama, but alcohol was a real problem. Most men didn't earn enough to get drunk and still have enough to buy the meat and feed their family. Usually those dives were very noisy and boisterous places, but still orderly. But in this particular one there would be all sorts of fights going on between the men. There would be fights between wives and their husbands, who didn't want to come home or who had lost their money playing cards. We heard them quarreling late at night. There was a real place for the temperance ideas, if they had done any good. But the people who belonged weren't usually those who needed it anyway.

My mother belonged to the Society of Good Templars. The official purpose of the Good Templars was as a temperance group but mainly it was a sort of social club. There were some people in the Good Templars who managed to sneak a drink or two on the side anyway, although that was against the main creed. There was this Mr. Strauss who we knew fairly well. He said he had a nerve condition for which there was only one effective medicine. That was glass of 'Yin Fong Drops'. It was supposedly a Chinese nerve medicine but in reality it was more alcoholic than ordinary *schnapps*. He used to drink that stuff by the water glass full. My father belonged to the Good Templars too, but he fell off the wagon too often to be member in good standing.

A lot of middle-aged people, at least I thought of them as middle-aged at the time, people in their thirties and older belonged to clubs of one sort or another. A lot of these lodges put on plays and variety shows where many of their members got into the act at one time or another, playing an instrument or acting in a playlet. People created their own entertainment in their own locales. There wasn't this mass entertainment you have today. People occasionally went to the movies, that was fairly new then. More often they would go to variety shows or out on picnics in the summer. Organized sports were very minor then and spectator sports were hardly known.

The lodge my mother belonged to occasionally put on *schattenspiele* (shadow plays). You put a thin curtain tightly

across the front of a stage with a strong light behind it. Behind this curtain the performers moved and struck poses to create the shadows they wanted. I was in a few of them myself. We did fragments of famous old plays, fairy tales and playlets we wrote ourselves, satires. You would devise props to symbolize forests and dragons and armies and what not, as your imagination and talent allowed and the story called for. There would be a narrator, or sometimes the actors would talk. All sorts of combinations. I think people would go for that even now. There were the most fantastic effects you could create with those shadows. We were never all that good but some groups were outstanding.

My brother Kurt, I, and a few friends put on a Cinderella show for younger children a few times. Everything went wrong, but wrong in such a way that it was a tremendous hit as comedy. For instance, Prince Charming was supposed to put the slipper on my foot and there was a phrase where he said 'With these little golden slippers I claim you as my own'. But he couldn't find the prop slipper. So he repeated the line again and finally grabbed for one of my big *pantinen* (clogs) that were lying just off stage. We called them *Jesus latches* because they were so big, with huge wooden soles, that it looked like we could walk on water with them. The audience was rolling in the aisles, in tears, by the time we were through. They were mainly kids and some of their parents who we all knew.

### *School*

I was in an all girls school; there were few coeducational public schools then. Even in the higher schools boys and girls were separated, But we young girls weren't interested in boys anyway. We palled around with boys from our neighbourhood, or later from work, but we never met any through school.

School started at seven in the morning. At one o'clock it was finished for the younger ones. We walked home and had lunch. After the second year there were extra sessions two days a week, from two till four o'clock. And of course we went on Saturday - school was six days a week. We didn't wear uniforms exactly, although we all had the same type of smock-like aprons which covered the dresses.

It was a forced draft education - spelling, reading, arithmetic, a bit about geography of the world, and history. But it was all

pretty stilted. The history was mainly of Europe of course, and particularly German history. It was the doings of great men and of battles and famous sayings. As kids we didn't think too much of it one way or another. Our families and friends and the opinions of the neighbourhood were much stronger than anything they tried to teach us in school.

Even the music classes we had in school, even though I liked music, were very inane. We learned stilted ballads and patriotic songs. We kids made up some parodies of some of them. For instance, the Prussian anthem was full of 'forefathers who fought to preserve freedom', as national anthems always are, and the last line went 'A Prussian I am and will always be'. But we sang 'A Prussian I am but another too can be' That amused us so much that once my girlfriend and I got carried away with it and sang it out too loud in the class room and the teacher heard us. But he didn't say much about it. Young girls, what could he say.

All in all school life was pretty rotten. When I was in the second grade the teacher asked me my name and I answered. 'Felicitas Golm' 8 He said, 'What? That name is made up. Are you trying to play tricks with me? Bring me your christening certificate tomorrow. We'll see about this.' So I went home and I asked my mother and she told me I didn't have one. We weren't in any church; she didn't go in for religious nonsense. The next day I went up to the teacher and told him that I didn't have a christening certificate and we didn't belong to any church. Hardly moving and almost too quick for me to see he took his long pointer and hit me over the head. 'So, that will teach you.' he said. I was too scared to cry then. Besides, crying would only egg him on because he was a sadistic man. He was always sneaking around the benches hitting students unawares for some fancied or real misconduct or inattention. And we were all small children, maybe seven to nine.

Well, this teacher started to circle around me and I jumped up and ran home. Then I started to cry. My mother took quite a bit. She didn't mix into her kids' problems much. But that was too much for her. Especially on the matter of being punished for not having a christening certificate.. At times she could work up quite a temper. The next day she went down to the principal of the school. I don't know what she threatened him with but she was boiling mad. She was ready to take the stick to that teacher herself. That teacher never said another word to me. And about



a year after that he was fired because he persisted in those tricks with other students.

Most teachers used to have a thin bamboo pointer which they oiled to make them pliable. They would hit you on the hands with them as punishment for one thing or another. Although most teachers were very strict and pretty free with their sticks, there were few who were actually sadistic.

If you had finished your assigned work you were supposed to sit quietly, doing I don't know what. But I read novels and adventure stories in school under the table or folded them into my work books. One wasn't supposed to do that. I was once caught reading in school by Herr Ludke, our literature teacher. It was a fairly well-known novel called *Janus Masken* (Janus masks), which I didn't understand and didn't even really like much. I just read the main story line but it had hidden meaning. As I think back, it probably dealt with homosexuality and although I was already twelve then we were all pretty innocent. Anyway, Herr Ludke caught me reading it on the sly. 'You're reading something'. 'No Herr Ludke, I'm doing my assignment'. 'You're certainly reading something there and it's not your assignment. You can't put that over on me. Bring up your books'. He took me on his lap, as he always did when he was going to scold you. When he saw what I was reading his mouth dropped open and he pretty nearly fell out of his boots. 'What? What is this? Your mother will hear about this. This has got to stop'. Actually I didn't even think much about the book.

Herr Ludke gave me a letter to take to my mother. I had to have her sign it and return it to him. But I got Fritz to forge my mother's signature on the note. He looked over some of my mother's letters and practiced copying the handwriting and finally did a pretty good job of forging, I had to give him my allowance for the next month.

Sorting people out into different schools started very early in Germany. In your fourth year it was decided who went to *volkschule*, the ordinary eight grade school, who went to *mittelschule*, a more advanced school which went to grade ten, and those who went on to *Gymnasium*, which was the school which give you university entrance. Almost none, in fact none of the children I grew up with ever went to a Gymnasium. That took more money than ordinary people could afford. It didn't lead to a trade or anything useful for you anyway.

Even most people who went to a Gymnasium never got into university. That was only for the sons of professionals and the rich. Public school was more or less free, up to grade eight. All you paid for were the school books and there were no other expenses. But as soon as anybody entered into the Gymnasium, or even *mittelschule*, then the fees were more than most working people could afford. And of course, university was completely out of the question. In most instances you had to pay even to go to a vocational school for technical training.

Once you got out of the *volkschule* at the eighth grade you either went to work or you went to a vocational school. It was a pretty big sacrifice for many families to be able to send their kid to vocational school. Because that would be three or four years too, and all that time the kid would be earning nothing. In some cases you could get a job where you would learn a trade. Although they were often so encrusted with apprenticeship rules and low pay that many people were closed out of even that.

My mother didn't believe in higher schooling anyway. Fritz was so clever that the school officials offered to give him a scholarship so that he could go on at least to university entrance. That was unheard of. But my mother said, 'No. I can't pay the fees for all my children so nobody gets it.' Well, for myself that was okay. I didn't think much of school in any form at the time. But for Fritz it was a crying shame.

I only went to school until I was fourteen and finished *volkschule* - eight years. There was no possibility of going on and I wasn't interested anyway. Actually, the schools we went to didn't even encourage it. The main thing for us was to get a job and earn some money. Serve your term from eight until five and then enjoy your life as best you could. For me that meant going on hikes and trips as much as possible.

I drifted back to night school after I'd been working a few years. During the early Weimar years they were very cheap, almost free, and easily accessible, at least in the cities. There was a wide variety of lectures that were available in a big city and you could get a pretty good education outside the regular school system. You could take a serious subject and slowly work your way through. You could even become an engineer that way, although very few made it. People became accountants or chemist technicians and things like that. But I just took lectures and classes that sounded interesting. I took a course on classic philosophers, like Goethe, some lectures on astronomy, and

theatre and modern writing, although I guess it wouldn't be modern today. But that's all gone now. I couldn't remember any of it to save my soul.

## 2. Work, War, Revolution [1914-1919]

### *The Great War*

My father was a socialist from way back, from the last century. Sometimes he got into hot water because of that. He was often fired, although I don't know if that was because he was a socialist or not. As I remember, printers had a reputation for being a pretty independent bunch and many of them were always quitting or getting fired. Still, all that socialism had no relation to the way he treated us kids or my mother.

I'm not really sure what kind of socialist he was because as children we didn't talk to our parents any more about politics than about sex, and that was nil. I think he talked to Fritz more about it because he was the oldest and a boy. But I was a girl so I didn't count in that respect. Although there were plenty of women who were fiery socialists even then.

My father started out printing on his own while he was still working for a commercial firm. He made placards and posters for circuses or meetings or whatever. When he started all he used was a large earthen pipe filled with loam as a roller and a large table. The print and pictures he designed himself and cut the pieces out of linoleum. It was very primitive but it was surprising what he could turn out. He was often up half the night doing that. After a few years he got some equipment, piece by piece. First he bought a Boston press - it's a good sized machine. Then he bought cases and cases of different kinds of type. Everything was set by hand. It's hard to describe but I can still see that press in front of my eyes.

A few years later, when I was about twelve, my father quit his job and went into printing for himself. He got a lot of machines on credit. That's also when he stopped giving my mother any money. He also exploited us kids something awful. For instance, he once had a big job of collating and stapling and trimming. All of us children had to work on that as soon as we came from school, for hours into the night, almost a week. And we were supposed to get some spending money for that, But instead he bought one big chocolate bar, for all us four kids to divide up. That was our payment.

About two years before I left school my father forced Fritz to help him in the print shop. He pulled Fritz out of school when he

was fifteen and made him take up printing. Cheap labour in other words. Later on he corralled Kurt into working in the shop as an apprentice but that didn't last long. He forced me to work in that print shop too, when I was thirteen. Ten, twelve years later I became interested in that on my own but at the time I didn't want to do it at all. I was typesetting and trimming and in short doing everything around the shop that he didn't have time to do himself.

Every single penny he made or could borrow went into machinery, It finally became a commercial operation. There was a large electric-driven press, a letter press, a huge paper cutter which could cut thousands of sheets of paper at a time, collating equipment and folding machines and even some simple binding equipment.

I had to run the cutter. My father showed me how to operate it and then set me to it. I was always afraid of it because a single misstep and you could have cut your hand off. It was like a guillotine. The blade was electrically raised; you placed what you wanted to cut in a box adjustable to whatever size you wanted and then you pushed a button and that heavy yard-long blade came whizzing down so fast you hardly saw it. Nothing ever happened but I was still afraid of it. It was only in family shops and in stores that child labour still existed.

The First World War took us by surprise. After the Sarajevo assassination most people said, 'Some Austrian archduke, what had that got to do with us. That's just a private affair.' Most people didn't even believe there was going to be a war until the papers started to drum up the war fever and the mobilization started.

That was the summer of 1914 and my father had already recruited me to work in the printing shop since the previous year. Actually, I was doing the work of a printer's apprentice by the time I was thirteen. Unless I sneaked out I had to work in that lousy shop until late at night. Well, somebody had ordered a large number of posters showing Kaiser Wilhelm with some of his famous sayings, but slightly changed so that the whole meaning was totally different. They were sort of anti-war placards. One was a big poster of Kaiser Wilhelm pointing out into the horizon, overdressed in a military uniform and loaded down with medals. He had a sort of half-mad grin and glazed eyes, although it wasn't overdone. The poster was a parody of one of the Kaiser's clever sayings that the press was always trotting out. What he had said

was 'Unsere Zukunft liegt auf dem Wasser' (Our future lies on the seas). But my father's poster said, in super-flourished script, 'Unser Zukunft liegt im's Wasser' (Our future is going down the drain). The government and their supporters were so proud of the navy they had. It was going to bring colonies and trade, but ironically it was the navy that finished them off. Because it was the mutiny of the sailors at Kiel that started the revolution in 1918.

But my father only printed those posters once. Satirizing the government and the Kaiser was a pretty serious offence. When the war actually started he had already cut that out because to print up placards like that would have been considered to be treason and you certainly would have been carried off to prison for a good long stretch if the police caught you. He was scared that it would come out that he had printed those placards and we weren't supposed to breathe a word of it to anybody.

Actually, the Kaiser was never liked by most of the people we knew. Maybe he was like by some classes but not by any of the people we talked to. Berlin wasn't particularly known for its patriotism anyway. Most ordinary working stiffs we knew didn't go for that patriotic malarkey. Although it's true there were enough stupid characters who didn't have the salt on the bread but who spouted off about 'Their country'. 'Their country', my foot.

Some people were for the war, of course. In the beer parlours and in the universities and in the fancy offices there were probably all sorts of people waving the flag. But most of the people we knew were not. In fact they were horrified because they knew that they would be the ones to suffer, although nobody dreamed it would be as bloody as it turned out to be.

As soon as the war started the newspapers were pretty strictly controlled and censored. It was mainly all propaganda. Everything they reported were victories, advances, successes. At the time printed matter, especially newspapers, carried a lot of weight. People were skeptical, but still not skeptical enough when it came to official news. Many people felt - 'It's printed here in black and white, so there must be some truth in it'. But everybody realized what was what when the lists of dead and wounded started to pile up.

Fritz was drafted into the army in the first year of the war, when he was seventeen, and then sent to the front. He was at the front by the time he had his eighteenth birthday in some

marine infantry outfit. My father finally got his draft call in 1915. He was already forty-five years old and he had to go to war. All those many years he had scrounged and saved and sold his life and soul down the river just to get that print shop on its feet. The upshot was that he lost the whole shebang. He lost everything. My father was in Poland a long time and Fritz was in France. Fritz was wounded a couple of times, and he was in Flanders. The soldiers were slaughtered off there like cattle. Toward the end the government started to recruit almost anyone who could carry a rifle, from sixteen year old kids to old men of fifty. And some men were old at fifty. The army took them all if they could get them, all into the meat grinder.

### *First Jobs*

The war had been going on six or seven months, not quite a year, when I finished school. I was fourteen and my mother said, 'You've played around in school enough. Now you have to learn housekeeping and then get a job. If you want to go to school after that, that's your business. But you've had enough of this idling away,' So she apprenticed me out to the household of a government official. A middle class family you could say, but in those days such people were living high off the hog. I worked for next to nothing. It was pretty stupid because I was just cheap labour. I don't know what went through my mother's head to get me into that. After about four months I told my mother, 'I'm not going to work for that dame anymore. And if you make me I'm going to run away.' The next day I quit.

One way or another I was going to work in a factory. I thought, 'In a factory you do your job, there are lots of people around you can meet. You don't have to be subservient to anybody and you're with people like yourself.' And that was true. To me, factory work was never all that bad, at least not when you're young and healthy. Besides, if some job was too rotten you could quit and find another.

At the time the factories were looking for anybody to work, no questions asked. I thought, 'I don't care what sort of factory work it is, I'll take it. Unless its making munitions or guns, That I won't do.' Not that it made much difference because if you work in those big factory complexes in one way or another you're supporting the industry and the industry was in one way or another all geared to the war. And a lot of times I wound up

making parts without even knowing what they were. Besides, I was a little scared, pretty scared actually, of explosives. First of all there were a number of explosions in the munitions works. Although they were all hushed up, top secret, most people knew about them. Hundreds upon hundreds of girls had been killed. Even where that didn't happen many, many of the munitions workers got terrible illnesses from the gun powder. Many were walking skeletons with bloated skin. They looked like they were in the last stages of jaundice.

At first my mother said, 'No, you're not working in a factory. No daughter of mine does that.' That was still a carry over from the times when factory girls were looked down upon. Or maybe it was because she thought factory conditions would be too terrible. Actually I don't know what her reasoning was because by that time the situation had changed completely. The domestic work she was sending me out to do was more degrading than any factory. She said, 'Well, before I allow that you have to get your father's permission'.

By that time he had been drafted and was in a garrison somewhere. I wrote him and after about four weeks came his reply. In the process of becoming a soldier he had become patriotic. He wrote back to the effect, 'Oh, what a brave girl you are, doing your bit for the Fatherland. How proud I am of you', and so on and so forth. Even for me, a fifteen year old girl, it was terribly sentimental and corny. I thought, 'They must both be getting a little soft in the head. All I want is a job.' Anyway, I took a factory job.

The first place I worked in was pretty overwhelming, a big machine shop in Spandau where they turned out all conceivable sorts of metal parts. Huge presses, whirring machines everywhere, hundreds of people in a single hall, thousands in one factory. There was still a lot of manual work in those days. Mainly girls and women worked there doing the jobs that strong men did before. It often took two girls to cart around things which one man could have handled, maybe. Still, everything got done. Considering the fact that we were all pretty green, it got done pretty well too. I think that experience opened up the eyes of lots of women, to what they could do if they got the chance. Of course, myself, just growing up in that period, I took it for granted.

After a while I found a better paying job in Siemens Stadt, soldering the wires in telephones. The Siemens company was like



a whole industrial economy on its own. They had not just factories but whole factory complexes that made everything from toys to huge complicated machines. But mainly they produced different electrical implements.

The longest job I had during that period was about seven or eight months at a corner druggist. I was a clerk and apprentice prescriptionist. That was a very interesting job and I was thinking of staying on a number of years to get a sort of diploma. Although I often got itchy feet and wanted to get away for a week or two. After a few months the druggist who owned the place had me grinding up and weighing the compounds that went into some of the prescriptions - so many grains of this, so many grains of that, and so much filler. I learned things very quickly then, not like today.

There were almost no ready-made drugs and capsules. Everything was prepared and mixed at the druggist's. There were some patent medicines, some just a swindle but others were pretty potent with alcohol and morphine in them. As it turned out the druggist was a morphine addict. I never had the slightest inkling. So maybe there were all sorts of things like that going on which I was just too dumb to notice.

One morning I came to work and nobody was there. I asked the people next door if they knew where Mr. Mueller was. It turned out that he had taken an overdose of morphine that night, either on purpose or by accident, and had died. He was a nice man too. Another guy bought the store and he started to make passes at me and the other girl who worked there. We, in turn, started to sing insulting songs about him so he could hear us. Not long after that he lured the other girl up to his room above the store and tried to seduce her. She broke loose and came downstairs crying and told me what had happened. Then and there we both quit and I returned to factory work.

My best friend at that time was Sophie Kochanek. Over the years we were the closest of friends, but especially when we were two young girls working in the factories. Although we had our occasional fallings out, she is one of the few people who I really miss from my youth. Sophie and her family lived near us in Spandau and we went to the same school. But she was three years older than me and so while we were in school the age difference was too great. I think she had a bit of a crush on Fritz at the time. Fritz's girlfriend, later his first wife, was a friend of

Sophie's too. Both of their families had come from Poland when they were girls.<sup>10</sup>

The Kohaneks moved to Berlin from Poland when Sophie was about eight or nine. There were her parents, two brothers and herself. While her father was still alive none of the family was allowed to speak German at home. They had to speak Polish. But when Sophie learned German she was so exact and perfect that I often thought to myself, 'If she only would make one little mistake in grammar or pronunciation'. But no, her German was absolutely flawless, she didn't even use the Berlin dialect.

Sophie had just gotten over a love affair, so-called, with one of the Schreiber boys. One of six brothers who I'd known since I was a kid and who were like cousins to me. Sophie suffered the pains of the world because he didn't fall in love with her. That happened so often that it was almost like a script. If it seemed to work she became disinterested; if not she'd first be elated and then terribly depressed. Sometimes she might talk about suicide; that was in vogue then. Usually it was obviously only talk, but occasionally I was worried. That whole cycle must have happened at least a dozen times in the years we palled around together. Finally, each time, she would snap out of it completely, for no apparent reason, and was all right again.

Both Sophie and I were still living at home and working in factories. I'd been at that for about a year and Sophie somewhat longer. At the moment I was out of a job. Things weren't too bad yet, but food was pretty scarce and we wanted to try something outside the city. One day in the early spring of 1916 we decided 'Let's go out and find some work in the country, some place where we can at least fill our stomachs. It doesn't even matter if we get paid or not, just so we get enough to eat.' The papers were full of help wanted ads and we wrote one place which was supposed to be a model farm and school for young women, they replied, saying that they paid top wages - which they didn't - and that we would be treated like daughters of their house, which unfortunately was true, So we packed up and went - went from the frying pan into the fire.

The place was about a hundred miles northwest of Berlin. When we got there we found it wasn't really a farm at all but a home - and I use the word loosely - for wayward girls from rich families. The owners gave us a tiny room in a shed attached to the main house. There were only a few sticks of furniture, with a straw mattress on the floor for a bed. Sophie and I made up a long song

parodying the room they gave us and about how they treated daughters of their house. We sang that during the day so the owners could hear us. But it didn't faze them at all.

A man and his wife ran the place. He was a retired major, a real faker, with big talk and fancy manners when it suited him. The girls were of all ages, from eleven or twelve to older than us. Some had rebelled against their parents or had had a love affair with some man, or had run away from home. They were shipped off to this place as a sort of punishment or to get them out of the way. The girls had to work pretty hard, planting and hoeing a large kitchen garden and taking care of the livestock. Working the farm in other words. They worked most of the day and in the evenings when they were ready for bed, after a hard day's work, they got what was supposed to be their schooling from the major's wife. Sometimes Sophie and I snuck out letters from those girls to their boyfriends. But all in all they were a pretty snooty bunch too.

It was some experience. The owners downright miserly when it came to food for their help and they expected plenty of work from us too. Those girls, inmates you might say, didn't get much more to eat than we did. I know because I used to cook for them. The major and his wife had their own kitchen where they cooked for themselves. Every day we saw platters of meat and other delicious food in front of the master of the house. They didn't trust us to cook their own food. and they were quite right; I would have eaten half of it myself and burned the other half just out of spite.

We cooked and cleaned and carried water and even had to gather firewood from the forest and chop it up. It was also my job to feed the pigs. Each day I'd boil up cull potatoes and turnips in two huge cauldrons. Pig food. They were better fed than us. Every day, if I had the chance, I'd steal some of the pig food and that made up a good deal of what Sophie and I ate. One day a boiling kettle spilled and scalded my entire right arm. I yelled and screamed and the major came running. He probably thought one of this pigs was hurt, When he saw it was just me he was relieved. 'Oh, that's too bad. You have to be more careful,' he said. Those characters were always stoics until it came to themselves.

The next day my arm was swollen to twice its normal size and I told them I wanted to go to a doctor and asked him to take me to town, 'No, my girl, you'll be alright. I can't leave here. Nope,

nothing doing.' So I set out on my own, walking ten miles to the next town.

I was in the hospital overnight where they slapped a lot of Vaseline on me and bandaged up my arm and took up a collection for train fare back. When I got back to the farm the owner bawled me out for missing a day's work and leaving without permission. That was the last straw. 'Listen Herr Major', I said to him in the most insulting tone I could muster, 'You give me my papers and my money because I'm quitting today. And so is Sophie. You can see if anybody else will do this work for you. We've had enough,' He wasn't used to that sort of tone but he still said, 'No, you can't go till I have somebody else.' And he didn't give us our money or our papers. And worst of all he kept our ration cards. We were so damn green and dumb and far away from home that we didn't know what to do. With no money, no papers and no ration cards you couldn't do anything. But after three days Sophie and I just left with the clothes on our backs and a small rucksack.

We walked and hitchhiked to Lubeck. We didn't want to go home, back to Berlin, because we had boasted to our families and all our friends of the wonderful place we had found in the country and we didn't want to be laughed at. The first five days we didn't have anything to eat at all, just some sticky candy floss that wasn't rationed for some reason. Then we talked a small cafe owner into giving us a room and the occasional meal on the strength of the money and ration coupons we were expecting. He wasn't even that concerned about the money, it was the ration coupons which counted.

Finally the police got our back pay and ration cards from that major, who cheated us in the process. The next day we blew most of our pay and a whole week's food rations and went on a picnic by the Baltic Sea. That was the first time either Sophie or I had seen the ocean. We ate up that whole week's ration in the same day; there was just enough left over for a small lunch the next day.

'Well', I thought, 'this isn't working out so well. I'd better go home'. So I telegraphed my mother and she sent the money for train fare. I went home and took my medicine; everybody laughed. But I lied about our experiences. I didn't tell them about how we were exploited, I just said we got tired of living in the country.

But Sophie said, 'Not me. I'm going to stick it out, I'm not going back home.' She managed to find another job on a large farm

near Lubeck. There were a lot of Russian prisoners of war employed there, along with whatever help the owners could hire from the surrounding area, mostly women and children. I said, 'You must be crazy getting back into a situation like we just escaped from.' But it turned out to be a better place and she stayed for almost a year. She had an affair with one of the Russian soldiers. They had to be in their quarters at night and had to work during the day but otherwise they had a lot of leeway. This Russian guy was talking about marrying Sophie but it turned out he had a wife and family back in Russia. They had a falling out and then Sophie came back to Berlin. But I'm getting ahead of myself - I returned to Berlin and Sophie stayed on that farm and I didn't see her for about a year or so.

### *Hunger*

Before the war we often had pretty sparse meals, but we never went hungry. People filled up on potatoes and bread; they were cheap and plentiful. A big bowl of potatoes and maybe a little fragment of herring or meat with a lot of sauce to give the potatoes flavor. At least once a week we had a small slice of meat with plenty of gravy and potatoes. There would usually be sausage of some sort once a week, probably on Sundays.

Once or twice a week the butcher store down the street would make sausages on the premises. They would hang a kitchen chair in front of their store with a white apron on it. That was the sign that fresh sausages were available. We'd go down with milk pails and buy one kilo of sausages and two liters of sausage broth which my mother made into a gravy. Teas and coffee were luxuries, spices weren't used. Everybody loved delicatessen food but that was only for special occasions, like a birthday or holiday or if we got some extra pay. We ate a lot of vegetable stews in season and plenty of pea and bean soups. They took the place of meat. In peacetime other foods were available which, in moderation, we could afford - sugar, milk and margarine. We were all healthy. But there were some families worse off than us, some kids never had a chance, they were stunted by malnutrition by the time they were in school. That was even before the war.

In a big city like Berlin, a city of almost four million at that time, everything became short soon after the war started. The biggest pinch was in bulk food, especially potatoes. Books and theatre tickets and train rides and public services in general

were very cheap and abundant. Even some manufactured items were available. Apart from a few clothes we never bought much anyway so we didn't miss many items. In those days once a family got together its stock of furniture and pots and lamps and those sorts of things they were expected to last pretty much a lifetime. Most of the things which you buy today and have to replace every few years weren't even around.

But food became scarce immediately, even if you weren't used to much to begin with. Of course, if one had money there was food available on the black market. Professional people and families of high-ups in business and in the government probably always got enough. But no ordinary person could afford black market prices. Petty profiteers probably even lived better than ever before. *Scheiber*\* never saw a hungry day during that whole time. But for the mass of the people, hunger started after the first year of the war, certainly by 1916.

At the same time money was more plentiful than ever, because the factories were just crying for workers. But you couldn't buy what you really needed. Food. The rations you got were just not enough. Much of the time you couldn't even get what your rations entitled you to and had to take some substitutes that really didn't have much food value. If you had good bread and margarine you were lucky. And the rations got lower and lower.<sup>11</sup>

\*Scheiber - literally 'pushers' but meaning an assortment of quasi-legal and illegal speculators and back marketeers.

Not only were the rations quite small but unless you were constantly running around and standing in line you didn't even get what your ration allowed. For three years we were almost constantly hungry. The only times we had full stomachs were those times I happened to come home with a load of contraband food. Then we would have a decent meal before going on our rationing again.

For instance, my mother got a half pound of soup beef, that was for seven persons for three or four days. Gristle, skin and bone. First she boiled it for a broth, as a soup stock, and then she added the potatoes and vegetables and anything she had to make a watery stew. Everything was overcooked but that was the way people seemed to like it. Then she ladled the meat out and used half of it, one quarter of a pound mind you, to give each of us one little cube of meat in our bowl of soup. The next day she did the same thing with the other half. Each family was also

entitled to a pound of bones each week, if you could get it. You'd crack the bones open with an axe and boil the marrow out of them. Talk about stone soup.

For the first year there was usually enough nourishing dark rye bread. But somehow it never filled you up, even if you had three double slices, a little while later you were hungry again. There were almost no fats or vegetable oils. Either there just wasn't any or it went into munitions. There was only the tiniest amount of margarine and often not even that. During the last two years there were government regulations about what additives had to go into bread. They started dumping more and more oak sawdust into the bread so that it hardly had any value any more. Everything was *Ersatz* (substitute) - ersatz coffee, ersatz flour, ersatz jam, ersatz everything. Just valueless junk. Turnips became the ingredients for almost every kind of food stuff - turnip jam, turnip meat filler, turnip bread. There was one kids' song that appeared on the streets which went,

Turnip marmalade, turnip marmalade

Is the foundation of the state.

Everybody took that song up.

We shared everything equally in the family, right down to the last bean. Everything was divided up into exactly equal portions. The food cabinet was kept locked with all the food in the house in it. That was also the case before the war. My mother had the only key. Strange as it seems that was the way it was in most homes. At one point Kurt somehow managed to sneak food out of the cabinet. Finally my mother caught him. She didn't beat him she just shamed him in front of us. He had to ask our forgiveness for taking food out of our mouths. That was the worst thing she could do, it would have been much better to hit him.

By 1917 it was either get out and rustle something up on the sly or starve, because you literally would have starved on the rations. Many people just wasted away and died from some minor illness. All sorts of diseases reappeared or became rampant, like tuberculosis, and many, many children had rickets. Erna's best friend and her whole family died of T.B. My father's parents and my aunt died of influenza, as did my grandmother later on. Kids got sick and died all over the neighbourhood. That Werner grew up to be so small and stunted was due to that malnutrition, I'm sure. It was just indescribable. People were just too weak to resist those diseases. Tuberculosis carried off more people in

our neighbourhood than anything else, except the influenza epidemic in 1918.

Hadel, Fritz' girlfriend, started me off going out into the country to get food. Somehow Hadel's mother managed to get coal oil, which was very scarce among farmers, and was able to trade it for a little food. But I only went with her two or three times because they already had a number of farmers they used to visit and I didn't have what they wanted to trade. Besides, Hadel's mother didn't like the idea of me going along. She probably thought, 'Too many cooks spoil the chance of any broth'.

Thousands of people went out *hamstering*. That's what we called going out to trade for contraband food. We went out with rucksacks and burlap bags and all kinds of contrivances. You took the train out into the farming country, two, three, four hours distance from Berlin. Then you walked for miles and miles along country roads, because the area near the railway was pretty picked over and more strictly controlled by the police. At first, in 1916, we just went to the area right around Berlin. But later we had to go further and further afield.

Half of Berlin seemed to be on the march for any food they could get. The farmers were getting pretty wary and pretty hostile to people coming into the countryside. Some of those farmers were real swine. In fact, to say that is an insult to pigs. You had to bring sugar or cloth which we either needed ourselves or luxury goods which we couldn't afford without selling what few possessions we owned. They would take whatever the traffic would bear and would try to cheat you in the bargain. Some farmers would give you less than you'd agreed upon or they'd give you mouldy potatoes and vegetables. I heard of quite a few cases where farmers just took the trade goods and then threw the people out

You had to be pretty brazen and ready to stand up for yourself. I always carried a kitchen knife, a butcher knife, with me, not that it would have done much good. I was a young girl after all and I had all kinds of trouble. They tried to lift your dress or touch your breasts. For a few pounds of potatoes they thought they could climb on you. I had all kinds of narrow escapes. Once this guy led me into the basement where he said he had potatoes. Then he tried to corner me and throw me down. I never told my mother about that because she wouldn't have let me go again, and we needed the food.



There were still seven of us at home to supply. I usually went alone. Once I went with Werner, my youngest brother, but it was just too much for him. We had gotten a couple of bags full of potatoes and were on the way back to the train station. The highways and the railway stations were always patrolled by police. They confiscated everything that you'd been able to get if they caught you. And they used to catch plenty. A lot of the stuff they confiscated they took for themselves or even sold on the black market. At least that's what we thought.

The one time I went out with Werner somebody told us that there was a checkpoint which had just been set up along the road we were travelling. You passed that information along when you could. We decided to take a detour through the woods to another station when we saw a mounted patrol searching for hamsterers. Werner and I half ran and half crawled through the fields, where we hid for the night. I was almost seventeen but Werner was only twelve. It was just too much for him, lugging packs, unfed, on the run for a couple of days. He looked like death warmed over when we finally got home and I never took him again.

The trains were pretty slow and people would jump on after they left the station. The whole side of the train might be covered with hamsterers hanging on the running boards. I always tried to ride in the toilet because that was safest. If there was a police check you just didn't open the door no matter how much they knocked. They had too much to do without bothering with one person in the toilet. If the train was stopped for a check you would see people scrambling off with bags and disappearing into the countryside. There were all sorts of ingenious ways to hide food. Of course you couldn't hide a sack of potatoes or, if they searched you, you couldn't hide anything.

A couple of times I lost to the police all the food I had managed to get, I wasn't fast enough. After that I said, 'Nobody takes anything away from me again, but nobody.' I would run if they stopped me and fight them if they tried to take the food I had gathered.

One time after that I had been able to get two bags full of potatoes. That was a really good haul. I was on the way to the train tracks, going down a country road when the police came along. With my full load of potatoes I ran into the nearby fields and jumped into a drainage ditch. But I sprained my ankle in the process. I lay there that afternoon and through the night because for some reason there were constant patrols down that

road. Early the next morning I was able to make my way to the train. It was very painful but I got through with my food, I brought my potatoes home.

The only difficulty with police was out on the highways and on the trains. Once you got into Berlin nobody stopped you. Probably the city government knew that without that hamstering half the city would starve and they somehow got the police to lay off. It was in those little stinky one-horse towns that you had all the trouble.

All that hamstering was in addition to the regular factory work I did during the week. Much of the times I was exhausted. One times I came back home sick and especially exhausted and my mother said, 'That's the finish. No more hamstering trips for you, no matter what.' But a few weeks later I was out again.

Towards the end of the war, during the last year, there was starvation pure and simple among the mass of the people in the cities. People didn't have enough to eat to keep them going. Everybody was constantly ill, many people keeled over and died at the slightest thing. Most people just looked starved out. We became even more bold in desperation.

Not too far from the outskirts of the city there were huge *mieten* (storage barrows) filled with produce - potatoes, onions, turnips, carrots. They were like huge root cellars. I gave up hamstering, which became less and less possible anyway, and started to break into those storage dumps. Kurt, my other brother, was about fourteen at the time and came along with me.

These *mieten* were about fifteen feet wide, four or five feet high and maybe twenty or thirty feet long. How deep they were I don't know because we never got down very far. The produce was just covered over with a few feet of sand and earth. We could dig through the walls, fill up our sacks with whatever was in the dump, and then shovel back the sand and earth so nobody would see that there had been any tampering, unless they looked closely. We also broke into railway cars that we thought might be carrying food, though we didn't do that too often because trains weren't left unguarded much.

The *mieten* were off the highways and we had been after them for a number of months; maybe we broke into them six or seven times all told. Of course we only went at night. There often were army trucks with search lights and machine guns patrolling those storage areas. They would drive around shining their lights over the whole scene. But it was a pretty big area and there

were barrows all over the place. The last time we went one of those armored trucks spotted something in our vicinity as we were preparing to break in. Luckily we were at a spot you couldn't drive to. But the truck started shooting and shining its search light around. We had heard shots before but we thought, 'Who knows if they're shooting in the air to scare thieves away?' Some soldiers wouldn't have aimed to hit anybody, but some of them would have. This time we actually heard the bullets landing near us. We ducked behind the nearest hillock and crept away as quickly as possible and never went back.

A few months later the war was over, although food was almost as scarce as before till the next summer. But hundreds and thousands of people, millions, had experiences like that. In fact we were fairly lucky. None of us were killed, and that was a time when whole families died out, when whole regions were destroyed and a whole generation was shot to pieces.

### *Revolution*

In the last years there was more and more opposition to the war. But you still had to be careful. Because if you spoke out and somebody informed on you that could be considered treason. Although if there had been more people speaking out regardless, that might have been the spark that was needed. Who knows?

There were slogans chalked on the walls saying 'Down with the Kaiser; Down with hunger and the war.' Others called for the revolution. Some people spoke out against the war openly and got away with it. They were usually those who had some position of importance already. Ordinary people who pasted up placards were occasionally caught and disappeared into prison. Although there was none of the shooting and executions, as under Hitler. For ordinary people, the Kaiser regime was probably no better or no worse than the regimes of France or England at that time.

All the news was censored of course, and the newspapers only printed what was allowed. If there were underground newspapers, I never saw any. We heard about the Russian revolution of course and hoped that it would bring peace. But it didn't. There were rumors about mutinies in the German navy and army in 1917 too, which turned out to be true. But they didn't succeed at first. By 1917 there was a lot of talk about strikes, especially in the heavy machine industries where I was working. They did start, a few big ones in 1917 and a real general strike that must have

stopped most of the factories in Berlin during the winter of 1917-1918.<sup>12</sup>

As a young girl I and my pals all felt pretty helpless. But most of us were willing to support just about anything to stop that insane war. Although we didn't want to get killed in the process. So during the first days of that big strike, in January or February of 1918 I think it was, when there were big street demonstrations and marches, we went along. In fact the factory I was working in was closed down on the second day of the strike.

I don't think the official unions organized that because there was all sorts of talk the day before that we should walk out and join the strike, but nothing officially decided. The next day, after we were working for about two or three hours, people began to say, 'Alright, now we're going to go out. Now's the time.' But still no real decision by anybody, or anybody in charge of a strike as far as I could see. But then all of a sudden the power went out and all the machines stopped running. Some people were yelling, 'Strike. Strike. Out in the street. Down with the hunger. Down with the war. Let's join our brothers.' That's all it took and in the course of ten minutes almost everyone of the thousands of us who worked there were on the way out. Only the superintendents and a few men and women remained and of course they couldn't do anything alone. Even many of the foremen joined in. I guess the thing was organized, but you'd never know it.

After milling around outside for about an hour wondering what was coming next, it was decided to march down the main street that led past a number of other factories. We heard that the people at the Leune Werke, a great big industrial complex not too far from Berlin, had also gone on strike that morning and were just then in the process of marching into Berlin. So we set off. When we came to some of the other factories, or any place where people were working, everyone would yell things like, 'Down with the war. Stop the hunger. Strike. Come, come out, come out brothers.' There were a few red flags which had been improvised and people were waving all sorts of coloured handkerchiefs and scarves and hats. Off and on we sang 'Bruder Zu Sonne Zu Freiheit'<sup>13</sup> and similar songs. Actually, in many of those factories, the people either were already out or came out when we called to them. Of course some didn't. It was a pretty big march by the time we got to where we were going. Tens of thousands of us, and nobody tried to stop us.

There was supposed to be a mass demonstration at the end of the march but nothing was very clear. So by the end of the day when nothing happened most of us just went home to see what came next. Of course we stayed on strike. I wasn't very politically inclined but everyone could see then, if they hadn't before, that something had to be done to bring that insane war to an end. If a general strike could do it, fine. If we could kick out the government, so much the better.

The next couple of days it seemed that hour by hour more and more people came out on strike. Even some who worked in little shops. There were some really massive demonstrations against the war - in Spandau, in the government quarter in Berlin, all over. I don't know how many hundreds of thousands of people there were at some of those meetings but it was like a sea of people at one I went to. I've never seen so many people pressed together in one place before or since. That was in full swing for about three or four days. Then the army and police stepped in, in force.

I was at a huge demonstration in Berlin, near Alexander Platz. Here we were marching along and up front we heard some commotion. We never found out what happened. All of a sudden, without any warning, the police came on horses; riding into the crowd, swinging their clubs and swords. Some had their pistols out, riding down the road and down the sidewalks and everywhere. It was bloody murder. One girl I was with, Elli Schneider, jumped up and tried to drag one of the police off his horse. For a few seconds she hung there on the side of the horse, with the horse prancing with a sort of fancy high step, until she got knocked down. We managed to pick her up and pull her away fast. She was a bit shook up but not really hurt, which was some luck. Then the police started to shoot and we beat it as fast as we could. We could see some people had been hit, either shot or clubbed, and were lying in the street. The rest of us were racing around and the police were firing away. The next day the army and police started arresting hundreds, thousands of people and sending them either to jail or to the front. The factories were under martial law, and in a sense the whole country, at least Berlin, was under martial law from then until the end of the war.

'Martial law or not,' I thought, 'This insanity surely can't go on any longer.' But it did. The army even increased the draft and made bigger attacks on the west. The men and boys they sent

were just slaughtered off. About those who started the war and those who kept it going I felt, 'Damn them, Damn them, Damn them anyway!' There were clandestine anti-war meetings, groups that became pretty bold. But I didn't belong to any personally. I and my friends were desperate but we also felt pretty helpless. We all thought that there would have to be peace soon. But the war had been going on so long that you believed anything was possible. When the end of the war finally came in November it took us by surprise.

During the summer of 1918 I got a job as a teller in the Spandau Savings Bank. I can't remember now why I took it, because I didn't like the work and it didn't pay very well. The girls who worked there were all right but it was a rotten place to work. It was within easy walking distance of where I and my family lived so I guess that was a consideration. By that time my help was pretty important in keeping our heads above water. I worked in that bank until the Revolution broke out in November.

It started with the sailors in the North Sea. Within a few days they had all mutinied and within a few more days there were mutinies and takeovers of towns all over Germany. During the first days we didn't know anything about it but then the news came through. But we still didn't know to what extent they were rumors or true. That was during the first week of November 1918.

Fritz had just come home on a wounded furlough and was in Berlin when the Revolution started. He had on a military decoration. Soldiers had to wear whatever decorations they had, when on leave, by military order. That was supposed to keep the civilian morale up. What morale, when they posted the names of thousands of dead each day on the post office? Well, we were on the elevated subway just coming home from downtown Berlin. It was fairly late at night. All of a sudden the train stopped and in came a bunch of soldiers and sailors. They must have actually come from Keil or Hamburg. When they got to Fritz they tore that decoration off and called him a parade ground soldier. He was almost going to get into a fight with them, although he was ready for the revolution himself. But then they yelled, 'Revolution, the Revolution has begun.'

We went down to the center of the city again and there were people on the streets everywhere although it was late at night by that time. There was shooting going on, but nobody seemed to know between whom. Almost immediately, a general strike

developed in the city. The trains stopped almost spontaneously, workers came out of many of the factories, masses of people milling around the streets everywhere - with shooting still going on.

Actually, at that point we didn't know if it was a real revolution or just another general strike, whether Berlin was alone or not, or what the army was doing. All I know is that we were glad that the war had to finally end. But we were worried that the government might bring in the army and that there would be civil war. There wasn't any dancing in the street. The first feelings we had were of relief that it was over, but of sadness too for all those who died. What stands out in my mind about those first days in November was relief.

After the actual armistice (November 11, 1918) our mood began to pick up. We didn't know what to expect, but we had high hopes. The war was over and that was enough in itself. The Kaiser was gone and the Social-Democrats were in power - or so we thought. When I went back to the Spandau bank a couple of days later all the girls were singing and laughing. The supervisor was mad but nobody listened to him.

Many people felt that somebody should hack (Kaiser) Wilhelm's head off, like they did in the French revolution. But that was sort of childish, even if he deserved it. That didn't get to the root of the trouble. As powerful as he was, the Kaiser was just one cog in the whole machine anyway. The whole bloody raft of so-called statesmen and rulers and generals and big capitalists were all involved. The German ones, the British ones, the French ones, all of them. If they all could have been tossed out it might have been okay. But just overthrowing the Kaiser made little difference. That first revolution did end the war and that was something. The mutinies should have started long before because that would have saved hundreds of thousands of lives. But as it happened, most of the generals and other big cheeses were still left around. Like Hindenburg. They went through the years of revolution and then popped up again later to help Hitler. And in the other countries, the war makers even became popular heroes, after killing millions of people. Of course, you couldn't tell that to most people here in Canada, either forty years ago or today.

Actually, the first revolution was pretty bloodless. The real shooting and killing, and in a sense the real revolution only started later, in December. That went on and off for the next

year in Berlin, and you could say for a couple of years if you consider all of Germany. So much was going on; I'm not even sure of the sequence of all that happened in those months. A whole series of local revolutions in Bavaria and in Thuringia and the Ruhr - almost everywhere. Including Berlin of course. Shooting back and forth and then the army would come in. Hundreds, thousands killed. After that there were years of street battles and murders and beatings.<sup>14</sup>

It started in December that year (1918), just before Christmas. The revolutionary sailors in Berlin tried to take over the government but failed. From then on there was more street fighting each day. You'd see marching groups of soldiers and sailors and civilians, all with arms, all over the place. Finally, it came to a real showdown just after New Year.

Dumb as it sounds, I still went to work at the Savings Bank. It was in the Spandau City Hall. For some reason we were working on the night shift, which was unusual. All of a sudden the bank and the whole block of buildings were occupied by army troops. We all had to stay because shooting broke out all around. Heavy fighting. There was sniping from rooftops, battles in the streets, especially around the railway yards which were nearby. There were pitched battles around that zone for two nights and a day. You would think it would be over and then it would break out again. At one point, there was shooting and artillery fire on all four sides of the City Hall. The revolutionary forces had dug trenches on the other side of a large field in front of the City Hall. They also held a part of the railway yards and were trying to bring in supporters from outside. The army troops held the City Hall and part of the city. They were also shelling from Ruhleben army base. The main fighting, when I was there, focussed around the post office which was right across the way from us. Bullets were flying every which way. We girls hid behind the vaults. That was pretty safe because nobody was using bombs. Only one employee in the bank was killed and a few were wounded. Outside, on the streets, there were many dead. We didn't find out much about what was going on until after we got out. It was pretty terrible. Many people were murdered by the army and the Frei Korps in the three or four days that the fighting went on.<sup>15</sup> The battles went on in parts of Berlin for a few more days.

During that whole period I rarely saw Fritz and I wondered if he was one of the people spraying around machine gun fire. At first



he was with a revolutionary sailors' outfit and then with the Spartacus group.

Now in that fighting, in the Revolution, it might seem like everybody would know what was what. But I didn't and most people didn't. It wasn't so much that you didn't know anything, it was more that you didn't know what to believe. It wasn't so neat and tidy as history books, or writers who weren't there and are writing long after, paint the picture. What happened in Spandau didn't happen in Charlottenburg. What happened to Ella didn't happen to Mr. Schmidt, and vice versa. There was just a tremendous amount of confusion. There were all sorts of groups. There was probably a half dozen different groups in arms in Berlin, for and against the Revolution. All sorts of deals between them. Each side making propaganda that changed from week to week.

The really heavy fighting didn't go on for so long anyway. But it went on, on a smaller scale, all winter. And then in the spring of 1919 there was another big battle in Berlin; for almost a week there was shelling and bombing and shooting going on all over the city, everywhere. It was even worse than in January. Who knows how many tens of thousands were killed, because a lot of executions were done on the quiet.

I had quit working at the Savings Bank and was living with Sophie at that time. With the bravery and foolhardiness of youth we went everywhere. Shooting or no shooting, curfew or no curfew. One night we were going to a friend's and on the way we were caught in the street between a cross fire. We didn't even know who was shooting at whom. We ducked behind a news stand on the corner, hiding behind a paper thin wooden partition, as if that would protect us, afraid to move a step either way. Then we made a run down the street trying to get into one of the tenements but all the doors were locked and nobody would open them. Finally, we reached an open sort of foyer which was pretty well protected from the street. We stayed there for a couple of hours until the shooting died down and then beat it back home.

### 3. Birds of Passage (1919 - 1924)

#### *The Dirty Twenties*

For almost one year, during 1919 and 1920, Sophie and I were unemployed, we couldn't get a job anywhere. We shared a room together in the old part of Spandau. We used what money we had saved to pay the rent, it wasn't very much. I got a volunteer job in a soup kitchen. Everybody who ate there was on a kind of relief; mainly technical school students and some unemployed apprentices and young unemployed workers in general.

The relief was provided by the Internationale Arbeiter Hilfe (International Worker Relief), a socialist organization that was all over Europe at that time. Each country and each region in that country had their own local sections. Most unions and a lot of individual people contributed to it. It wasn't connected with the government. The soup kitchen I worked in provided one meal a day, usually a very thick stew. A hall with trestles and benches was attached to the kitchen for those who wanted to eat there but most people took their portions home in milk cans. You got maybe a liter and a half of stew, and what with the bread they gave out, there was usually enough for two meals. That's what Sophie and I ate for seven or eight months. It was a rather monotonous diet but nutritious and filling. In fact, I was eating better there than I ever had before. My job was to help the cook and clean up. Sometimes there was stew left at the end of the day and then we could take some home. Sometimes we brought back food for our families.

But it didn't take too many months before Sophie and I ran out of rent money, so we had to return to our families. For a while we continued to work at that soup kitchen but after a few months the municipality cut out the streetcar passes so I couldn't afford to go down there anymore. That was the one time I was at loose ends during those years.

When my father came back from the war the family was still living in Spandau - my mother, Kurt and Werner, Erna and then my father. Fritz was on his own. My grandmother had died during the influenza epidemic of 1918. My father had gotten meaner and more eccentric during his years in the war. He had developed a taste for cat meat, that's what they picked up from the front. He caught cats in the backyard at night; skinned them, fried

them and ate them. I would never forgive him for that, never as long as I live. I never said a word because it wouldn't have done any good anyhow. But I hated him from that time on.

My father tried to get back into the printing business with rented equipment, but without much luck. He attempted to make a go of it by corralling my two younger brothers as apprentices. But it was impossible to stand his cheapness and bad temper. Erna already had a job as a secretary and she couldn't be roped into helping him anyway. Neither Fritz nor I were living at home at that period although I used to visit every few days.

After less than a year, Werner, my youngest brother, took off. He had had enough. He took what little money he could lay his hands on, sold his few possessions, and beat it. That must have been in the winter of 1920. Werner was about sixteen then and he wanted to go to Hamburg, get forged papers and a passport and emigrate to America. But he got cheated out of his money and that was the last we saw of him for about four years.

During the years after the war there were a series of mass murders around Germany. A lot of mad men were cropping up. One day, about a year after Werner left, the police came around with a hat and some papers which belonged to him. They had been found on one of the victims of a mass murderer in Hanover. There were many bodies in a single grave, so mutilated and decomposed that they couldn't be identified. We were sure that Werner had been killed. In fact, when Kurt's first son was born, we named him in memory of Werner. But a couple of years later, Werner turned up again. He'd just been working and bumming around the country.

Not too long after Werner left, Kurt also decided to fly the coop. He got jobs in heavy construction as an unskilled laborer. It was very hard work for him because he was never a big man or ever really strong. But he kept at that work until he was in his thirties. Sometimes he was in Berlin, often he wasn't. We didn't see too much of him either until after he was married and settled down with his wife in Berlin, still working as a construction worker.

Fritz worked in factories and at odd jobs, never very long at any one thing. He always hated printing, but he was the only one who actually finished his apprenticeship. He only worked at it when there was absolutely nothing else available. He went through so much hardship all his adult life.

He was always a communist - from the time the November revolution broke out in 1918. And he remained a communist to his last day, through thick and thin. Mainly through thin. From that time on he was hounded by one group or another - by the local police, by the Noske government, by the Black Reichswehr, by the Nazis before they gained power and after they gained power. Even when Ebert and Noske came to power, came to the throne you might say, the Social Democrats were still fire and sword after the communists. Even though they came to power through the revolution.<sup>16</sup> Well, that was mainly true of the leaders. If it hadn't been for their stupidity - most ordinary guys wouldn't and didn't split hairs between different brands of socialism.

There were so many grouplets who made their own local alliances and secret deals with mayors and police chiefs and local commanders and union leaders and who knows who else. Each interpreting the law and meting out justice in their own way. It was impossible to keep track of it all. In the histories it all seems very neat and clear. Well, it certainly wasn't.

For instance, later I read about an army revolt in Berlin called the Kapp putsch.<sup>17</sup> It was described as a single clear cut incident and when one reads about it it seems very straight forward. In reality, for us and all the people around us, the situation was so confused and there were so many local putsches, so many incidents of various groups fighting each other that we didn't even separate that particular incident from the rest of them. In fact, I don't even remember the name Kapp, except for having read it. But it's hard to know. What histories of Germany I've read that deal with my own times are very different to what we lived and knew and felt. Maybe what writers talk about is what the leaders knew and felt, but not us. Often that history is just baloney. A lot of it is just plain made up as far as I can see.

The communists never came to power, but they were very strong in parts of Berlin and in some of the other big industrial centers, where they did have some power for a short time. Around Halle, where Ali came from, and in Thuringen there was an underground civil war that went on for a long time. Like in Ireland.<sup>18</sup>

And then there was Noske. He was some party functionary that nobody had ever heard of and on the strength of some minor position in the army he made himself a big cheese under the Social Democrats. For a while he was a real power in Germany

through the police and army. In many ways it was much worse than under the Kaiser. Noske was dictating all over the country and he was working hand in glove with the generals. It was a pretty bloody time. But even the Social Democrats didn't hold power for long. There was a whole succession of governments that sat in Berlin and had a say in some things and none at all on others. Nobody controlled the army. In Bavaria, you could say that an outfit pretty much like the Nazis was in control from 1920 on and Berlin had nothing to say about it. The amazing thing was that so much got accomplished in the twenties, because in terms of building and new ideas it really was a tremendous time. Many of the ideas were already in existence before the war, but it was amazing that anything ever got done.

Quite a few communists and socialists were murdered during that time. Hundreds, thousands actually. Fritz was chased by all the groups that were in power. He was often in hiding. Sometimes, if the police or the gangs from other parties caught him, they'd beat him half to death. But of course it wasn't history to us. It was part of our lives. You still had to earn your bread, meet minor family crises and enjoy life if you could.

There were all sorts of ex-soldier groups and other outfits like that which were out after the communists or people they thought were communists, or those who they thought were a danger to the country. That was true even before Hitler and the Nazis were generally known. In fact, some of them would have beat us up, too, as Wandervoegel if they had had the opportunity. But nothing ever happened to me personally.

For a number of years Fritz lived in Staken. Many times he heard that some group or the police were coming to get him and he had to hide. He had hideouts in the *Laub colonien* (garden settlements) that were around there. But he didn't tell us anything about them in case we might let it slip to somebody. A couple of times some group did catch him. Once he was beaten to a pulp by the police. He literally crawled home.

Another time an S.A.<sup>19</sup> outfit caught him and almost killed him. They left him for dead and he lay in the fields all night. The next day some friends carried him home. Fritz was covered in blood and huge bruises; some of his ribs were broken and his collar bone. He had a concussion and could hardly see anything for a long time. But he was pretty hardy. Fritz used Veronal for many years, through most of the twenties and thirties. It's a very powerful drug which calms your nerves but still allows you to

concentrate. He took it in fairly large doses, all the time, for years. That he lived to the age he did is a real miracle.

When all the boys had left home, my mother sold the store she had in Spandau and put a down payment on a small house in an area on the edge of Spandau called Waldsiedlung. It was a beautiful spot out in the woods, an early sort of public housing scheme financed by the government. The down payments were pretty low -- maybe a thousand marks. But it took all of our savings.

After we moved to Waldsiedlung, my father sometimes lived with us and sometimes somewhere else. We never knew where but it turned out he had another woman stashed away in Berlin. He had lost his printing shop and was working for wages again in a printing plant, making more money than he ever did with his own shop. I was already twenty and with a good deal of living under my belt. But that didn't matter. As long as you were living at home you were expected to do what your parents told you, especially if you were a girl. Erna and I were still supposed to be under his charge. Even my mother didn't dispute him on that.

We kept pigeons in a coop. Beautiful creatures when you see them up close, circling and wheeling in to land. My father used to disappear for weeks at a time and when he came home he was hung over and mean. One time when he was in an especially bad temper he went out and broke the necks of all the pigeons. That was just to make us suffer because he knew how we felt about them. After that I decided I wasn't going to talk to him. Fritz had already done that and my father didn't turn up when Fritz was visiting.

My father just kept on drinking and drinking. Erna and I used to go upstairs and lock ourselves in our room when we heard him coming. All the boys had left by that time. My mother slept on a cot and Erna and I slept in a double bed, all in one room. There was also a main bedroom where my father slept. A couple of times I got into a fight with him when he was drunk. Once it came to a fist fight and he gave me such a hard clout on the head that I almost passed out. I ran up the stairs and got into our room and locked it before he could get in. I had a heavy brass candlestick tucked in beside the bed. I was fully prepared to hit him over the head with it and damn the consequences if he ever forced his way into our room. What he did you can't even put into words.

My mother wanted a divorce but to get it she had to prove desertion. Cruelty, mental or otherwise, and adultery weren't

grounds for divorce at that time. When her case came to court, the judge insisted on a trial reconciliation and she accepted my father back again on that basis. Of all the stupidity. The first night he was back they were in the main bedroom together and after a while I heard some noise. A little later I went downstairs and there she was, lying on the living room floor, stiff as a corpse and chalk white. She must have been in shock because she didn't move a muscle or say a word. I sat there till the morning and she slowly came out of it. Fortunately that reconciliation didn't last long and she got a divorce. And finally my father drank himself to death.

Erna and I gave my mother our pay each week for the family budget. Kurt was travelling around the country then and Werner we thought was dead. Fritz depended upon our help more than he helped us. So Erna and I handed over all of our pay and my mother would give us back what she thought could be spared. And we were women by that time, too. How I ever stood it is beyond me.

My mother made some money by going from door to door in the new settlements and small towns surrounding Berlin, selling crocheted dresses and lace work which a friend of hers made. Sometimes they would make them to order and sometimes they would sell them ready made. A Frau Schladitz made them. She was sort of hoity toity, although she got on pretty well with my mother. In any case, she crocheted some of the most beautiful jumpers and sweaters and capes I've ever seen. They would sell like hotcakes now, very much like what is in style today. But at that time handmade things were considered old fashioned by most people.

Frau Schladitz' husband was mentally retarded, quite noticeably so. The husband used to help support the family by selling hot sausages on the streets from a *Bauchladen*, a sort of portable steam box. I never paid him much attention because he struck me as rather silly. Just before my mother left that district, these Schladitzes, especially the wife, became vehement Nazis. She and her husband went up and down the neighbourhood distributing leaflets and trying to convince people to support the Nazis. My mother could never understand it, because this Frau Schladitz wasn't really a bad person. Although they had been friends for many years my mother said, 'After all you people have done to my sons. No. that's the end.' And they never talked to each other again.

A few years after, we heard that Frau Schladitz had been killed in a demonstration in Berlin which turned into a riot. The communists and Nazis and police were all in that melee. When I think of it, in some of those fights they would shoot at each other at the drop of a hat. And the police were often the worst, shooting into crowds of people for almost no reason at all. Anyway, Frau Schladitz was killed when a streetcar was overturned by some group or another. She became a minor martyr in the local Nazi following. Later on, after Hitler actually came to power, I heard that the husband had gotten a fairly important local post and had power over the lives of many people. When you think of it, it was really insane and pretty frightening. But that comes later.

Sometimes my mother wasn't quite all there either. Not long after my father left she had rented a half acre of sand lot pot-marked with craters and holes. I was supposed to level out those craters, with a shovel mind you, enough so that potatoes and other vegetables could be planted there. It was like something out of old Greek mythology. One could never have made a garden out of that plot. Nothing would have grown in that sand anyway. I think she just wanted to stop me from going out. That was during the period when I couldn't find a job. She probably thought anything would be better than having me tramping around the countryside. For a while I worked at that plot, and then I rebelled. I said, 'If you want a garden made out there then you go out and dig. From now on, I'm on my own. I don't care what you do or say. From now on I'm going to help out at home but I'm also going to live my own life. If you don't like it, I'll leave.' In fact, it wasn't too long after that that I finally got a job in Berlin and moved in with a girlfriend of mine.

### *Factory Girl*

The first job I got after that period of being unemployed was in a huge warehouse, testing field telephones left over from the war. They were supposed to be sold to some other country. There were two of us girls testing the equipment and two foremen. We turned it into our own make-work scheme. One foreman brought his fiddle along and would play. Sometimes one of us would take a nap behind a big pile of field telephones during the day. At least one always watching for higher-ups. We had a song we would sing as a warning.



I used to like factory work, much better than any white collar work I ever had. Of course you had to be young and strong because it was pretty heavy work, for girls. We worked in different factories operating all sorts of machinery. Drilling, reaming, cutting and soldering metal parts. We were often on piece rates for different items and you would have to be constantly figuring out not to make too much of one kind. We had all kinds of fancy ways of arranging the output and time spent so that our overall wage wouldn't be lowered.

If there was a job that we thought might be interesting to try, we'd just say, 'Oh yes, we've had experience at running something similar to that.' Then if you got a bit of a chance to observe how it was done and could watch the people who knew how to run those machines, and if the foreman didn't stand over you, within a day or two or sometimes in a few hours you could get the hang of it. Of course sometimes they found us out and let us go. But, nothing ventured nothing gained. We didn't lose anything by trying.

I operated a nail making machine in Siemens for a while. That's a pretty dirty job because you're spattered with oil and soapy water all the time. Then I worked on soldering together the strands of huge underwater telegraph cables. That was a pretty exacting job. Another job was making the minute counters which they use in long distance calls. That was quite interesting because we made the whole apparatus, from drilling the first holes in the plates to soldering in the parts and putting them together so the thing worked. There were quite a few other jobs at Siemens I tried my hand at: running a lathe, working different presses and drills. Actually it was fairly simple and there was usually somebody around to set the equipment for you. I was at Siemens about six or eight months and worked in many factories a few months at a time, never staying long in any one place. A couple of times I worked in small chocolate factories wrapping chocolate pieces. I even had a job as a payroll clerk for a while, but I didn't like that.

In one place there was a manager, a good looking man in his middle thirties, who had a long scar from his forehead to his chin. He was very proud of that because he said he got it dueling. Most of us thought dueling was something out of the Middle Ages, something that only the most backward rich loafers' sons engaged in. So we made fun of him. When he heard that, he really got his back up. But he couldn't do anything about it because of

the factory Workers Council. The union never would have stood for him firing us because we made fun of him.

After the revolution the Arbeiter Rate (Workers Council) was quite powerful in the big factories.<sup>20</sup> Usually they were successful on grievances but they were never able to improve the pay much. Still, in many of those plants it was a pretty friendly atmosphere. We used to bring apples along and roast them on the ovens that were used to heat up our soldering irons. Through that huge factory hall would waft the smell of roasting apples. About four or five of us used to share them around. If you brought three apples you might wind up eating a half of one.

Nevertheless, we didn't have a big stake in those jobs. We didn't expect to spend much time in any one place. We quit anytime we had a bit of money and felt the urge to get out in the countryside for awhile. The factories always got enough unskilled labor like ourselves so they didn't really care. And we in turn always got one job or another because people were always quitting. We made very little money anyway and the jobs weren't worth worrying about.

One time I wanted to buy a secondhand bicycle in the worst way. To save up for that I bought absolutely nothing and ate only one meal of thick soup and bread a day for six weeks. So that gives you an idea of the value of our wages - six weeks strenuous saving for a secondhand bike.

Finally, I took a semi-permanent job in one of the plants in Siemens Stadt. That Siemens complex was like a small city in itself, with its surrounding tenements and shops and recreation facilities. The apartments were relatively cheap and pretty modern for that time. It was supposed to be like a model company city. But I never wanted to live there, even though it was closer to work. Everything was so uniform and everybody worked for the same company. It was the dreariest district in Berlin. So I either lived in Spandau or in Wedding.

I was on the go all day long. Up at six thirty in the morning to get to the job at eight. It was about an hour's walk to the streetcar. Then work all day till five. Sophie and I or some friends would eat in the canteen and almost every night we would go visit somebody or go to meetings. Or we would go to the theatre or to night school. I got home around midnight or not home at all many times. On the weekends we were always on hikes. That was the way it went.

It was about that time the real inflation hit its stride. Those were incredible times. The inflation began slowly around 1921 and climbed for a year or two. By the end of that period ten marks had become the value of one mark. But in 1923 it started to climb like wild fire. A hundred or a thousand marks bought you what you used to get for a mark, then into the millions. Finally it took hundreds of millions and billions of marks to buy a towel or something. There were ordinary postage stamps that were the value of one billion marks. One billion marks to post a letter.

During the inflation the wage rates changed every day, and then, at the height of the inflation, twice a day. At the end of the day you got your day's pay. You had to spend it right away because the next day your cash would be worth a half or less of what it was the day before. The stores stayed open late just for that. They were trundling truck loads of cash back and forth from the banks to the factories every day. Whatever money anyone had managed to save was completely lost.

At the beginning of the inflation I had saved up a hundred marks towards a sewing machine. When I saw what was happening to the value of the money I decided I'd better buy something quick, but I had waited too long. Because all I got for that hundred marks, which was quite a few months' saving, was a skimpy blouse -- made of paper. Money was literally not worth the paper it was printed on. But that was nothing, many people who had their savings in bank accounts or government bonds lost everything they had managed to scrape together during their entire lives for their retirement.

Once the inflation really started it was a runaway. The banks just took the bills in and printed over them. Ten mark would have a thousand mark printed over it and later it would be printed with 100,000 mark. You could see how things were starting to break down. Some towns began to issue their own script tied to local values and exchange. Naturally, that didn't work either. Finally, there was a revaluation and each person could turn in so much of the previous money, if they hadn't spent it for nothing already, and get a small amount of new currency. It was very little, 200 marks or so. And the rest was all lost. I'm not sure how they did manage to stabilize the currency, but once the government decided to take action they did it.<sup>21</sup>

Of course all the little people who had small savings were wiped out. But the big factories and banking houses and multi-millionaires didn't seem to be affected at all. They went right on

piling up their millions. Those big holdings were protected somehow from loss. But the mass of the people were completely broke. And we asked ourselves, 'How can that happen? How is it that the government can't control an inflation which wipes out the life savings of the mass of the people but the big capitalists can come through the whole thing unscathed?' We who lived through it never got an answer that meant anything. But after that, even those people who used to save didn't trust money anymore, or the government. We decided to have a high-ho time whenever we had any spare money, which wasn't often.

### *The Youth Movement*

From the time I was fourteen or fifteen until my mid-twenties, almost until I was married, I was part of the Wandervoegel movement.<sup>22</sup> Whenever possible I was out hiking and singing and going through the countryside. There were many different kinds of groupings in the youth movement. Usually they weren't organized. In fact, organization and rules and formality were some of the things which the movement was supposed to be against. At one end of the spectrum were faddists of various sorts, some of them pretty fanatical. Vegetarians and nudists and religious nuts of all stripes. But on the other extreme were highly nationalist hiking groups which weren't much different from the pre-war university groups. But the great majority in the youth movement didn't belong to any groups at all, just circles of friends with individuals changing all the time. The main thing was to get out into the countryside, swim, hike, sunbathe, go camping. To travel and see the forests and moors, hills and farms.

By the time I was twenty I had been working for more than five years and I went out almost every night to some meeting or hike or lecture. I wish I had just one thousandth of that energy today. But my mother complained about my going out whenever I lived at home. In fact, once she threw me out because I didn't come home at night for a few weeks running. She just couldn't understand hiking into the countryside unless it was to a formal Sunday picnic near the city with a lot of people around. To her, the countryside was where other people grew food, where people migrated to Berlin from. Otherwise it was waste land.

During the years I worked in the factories (early 1920s) I was still involved in the Wandervoegel movement and we went out for

hikes every weekend. When a number of us had saved up some money and wanted to go on longer expeditions of three or four weeks we just threw up our jobs and went on the *wanderschaft*. We just quit and when our money was used up we came back to Berlin and got jobs in some other factory. We set our own vacations that way. And for most of the time we never had any trouble getting new jobs again.

The majority of the people in the youth movement were pretty ascetic. No alcohol, no stimulants, some wouldn't even take tea or coffee. If you were seen smoking a cigarette your name was mud in most of those groups. Even things like ballroom dancing and going to light comedies and movies was considered decadent by some. And on the question of sex they were downright abnormal. It was supposed to be no sex of any sort. Certainly no sleeping together unless you were married and then only if you wanted children. There were couples who were even fiancées for years and never had intercourse. Of course I think it would have been different if birth control had been easily available and reliable but maybe not.

Young people today really have a much healthier attitude toward sex. They live together and sleep with each other when they like somebody. Life is pretty short. Although I think a lot of the supposed freedom that many girls say they have about sex is still put on.

In principle, at least, I wasn't against sex. I always thought, let people enjoy themselves as they wish unless they harm somebody. But I wasn't personally interested in love affairs, let alone sex, until I was quite old and I met Ali. I didn't want all the trouble that went along with it, especially not marriage and children.

Nudism was part of that whole philosophy and we often sunbathed in the nude. In most places and groups we were with that was quite all right. Anyone in the groups I went with who would have considered nudity as an invitation to sex would have been ostracized. And some were on occasion. It was clearly understood that going around nude was returning to nature and all that sort of stuff. Of course, thinking back on it we were pretty naive. Often, Sophie and I and a bunch of us went down to swim in the Havel River in the nude, at night. In the playing around between girls, and between girls and boys there was a lot of thinly disguised sex. But it rarely led to anything. Maybe a kiss, but even that was rare. At least as far as I knew.

Oh, there were occasional affairs. But they were kept quiet. In a way, love making and affairs were considered sort of anti-social. Naturally, love affairs did develop, but usually of the most platonic kind. Downright humorous, many of them. Some guy sighing and writing poetry about his girlfriend, so-called, who he was suffering the pangs of torment for, but whom he hardly knew. And similarly for some girls.

There were some difficulties and dangers involved in wandering around, for young girls and even for men. That was the time, just after the war, when all sorts of insane things were happening. Everything loosened up. The war and what followed it seemed to trigger a lot of people who probably weren't too well balanced anyway. There was a tremendous increase in robberies and muggings and all sorts of obviously insane murderers roaming the country and the cities.<sup>23</sup> One case after another, some really grisly murders. One of the murderers they caught had a hideout, a lair, near a place we often used to go for outings. He had killed people all over the region.

There was this one girl, Marie Leuchtenberger, who used to go hiking with us and who always took a huge revolver along. But she was frightened of it so she packed it at the bottom of her pack sack with the bullets some place else. We used to say, 'When you meet a robber don't forget to ask him politely to wait until you can unpack and load your gun.' Guns, especially pistols, were illegal. Even rifles had to be registered and it was difficult to get a registration permit. But still, quite a few people had guns hidden away somewhere.

I had a truncheon that I took along on trips. I had it hanging on my belt. But the truncheon wouldn't have done me much good if somebody had attacked me when I was alone, and when we were with a group there was nothing to worry about. So it was sort of silly to carry it. I had a close call with one man who grabbed me on a forest trail when I was alone. 'Now I've got you,' he said. I brought my knee up with full force, right between his legs. It was automatic, I wasn't even thinking. He fell to the ground and I ran away. But during the chase I completely forgot that I even had my truncheon with me.

As far as I can remember there wasn't much open hostility towards us as Wandervoegel. There were occasional set-to's but usually for personal reasons. But there was no general hostility towards us. We were sort of hippies. We certainly looked like they do, and in many ways acted similarly.<sup>24</sup> But we were also

different. For one thing we were all self-supporting, we all had jobs most of the time. Unemployment wasn't so rampant as it is here now. Besides, we fitted into the history and customs of the country more than the hippies do here. In Germany at that time there was a long history of journeymen travelling around the country for years. That was accepted - for men that is.

There were youth festivals held all over the country, especially in spring and summer. They lasted a few days, up to a week, each, and you naturally picked those festivals that were some distance to travel to. Even if one was coming up in your own area. I suppose they were something like the rock festivals of today. Without the drugs and sex and violence but with the same enthusiasm. There would be thousands of people at these get-togethers. Especially on midsummer eve, when we would go out and sing and dance around campfires through the night.

We used to give each other different colored ribbons to tie to our guitars and lutes. They were a token of friendship. There were ribbons with solid colors, multicolored ones, ribbons with designs and they would all float behind you when you walked. They looked beautiful. We wore necklaces made of what you would call love beads today, or belts made out of woven rope or sometimes out of your own hair - all woven into intricate designs. Ordinary jewelry wasn't worn but there were some styles like old Scythian belt buckles and simple hand made brooches of copper, bronze or silver, that both men and women wore.

I had this dress of a velvety corduroy; green, with a satin lining. There was all sorts of embroidery on the sleeves and round the neck. On the front it had a great big embroidered spider web, in purple thread - but no spider. I thought that was cute. But everybody kept saying, 'Where's the spider? It must be you. Watch out, she wants to catch you in her net.' That became so repetitious that after awhile I stopped wearing the dress.

In the winter time it gets pretty cold around Berlin. We girls often went on hikes with thin white smocks, sandals, and a light spring coat or cape flapping open. I had a dress that my mother cut out of bleached burlap and embroidered all over. It was really a beautiful thing. She also made me a cape of an old horse blanket, dyed blue. We had to get the healthy air, and also show how unconcerned we were about the elements. Tripping through the snow with chilblains and sometimes frost bite. Going to some skating party on one of the lakes.

We girls wore dresses and hair styles and sang songs that were supposed to date back to the past, or so people thought. And then, we had that aura of purity about us. So it was sort of difficult for people to object to us too much. Although a lot of people didn't believe that and figured that we probably engaged in free love in the bushes. But then we were pretty orderly insofar as we affected other people.

If you go by a group of long-haired kids on the street today, you always feel you have to be ready for some dirty language or insults or some violence. Although that's not fair to them - but you never know what to expect. We didn't threaten people that way. At worst we just ignored them and they left us alone.

Of course there was a frosting of culture and high purpose surrounding a lot of the groups. We gabbled about Goethe, the meaning of Faust, and old philosophers, and about some of the recent playwrights. We knew a bit about some of the English and French writers, too. Most of us had read them, even if in bits and pieces, and even if in self defense, like myself, in order to know a bit about what the others were letting off steam about. But it didn't amount to a hill of beans. There was no way in which that affected anything anybody really did.

We read about star lore, knew about astronomy, could identify all the constellations and planets and the mythology that went along with them. And we would often stand for hours at night when we were in the country charting out the heavens. A few people were involved in astrology too, but that was generally looked upon as a superstition, like those we wanted to put behind us. There were almost no end of little cults and fads around. There were even some people who believed in witchcraft. But the main theme was back to nature, simplicity, be a free spirit, and purity of course in its various shapes and sizes.

I never really believed that all the preaching that some Wandervoegel thought would change the world, would change anything. But it was nice for yourself and for those who felt like you. We sang and hiked and sang some more.

There were plenty of cults and people that I'd now say were either simpleminded or just plain nuts. Everything was holy. Everybody and everything had the spirit of god in them and all you had to do to bring it out was to preach to them about ideals and being pure. That, with evidence all around them of the most rotten characters and murderers.



The philosophy was 'don't become entrapped in political parties. That way only leads back to *Bürgerlicheit* (bourgeois life). Just come out and lead the pure life back to nature and simplicity and at least you will be doing good and being good.' It was 'Get the poison out of your system.' And if the rest of the world doesn't follow your example that's their tough luck.'

I still believe that business about simplicity and getting back to simpler things, and having greater freedom for people to do what they want. But that obviously isn't possible if you have to work your life away in order to make a living and while the rulers decide what you can and can't do.

There were some elements of the youth movement which were the very opposite of what we believed in. The 'Wandervoegel, E.V.' were a perfect example. They were mainly composed of university students and sons of the bourgeoisie. They always thought they were a cut above the ordinary people. We used to laugh at their 'E.V.' (Incorporated). The great mass of the people in the youth movement were like us. We belonged to no organized groups, just circles of friends. But some of the purity and idealism stuff was really very empty when I look back on it, and concealed what developed into some pretty rotten things. Some of those idealistic people turned into some pretty rotten human beings.

There was one painter, Fidus, known throughout the youth movement. Many of his paintings were quite beautiful in a sort of way, something like Art Nouveau. He was always spouting off about aryanization and was quite influential. There you could see the ideology of the Nazis already starting off. True enough, if the Nazis hadn't fastened on that they would have picked up some other philosophies because they took bits and pieces from everywhere. They even took over some of the trappings and songs of the socialist movement too. In fact they called themselves National Socialists. That was all window dressing anyway.

The *Natur Freunde* (Friends of Nature) were probably the oldest youth group and had been around from the last century. I think they still exist now. In my time, in Berlin, they were a pretty strong socialist youth movement. They weren't considered as part of the Wandervoegel because they didn't have that whole philosophy of nudism and vegetarianism and what not. They were a combination political and outing group. Fritz never belonged to them or any other youth group either because by the

time he'd been through three years of war those sorts of clubs were too childish for him. And with all their singing of the 'Internationale' and the 'Workers' Marseillaise' and similar songs I don't think they amounted to much as revolutionaries anyway. Many of them could have joined the Spartacus as Fritz did. But they didn't.

I went out hiking quite a number of times with the communist youth groups; they were in every city too. And there you got another set of philosophers that were talked and argued about, as if understanding what a few paragraphs meant would save the world. Of course what we talked about was the world as it should be and could be. But that is very different from what developed in Russia. Even then I was suspicious that it wasn't all that it was cracked up to be. But I could never say that to my brother or he would fly into a rage.

Of course, the Wandervoegel philosophy was not general in Germany by any means. In large sections there was still a more or less unchanged stiff-necked morality. Even the sorts of things that we did as Wandervoegel were scandalous to many people. On the other hand, there were a lot of people who considered us Wandervoegel as puritan nuts. Many, maybe the majority of people our age in the big cities were engaged in a lot of free and easy drinking and enjoying the material things of life, like eating and dancing and night clubs, and sleeping with boyfriends. The men who came back from the war especially weren't inclined to the sort of ascetics we played with. Their attitude was 'eat, drink and be merry.'

### *The Wild Bunch*

In 1923, Ella, my best friend at that time, started living with this one painter - Franz Koch was his name. When we got in with that bunch we had some really wild experiences. We tried making what I suppose you'd call drugs, various herb teas and vitamins and chemical food supplements. There were some particularly high strung people in that crowd who always got high on whatever was being tried. Only twice did I have any visions or hallucinations, and I didn't like them. Usually it had either no effect or just made me ill. We must have been just as crazy then as young people are today, only we didn't have the means. Of course there were opium and cocaine and Benzedrine addicts around. But no one I

ever knew would touch that stuff. Besides those tea parties were a pretty short lived fad with us.

The center of that crowd was Franz Koch. He was a painter and had some sort of growth deformity. His upper body was wonderfully developed, handsome and strong. A giant of a man above the hips. But his legs were shrivelled up - child's legs. He was a wonderful painter. Sort of surrealist but not so exaggerated as some, like Dali. But he couldn't and didn't really want to sell his paintings. Franz got a kind of welfare which paid for his two room flat in Wedding and not much more. Ella was living with him at the time. Ella and I used to bathe Franz because he couldn't do that for himself. We'd undress him and put him in a bathtub. For all his general cynicism he was embarrassed if people saw his legs.

His place was always full of people. With that handicap he was still tremendously attractive to women, at least to the women he had around him. There were constantly girls who were trying to get him as their lover, young and beautiful and intelligent ones too. He drew to himself all kinds of people, the best and the worst, the most intelligent and the most degraded. Like a magnet. For the better part of two years Ella and I contributed to feed Franz and the crowds of people who were always coming to visit. He couldn't have managed that just on his welfare check. Franz expected, and always got, people he could cajole and who would look after him. He was that way.

Of course what we ate was often pretty meagre. Potato soups to no end, with hunks of black bread. Often we were glad to have bread and margarine for a meal. For a while we lived on nothing else but boiled wheat that somebody had swiped from somewhere. There were occasional days of feast too, when somebody would bring along sausages and cheese and bread and wine or when we went out and blew half a pay check on delicatessen. But we always got through somehow. We didn't worry about food too much, which is surprising considering the famine years most of us had lived through.

During that period we got to know all kinds of homosexuals and lesbians. This other friend of mine, Eva, was always nosy about such things. And so was I for that matter. Nosy about anything out of the ordinary. Among the homosexuals and lesbians coming along to Franz' place there was one woman who called herself Anatole France. She had money of her own and dabbled in poetry and seances and painting, and whatever, as the mood struck her.

She was quite straight forward about being a lesbian but somehow she always had a string of men and boys trailing after her. She was a clever, very beautiful and quite nice woman. But the fact that she had money and could do what she wanted always irked me.

She told us about a cafe, the Blue Cuckoo, which was only frequented by lesbians. They wouldn't let you in unless you were a woman. So Eva and I decided to go down there. We were a little frightened but even more nosy. We sat there drinking coffee and rubber necking without trying to appear too obvious and impolite. The couples were dancing; the one who was supposed to be the male dressed up in men's evening wear of that period. We were two young, fresh girls, right from the farm so to speak. Almost immediately we were propositioned. Well I got scared and decided to get out of there. But Eva said, 'I'm going to find out how they do it. I'm going to find someone to take me home. I'll tell you about it tomorrow.' The next day she told me a bit of what happened. 'How can they be lovers?' I thought. 'They don't have anything to love with.' I must admit I was pretty dumb in that regard. 'Oh, they do it with a feather.'

We were a mixture of naivete and experience. About hard work and getting by under terrible conditions we knew as much as anybody. We had a pretty well grounded suspicion of the authorities and what the official story was on anything. But when it came to some things, particularly sex, we were more innocent than the average twelve year old girl today. But then I wasn't interested in the whole topic anyway. Unless somebody was a flaming homosexual I didn't notice and didn't want to notice. If somebody wanted to be a friend that was fine, but if not, that was fine too.

One day Franz said, 'Let's all go on a long trip. But not too large a group. Just us and a few of our closest friends.' He was very persuasive and we never needed much convincing to go on trips anyway. Some of us got together - one person played a fiddle, another the lute, another a block flute (recorder) and we all sang well. We had good voices and a pretty good repertoire of folk songs.

So Franz, Ella and myself, and two other boys set out for as far and as long as our money would last. We pooled what little money we had or could scrape together. Franz had a wheelchair something like a lounge chair. It was rigged up so he could pump it along with a draw bar. He used to lie in that contraption like a

potentate on a divan. But he was always covered up, wrapped up with blankets from the waist down.

We took trains and we hiked - there were always enough people to push the wheelchair. There wasn't much hitch-hiking in those days, but we tried it. We would wait on the main roads for trucks. When one would stop we would talk to the driver. Most of them took all of us, the two girls in the front with the driver, and the boys in the back with the wheelchair. We went throughout the country. First up to the North Sea, and then over to the Baltic, then through Mecklenburg and over to Pomerania. Then down into the area around Hanover and Chemnitz. But we stayed out of Bavaria and the south. In fact I was never in that part of Germany. We were on that trip for almost six months.

Early on in that trip, in a small town up in Mecklenburg, we met a couple who were followers of Gustav Naegel. Naegel was a proponent of nudism. Everything under the sun could be cured by nudism - illness, depressions, crime, immorality, war. Really pretty silly. There were all sorts of the most childish cure-alls floating around in those days, each with at least a few adherents.

Anyway, this couple saw the five of us coming down the street in their small town and invited us in for something to eat. Some bread and cheese but no meat, they were vegetarians. 'Oh,' said the wife after about five minutes. 'I saw you. I saw you coming. God sent you to me. You must stay with the children because I have to go to my eldest daughter in her need.' It turned out that their daughter was living with one Heuser, another Naegel type with his own version of back-to-nature and with his own following. Actually, her daughter didn't need her at all, she was quite satisfied living as she did.

The couple had two children of their own and an adopted four year old boy. The townspeople were pretty het-up about having the family in their little *Kuhdorf* (one horse town). The neighbours had petitioned the municipal authorities to take the adopted boy away from this couple because they were encouraging him to run around naked, in their own garden, mind you. That's small town society for you.

Nevertheless, for all that talk of freedom and naturalness, the husband wouldn't let his wife leave unless there was somebody there to take care of the house and their kids. I didn't want to stay but somehow she talked me into it. 'God sent me' indeed! She probably could see a sucker coming. But I wound up staying.

All three of us slept in the same double bed, that strange man, the boy and myself on the other side. The other two children were a little older and had a bed of their own in the same room. But the whole bunch were so ascetic that there wasn't even a question of sex. I didn't even think anything unusual about the arrangement. I must have been nuts too at the time.

After about ten days the wife came back and I left for another town where I'd arranged to meet up with my own group. From there we went to Rostock and all through the countryside. We used to find out which was the busiest corner in a town and then start singing and playing there. One boy played a violin, another the flute, and Ella and I sang. Ella and I had really exceptional voices, and we were always on the look out for songs with intricate harmonies. The boys had pretty good voices too. Franz just sat in his wheelchair looking slightly haughty. We got donations from all sorts of people. Of course some people called us names too. But we got more than enough money to get by on. We didn't need much. We got an invitation to come and play at some one's house and they gave us supper and a good place to sleep and some even packed sandwiches to take along.

On the farms, large and small, we never got any money but we received a great welcome. They gave us the best food they could serve, and that was usually quite something. And they would put us up in some comfortable place. Even if we slept in the barn they fixed up a clean, dry and nice smelling place for us.

Two of our favorite songs were 'Kein Helmlein Wachst Auf Erde' by Friedemin Bach and 'Der Mond ist Aufgegangen'. Sometimes we'd throw a little satire into our songs. especially if we were singing on street corners. For instance, there was a song, the Lorelei, that everybody learned in school. Quite pretty actually, but so many people sang it and murdered it that we looked down on that song. So we would sing it as melodramatically as possible, almost with tears in our eyes, for the young men lured to their watery graves by the lovely Lorelei. That's what it's all about. Then, when the verses got more and more drawn out and sad, we'd sing a quick chorus of 'So, there he goes capsizing the boat. Now he's falling over the side. The lummoX, out of the apple barge right into that great ocean. And that's what Lorelei accomplishes with their caterwauling.' We sang that in the thickest Berlin dialect we could put on and it would break people up.

We made some money singing in the cities and the larger towns until the police caught up with us a couple of times and threatened to arrest us for singing without a license. A couple of times we had run-ins with organ grinders or other musicians who had paid for a license to work in a certain district and they were usually boiling mad because we took their business away from them. But we never stayed long in one place. In a few places we did have some trouble. I remember when we passed through Chemnitz some people we sang for came out of their houses and gave us money while others tried to insult us. One guy came storming out of his house ready to attack us. 'It's a scandal. Young people begging in the streets. Tramps, you don't have any shame. You and your boyfriends flaunting yourselves in public. You need a good whipping.' Something like that happened a few times. But we were young, we just laughed. We didn't give a hoot what people like that said.

We did have some real trouble once in a district where a character by the name of Muck Lamberty was living at the time. He was known all over Germany as one of the leading spirits of the youth movement. Although he wasn't any youth himself anymore, he gathered around himself all kinds of young people, mainly teenagers. The kids worked for him. Lamberty turned out hand carved wooden candle sticks with sort of Medieval designs. They became all the rage among the Wandervoegel and soon everybody had to have a candle stick from the hands of Muck Lamberty himself. Even I had one.

Anyway, at one point in our wandering we came through the village near Lamberty's place. All of a sudden we hear this yell, 'Make your own children, make your own children'. And here is most of the village turned out to chase us away, from old people to youngsters. They looked upon Muck Lamberty and his followers as a modern-day Pied Piper. The next thing we knew they were stoning us and we had to run as fast as we could, pulling the wheelchair for about half a mile. We got pretty badly bruised. Luckily they just wanted to drive us out. Finally we got to Lamberty's house and stayed there for about a week.

There were boys and girls staying there; mainly young men but a few girls too. They had to work, there wasn't any two ways about it. People came and went in that house. Sometimes there would be five, sometimes ten, and sometimes as many as twenty kids there. Lamberty also had a whole bushel of women scattered all over the country. He drew women like flies to honey. He was a

handsome man, in a way. Tall, a sort of Svengali without a beard. Long flowing hair down his back with a kind of Holy Joseph face. He must have been in his early thirties at that time.

Lamberty himself was on a perpetual fast, he rarely bought any food. The kids with him hardly got anything to eat. Actually, you can't call them kids because they were anywhere from thirteen to twenty years old. It was a sort of communal arrangement. The kids had to get their own food as best they could. Sometimes they'd go out to the farms to beg or steal fruit and potatoes and vegetables from the fields. And some of the farmers would take a shot at anybody they saw stealing their produce. They had shotguns to drive off sparrows and people if they tried to take a few cherries or something. Most of those farmers were a pretty miserly bunch anyway but I could see how they would get pretty fed up with this lot constantly harvesting their crops for them.

Lamberty didn't believe in processed or store-bought food. 'Take your food directly from the fields as Mother Nature intended. It's clean living.' He bought some bread and a little meat from time to time, but that was about it. Actually, I'm not even sure now if he did eat meat in any form. They didn't believe in tea or coffee or any stimulants. Drinking, except maybe an occasional ceremonial glass of wine, was pretty close to a mortal sin for them. Smoking was completely taboo.

Ali knew him too, before we met. He wrote to Lamberty from one of his travels and Lamberty answered something like, 'We have little in the way of material possessions. But we do have the happiness of living in harmony with Mother Nature. That is all I can promise but if you want to come a pair of blue eyes light your way to us across the distance.' It sounds pretty corny today, but it was the sort of talk that moved many young people then. Anyway, Ali picked up his pack and went. I think he stayed for a couple of months and then he had had enough of it too. We often talked about Muck Lamberty later. There were always dozens of people eager to join him so when any of them got fed up and left, they got an affectionate embrace but left with empty pockets.

During the time our group was visiting with him I snooped around the house and in the attic I found boxes and boxes of machine-made candle sticks, rough blanks. He and his helpers put on the finishing 'hand made' touches and he himself just carved his name on them. But I must admit, the candle sticks he turned



out were very beautiful. It sounds more cynical than it actually was. Nobody was coerced to buy those things and those kids liked to work for him. If they weren't with him they would have been doing something equally nonsensical. Compared to all the other things that were happening it wasn't a bad experience for kids. Most of us were just dying to try something different.

After about two years with that wild bunch around Franz Koch I thought, 'Well, it's about time you learned a good trade'. I certainly didn't plan on getting married and sitting around home the rest of my life. That was the last thing on my mind. After those years with that crippled artist and his whole coterie I thought, 'Enough of this wild life. Now I have to settle down and learn something I can rely on'. In fact, I was getting pretty tired of all those high strung people with all their sensitivities and endless problems and endless empty talk.

#### 4. Settling Down (1924-1928)

When I broke off from Franz and that whole bunch I became interested in printing again and decided I wanted to learn offset printing. It was in its early stages then. I managed to land an apprenticeship as a multigraph operator which paid a salary as well. The job entailed not only running the machine and printing but making whatever adjustments and repairs were needed. The outfit I worked for put out two fairly big trade papers each day and a small weekly paper. For one paper we used ordinary cold type, very old fashioned even then. I spent a lot of time setting type and composing with a tally stick. It took practice and you had to be pretty fast. By the end of the time I worked there I could take the whole press apart and put it back together again. I was there quite a long time, over two years; until I got married and even after that.

I took a room on my own. But on my apprentice's salary I couldn't afford to live alone so I moved back in with my mother. By that time she had moved out of the house in Waldsiedlung and lived in two small rooms behind the store she ran in the Wedding district. A small tobacco and confectionery shop. She and my sister Erna lived there. It was pretty crowded and when I returned we were packed in like sardines. Actually, I'm not even sure why I moved back home. Partly because I wasn't making enough money as an apprentice to support a place of my own. Still, I can't remember why I didn't move in with a friend, because it was awfully restrictive living with my mother.

Wedding was a very old and poor part of Berlin. It was a well known part of old Berlin. Some parts of it were the slum of slums, other parts were the hangouts of prostitutes and petty criminals. The area we lived in wasn't like that, it was mainly composed of the poorer working people. It was kind of tough; not really dangerous but pretty rowdy. There was a little bit of notoriety if you said you lived in Wedding.

There were a couple of pubs on the block which ran twenty-four hours a day, so it seemed. There were drunks on the street almost constantly, and wives coming down to pull their husbands out of those saloons. That was often accompanied by fights on the street. Well, it wasn't as bad as it sounds but there was a lot of grinding poverty in Wedding which you didn't find in most tenement districts.

During 1925 and part of 1926 I lived with my mother and sister. Erna was a secretary. That was supposed to be a pretty desirable job then. I still went out hiking on weekends, mainly with old friends, but Erna went out to cabarets and house parties. We ran in very different crowds.

Erna was always unlucky with her boyfriends. I think it was because she was a bit of a social climber. The ordinary guys weren't good enough for her and the ones with cars and money to spend only wanted to use her, sleep with her and drop her. One guy she was madly in love with at that time was supposed to have a car. That was really a big thing, to have your own private car. Only we never saw it. He said he was a civil engineer and he always played the big shot. They went around a number of months together and they were going to go off for a long vacation together. Erna was always talking about marrying him. But he just didn't look right to my mother. She nosed around a bit; I don't know how she found out. It turned out this guy was just a minor employee in the city government - with a wife and two children at home. He used up his money on girlfriends and the wife and children sat at home with hardly a crust of bread. Well, that ended that. But there was a whole string of other affairs that my sister got into. All of us, in our own way, burned the candle at both ends. Not that it amounted to much.

My mother earned her living with her hands till she was a pretty old woman. There were only the three of us living behind the store and we put all our money into one pot. I was a grown woman already and had been working for ten years at the time, but I really couldn't do very much because I never had any money. Somehow when everything was paid for there was only enough left for a small allowance of a few marks a week.

I don't know how I stood it for so long. I would even have to nag her in order to get enough of my own money back to buy the very occasional dress. I was getting pretty fed up with that situation and was thinking of living on my own again when I met Ali. For the first time, I began to think about getting married. I still continued to live with my mother but from then on I only paid for my room and board and kept the remainder of my pay. I said, 'Now I have to save up my own money because I might need it myself.' But that's getting ahead of the story. You have to know how I met Ali.

*Ali*

I met Ali through Sophie actually, many years before. In about 1920 Sophie and I were thinking about going out to work on a farm again. You'd think we would have learned our lesson, but we hadn't. There was an ad in the paper which was recruiting farm workers. Both men and women were wanted. Sophie and I wrote a letter saying we were interested and they hired us. But when I thought about it some more I decided that being stuck in some god forsaken nest out in the flatlands was not what I wanted. I remained in Berlin but Sophie was fire and flame to go to work on a farm again. So she took the job and went out to Pomerania. And there she met Ali.

He had finished an apprenticeship and was a journeyman baker, but he wanted to get away from baking and work on the land. He was employed by a small farmer there. Employed isn't actually the right word. They barely got enough to eat and hardly ever got any wages. Neither of them ever got a cent in wages. Sophie was working as a sort of milk maid, Ali was a general farm hand. Ali was eighteen and Sophie was twenty-three. They met and had an affair. But at the end of about six months they had a falling out. Sophie got fed up with country living so she came back to Berlin. Ali stayed on for about a year and then he finally left too.

A bit later Ali passed through Berlin and came to visit Sophie, and that's when I met him first. One day we went out into the countryside by train. There was a creek and a small lake surrounded by trees and wild flowers and meadows. We all swam in the nude.

The second time I met Ali was three years later, in 1924. I was working at the multigraph company. He had been travelling around the country but now worked in Berlin as a truck driver. Sophie said, 'Ali is coming over. Let's go to a place way out in the country where we can sunbathe.'

It was an area of forests and lakes. We went out there the next Sunday and had a lovely time. We swam in the river and hiked and sang and had a picnic, the three of us. I'll never forget that day as long as I live. But Sophie got kind of jealous because he was still her old flame at that time, although they had ended their love affair long before.

When we got back to Berlin we dropped Sophie off and Ali brought me home. Well, Ali walked me home in the dark and we went arm in arm, a warm summer evening. I began to think about

marriage for the first time. I had always said to my mother and to anybody else, 'I don't like any men in that respect.' I always had plenty of friends who were men or boys, in fact most of my friends were boys. I had only a few girlfriends. The boys always used to unload their love troubles on me. I was a sort of buddy and I preferred it that way. If it ever turned into anything more than that, which happened occasionally, I nipped the romance right in the bud. I always thought, 'All those crazy love problems. That's not for me. It must be a sort of mild insanity.' Nevertheless, after I met Ali I changed my mind. But before we talk more about that I should tell you a little about Ali's background.

His father had been what they called a *Schweizer*. That's a sort of foreman on large estates who looks after the cattle, especially the dairy stock. The family lived on various big *Guter* (estates) in Pomerania and Silesia when Ali was a kid. From what Ali told me his father was an unholy terror. He was a big man and he always used to beat Ali up. And of course he was very religious. He was Austrian or Slovakian, I don't know which because that was still part of Austro-Hungary at that time.

Ali's mother died when he was quite young and his father married again. His stepmother was pleasant enough, in a stupid sort of way. I knew her later. Whatever the husband, or the priest, or the local government official, or anybody in authority said was God's truth for her. She was almost out of the Middle Ages in her knowledge of the world. Ali got beaten for not wanting to go to church.

At first Ali was in a special Catholic school for boys who were intended to continue into the seminary and ultimately to become priests. They must have started him off very young because he had already seven or eight years of schooling when he ran away from that school at thirteen. His parents wanted their children to become priests or nuns. That was the highest ideal that they could aspire towards.

After Ali had run away from the Catholic school his parents didn't want him around home anymore. They hired him out to a flour mill operator as a laborer. Parents could still do that then. If they couldn't do it legally they did it anyway. Ali was there almost a year. Then he got sick and the miller and his wife just let him lie in the attic above the mill where he slept. They didn't believe in pampering their help. He lay there for four days too weak to get up. Finally a neighbour got the authorities and they

rushed Ali to a hospital where they performed a tracheotomy, because by that time he was choking to death. He had that scar until the day he died. He was about fourteen at that time.

Later, Ali's parents dragooned their daughter into a nunnery. She was a novice, took her vows and, shortly after, ran away and got married. Naturally, her parents disowned her too. Ali was always close to his sister, in fact she was his whole family. Her husband was a wonderful guy who drove a truck and used to visit us later, when he passed through Berlin. Still, we didn't see too much of them.

After that business with the miller, Ali's father apprenticed him to a bakery in Halle. The apprenticeship lasted three years, from about the middle of the war to the end of it. Whenever he had any free time Ali packed up his rucksacks and headed off. By 1920 he was a journeyman baker. At that time, many journeymen, after they had finished their apprenticeship and gotten their papers, wandered the country taking jobs for a short time with different shops. It was the same with shoemakers and carpenters and whatever. The idea was that they would learn other techniques and meet other members of their trade by doing that. Although not all journeymen went on the circuit.

Ali would work a while, save some money and then go on a hiking trip with a few other guys. When the money ran out he'd find another job. They would come up the country road leading to a village, playing their fiddles and guitars and singing as they walked. Before they got into the centre of the village they had a whole troop of children following them so that they really did look like the Pied Piper of Hamelin. Ali operated hand puppets and he would make up stories with them. The others would sing and play. There were usually morals attached to the stories about becoming free spirits and leaving behind the settled life and greed and authority, and to come back to nature. They were intended for the children who trooped out to see any minstrel band. Ali was very good at story telling. But in a couple of places they got chased out of town by parents who weren't going to let wandering Gypsies put those ideas in the head of their children.

They travelled around without any money. Occasionally they would get a lift from a truck but there was no real hitch-hiking possible then. People who had cars to travel in hardly ever stopped to give the rabble a ride. Sometimes Ali and his bunch took a train but usually they hiked everywhere. They walked a lot

- they walked hundreds and thousands of miles. Often they got food and shelter on the farms they passed by in exchange for work. All of these places we went to, all of these long trips where you were on the road for weeks or months were really only a day's or a half day's drive from Berlin by today's standards. But they were pretty far away if you walked and travelled as we did, down country roads and paths.

Ali and I were married on August 24, 1926. We rented a small two-room apartment on Treskow Street in Wedding. It was only a few blocks from where I had lived before.

There wasn't a tree, not a blade of grass in the district. We were on the fourth floor of a tenement. Those buildings were all the same. They had the front block, a back section, and behind that another back section. There were two connecting blocks which all formed a little yard in the middle which was cobbled over. There was a joke about those sorts of courtyards. 'Oh, the yard of our house isn't very big, but it's nice and high.' Meaning that it was nothing more than a glorified air shaft. There was running water and a gas stove in each apartment but no heating. There was a public toilet and a bath tub on each floor. Over a hundred families lived in this tenement block and it was like being in a rabbit warren. You'd hear the arguments going on in the apartments across the way or above you or below. And sometimes, especially in the summer when the windows were open, you'd hear screaming and cursing as some husband beat up his wife or children.

I was still working in the printing plant and earning a fairly good salary since I finished the apprenticeship. For about a year, a little more, Ali had been working as a tractor driver in Zahlendorf. They were building a sort of garden city that the Bauhaus had designed. It was supposed to become a city of colours, on the outskirts of Berlin. Ali talked about how beautiful the pastel coloured houses and buildings were compared to the drab stone buildings that you saw everywhere else. Gropius of the Bauhaus was a hero of ours and much of the youth movement.<sup>27</sup> Along with the medieval stuff we loved futuristic designs with open spaces and lots of glass to let in the sunlight.

But that job didn't last and shortly after we were married Ali wound up driving a huge truck for 'Greenland Ice Cream', with a big picture of an Eskimo on the side. Almost everyday he would scrape out the remains of the ice cream cartons they delivered to stores. There'd be pounds and pounds of the stuff left over.

We ate ice cream by the bowl full and gave it away to the children in our neighbourhood. That and the ice it was packed in. It got so that there'd be a big bunch of kids waiting for him every day when he came by with the truck. A couple of women of that block began to think it was their due to get ice from Ali, free of course, and they would bawl him out if he didn't have any some days. Ali had that job only for a few months and in early fall he got laid off.

After a few weeks Ali landed a job as a chauffeur for a sculptor. Max Manus. In order to sell his pieces this sculptor travelled all over the country soliciting business and playing the successful artist. Successful he wasn't, not when we knew him, but he certainly was an artist. He worked in copper and bronze. Some pieces he sold were supposed to be items that came from old estates, although he never said that in so many words. He was a bit of a con man.

Manus sculpted and designed all the pieces himself and would make a piece on any theme you might choose. They weren't even so expensive. My boss at the printing plant had one of his works, a study of Tom the Rhymer. Tom the Rhymer was a sort of Robin Hood figure in England who wound up on the block in Henry III's time.<sup>28</sup> This piece was of Tom the Rhymer walking his horse with a young girl riding. You could almost feel them looking around at the forests and fields they were passing through. Just wonderful. Even today I would appreciate it.

And the man who produced these marvelous works and put on that big show hardly had enough money left over to feed his family. In the summer they lived on what they grew in their garden and on black bread and margarine. His car, old but very fancy, was paid on eternal credit, his house on the outskirts of Berlin was rented. Nothing else was ever paid, including Ali's wages. Manus wasn't miserly either, he just had no money left after he paid for the window dressing of his business.

We both liked him. But likable or not he still couldn't pay any regular salary. We stood it for a few months because we thought that the money was bound to come in sometime. Meanwhile we were living on my salary.

While that was going on Ali and I were looking for a piece of land to start a farm on. We didn't need very much because we were only going to go into chicken farming. That had been in the works since before we were married. Our plan was that both of us would work for a year and put a down payment on a piece of land. That



was the dream of those who belonged to the Wandervoegel movement. Ali and I wanted to stay in Brandenburg province, not too far from Berlin. We started looking.

One plot we looked at was almost pure sand. The guy who wanted to sell it figured he had city people on the hook who would buy anything as farm land. Ali looked at the land and said, 'Oh, what it would be like to have our own piece of land.' He took a handful of the soil in his hand and it was just sand. Dug a little deeper to see if there was anything that would sustain a crop. But no, only sand, a thin covering of *hiede* (moor) grasses and some sparse brush with a few larch trees scattered around. It would have been impossible for anybody, no matter how skilled, to grow anything on that land. And even then we still considered it. Here we could put the house, over there a stable, we could use that little rise to get a bit of a view. How long would it take to pay off the land and get the money for the house and equipment enough to raise chickens? But finally we came to our senses. We realized it was impossible to make a living there. But it was beautiful - rolling moors, little lakes, open forests and grassy meadows.

They used to call Brandenburg the Sandbox of Germany. Some parts had fairly thriving dairy and potato and rye farms but there was a lot of sandy wasteland. We should have been thankful that it was unusable to farmers because otherwise the cities would have been ringed with privately owned lands, fenced in and used, on which nobody could have walked. Actually, it was quite amazing. In a small country like Germany with its large population, there were open areas which you could get to and enjoy. Large forests and parks all around, or so it seemed. It wasn't a retreat we were after but a farm, so-called. We just had to turn a plot of land into a garden or farm, even though we loved the natural moor and forest. Many years later, in Vancouver, when Prairie people came in and cut down the trees on lots they bought in order to plant gardens, I thought, 'How crass.' Yet we were ready to do the same thing. Dumb!

Ali and I searched all over for land, within reasonable train distance from Berlin. We only wanted about five *morgen* (10 acres) but we couldn't find anything we could afford. Then we heard that one of the small farmers in Pomerania where Ali had worked wanted to sell off his chicken farm. We wrote back and forth and at first it seemed like the guy who was selling the farm wanted more of a down payment than we could rustle up. I never

saw a person sitting on such pins and needles as Ali then, looking everywhere to get the additional money we needed. Then Ali decided to quit and get his back wages. Of course that sculptor didn't have it. We waited a week and finally Ali went to his office and said, 'I'm going to stay here till you round up the money.' A few days later the sculptor sold a big rug he had and came up with the back wages. We had eight hundred marks altogether. With that Ali set off to put a down payment on the chicken farm. By that time the owner of the farm was willing to take any terms that were offered. I stayed in Berlin to earn as much money as I could in preparation to joining Ali.

### *Back to the Land*

The chicken farm that we wound up buying was one of the parcels that resulted when the (Weimar) government split up some of the large estates just after the war. The plots were between ten and forty acres and were sold to anybody who wanted to tackle farming. The prices for the land were pretty low, but in many cases it would have been too high if it had been given away free. The man we were buying it from had been there for about five years with his wife and hadn't made any headway at all. That should really have tipped us off.

The farm was about ten miles from a town called Doelitz. It was on the border of Pomerania and Mecklenburg provinces, only about a hundred miles from Berlin. But to get there you had to take a very round about route which took two days. The nearest village was called Ickerhoff. There were about twenty or twenty-five families in the immediate neighbourhood. Most of them had little or no farming experience and many were originally from cities or small towns. They were all paying off their plots of land; some had ten or twenty acres. Our plot was twenty morgen, about ten acres.

Ali knew that area and even that particular farm because he had worked on a farm nearby for over a year in the early twenties. The house was wood covered with adobe, a couple of big rooms and a lot of attic space for storage. There was also a barn and a half finished chicken house. The wife of the farmer we bought the place from had tried to commit suicide. She had gone mad and her husband couldn't carry on on his own. Ali didn't tell me that until afterwards.

'My own land, my own piece of land. Here is my own home, my very own.' That's what people said and felt about their little muddy barnyard plots. And I must admit, Ali and I felt that way too. But I soon got over it. Not too many people did move back to the country, maybe a few tens of thousands. Very few compared to the millions in Germany. But thousands and hundreds of thousands of persons felt that that was what they wanted to do if they got a chance.

In the Wandervoegel movement people talked about how they were going to get back to the land, to farm. But most never worked toward it. It was just as well they didn't because they would have been impossible as farmers. When they talked about the farms they were going to work they never talked about crops and prices, or in general about the mechanics of farming. They didn't want to know about markets and prices. Making money was almost a dirty word. Instead they talked about the nobility of sweat and toil and the good feel of dirt on your hands, and about how wonderful it would be to look up at the night sky and see the stars above the home you built with your own hands. I think many saw having a farm as a sort of extended trip into the country.

That was pure fantasy. Often we were too tired to look at any stars after working from morning to night. We didn't have the get-togethers on that farm that we had in the city. Everyone was always busy. Ali's best friend, Kurt Rohrbach, who he had bummed around with for many years, had a little plot of land up there too. Even they didn't see too much of each other. I think we saw much less of the country in the year that we were on that farm than when we lived in the city. Besides, the area all through Pomerania was pretty bleak.

Most of those settlers were greenhorns, mainly city people. Some had schooling in agriculture and had learned about how things were supposed to be done, but most had little practical experience. None had the necessary capital. The nearest village, Ickerhoff, was an old peasant village. When the peasants came by these small holder plots they used to laugh about the city gardeners who had come out to farm.

Some of the settlers really were green, I must say. To give you an example, there was one guy there who had just started to farm the year before we arrived. And he had a doctorate in something or another. Well, late in the fall he gathered in a lot of field produce - turnips, potatoes, cabbages, and what not - and

stored it wherever he could. Even in the attic in his house. But the stuff was already frozen; so naturally it all rotted.

Generally, the settlers were decent enough. We got on pretty well with most of the families on the few occasions we had of getting together. But there were also some pretty rotten characters among them. And living on a farm, driving their animals, brutalized them even more. Everything was done by hand, many of them had almost no machinery. Many didn't even have work animals, except wives and children. So that was what their love of the soil and precious freedom came down to. All that hogwash about building a new life, putting down roots in the good soil, returning to the land and simplicity. Simple is right. Nonsense. Many of those types really wanted to be estate owners, which of course was quite impossible no matter how hard they worked or how miserly they were. They really wanted servants and hired men to do the work ultimately while they played the lord. Although they rarely said that openly.

The real peasants who had been in that area for generations looked down on the people who came in to set up these small farms. They called them *Seidler* (settlers). That was a bad word there. There was one family whom I knew somewhat. The owner worked but he also had a couple of hired farm hands. That family had a big solid house and some pretty expensive clothes and belongings - sort of a rich peasant. Most of those wealthy peasants were pretty stingy. They begrudged their help food that they had more than enough of. They only bought things that either could make money for them or serve as a show piece or as an heirloom. They did spend money, when they had it, on heavy silver mugs and decorations and jewelry but never on anything so frivolous as vacations or labour saving appliances for their wives, or schooling or books. You'd see their wives out scrubbing and boiling the laundry in the hot sun and the daughters carrying water from the well. And there were electric pumps and washers already. But no, the husband lorded it in the local inn, drinking, while the wives worked.<sup>29</sup>

During the first winter I continued to work in Berlin and save all the money I earned and Ali worked fixing up that farm. Every few weeks or so I would make a visit out there. The next spring I went out to join him permanently. I had never had a close look at the farm before because Ali was living with friends while he was fixing the place up. We did go over every time I visited but it was only that, a visit. And I only had eyes for Ali on those short visits

anyway. Now that I thought I had to live there permanently I really saw that place for the first time as a home. And my heart sank down into my boots.

It was a wet, grey March day with patches of dirty snow and puddles of mud and mud-spattered houses. Not a sprig of green anywhere and the flat countryside that somehow seemed to press in on you. Forlorn, dirty, cold, and windy. The wind was so strong I couldn't even open the barn door when it blew against it. I thought, 'Oh, oh, what have you let yourself in for.' But I was soon too busy to worry much about fine points. We had to get ready for a thousand baby chicks that were going to be delivered in a few days.

We had so many problems and difficulties in the year and a half we were actually on that farm that one couldn't begin to describe them all. It was like a personal version of *The Egg and I*. When I first read that book, the way the woman described her experiences, I thought it could have been me speaking at times. Only it didn't seem so humorous at the time.

For instance, we bought five brooders made of Plexiglass, which was a new material at the time. They were low spreading huts which the sunlight could penetrate and they were heated by a little alcohol burner in the centre. One day one of them caught fire while I was half inside. Naturally I got stuck trying to get out. Here I was half in and half out of this brooder, stuck, with the Plexiglass around the burner smouldering away. Our dog was trying to pull me out by tugging on my boots. Finally I managed to wriggle out but most of the chicks in there died of smoke. I managed to save a few but most died.

We wanted to raise chickens for egg laying purposes so we got a batch of 200 mature Leghorns, which lay very well. That was besides the thousand baby chicks. The whole wall of the chicken house was filled with tiers of nests. Each bird went into its own nest. When the egg was laid it rolled below the nest into a trough. You didn't have to fight with the hen to get the eggs.

The major trouble was that we couldn't sell the eggs. It was strange. In the cities eggs were very expensive. But we couldn't get any wholesaler to buy them at much above production costs. So we ate eggs - eggs fried, omelettes, scrambled, boiled and in every imaginable combination. They were coming out of my ears. Anybody who visited us always got eggs to take along. Once we had a couple of local peasants' sons helping us repair the barn. We gave them as many eggs to eat as they liked, and some to

take home too. And they ate them by the half dozen. That was quite apart from their wages. Later we heard that those two boys were saying, 'The way they squander their produce, eat as many eggs as they like and give them away, it's no wonder they're going broke.' That was the sort of penny pinching and ingrained miserliness that was common to most peasants. It's the way they survived on those farmlets for generations.

Besides the chickens we had a Shetland pony and a couple of goats - they were mainly pets. Then we had fifty ducks. We intended to sell the ducks but in the meantime they were laying eggs; quite a few. For some reason there was a market for duck eggs. But there was the problem of finding the eggs. The eggs began disappearing. We thought there must be rats or some sort of animal eating them, but you rarely saw any empty shells and we never saw any rats. Finally, we took up the floor of the goat shed and there were row upon row of duck eggs, like somebody had laid cobble stones, along with nests of young rats. We laid poison in rat boxes and that seemed to drive them out or kill them off.

Duck eggs were selling well. So right away Ali decides to buy 300 baby ducklings. But who is going to look after them? Me, of course. Ali built a frame shed for them down by the farm pond and used a huge tarpaulin as a roof. It worked out pretty well at first, until a strong wind carried the whole thing into the pond.

The very day that the ducklings were to arrive who appears but my mother. I don't think she had been out on a farm since she was a child, if then. She was a real daughter of the big city. Any place other than Berlin was a small town. And what wasn't a small town she saw as wasteland. Possibly pretty wasteland, if you went through it by train or out on an occasional picnic, but certainly not a place to live. And our farm sure wasn't pretty. Here she gets out of a *droschka* (horse cab) she'd hired to bring her from the station and her eyes get bigger and bigger. 'Oh my god, oh my god!' were the only things she could say at first. When she came in the house she said 'Litze, pack your things and come home. You don't have to do penance out here for anything.'

Well, she stayed a couple of weeks and took care of the house while I worked on the farm. She never said anything more about coming back to Berlin because she could see that I wanted Ali to have a good try at this life. But I could see that inside her she was thinking 'There's no explaining what people think they should

like' and she was already figuring how long we would stick it before we returned to the city.

I tried growing a garden the first season we were on the farm but nothing much came of it. Gardens take a good deal of weeding and hoeing and tending. You can't just throw the seed in and come along and harvest your vegetables three or four months later as some people seem to think. I just didn't have the time to tend a garden. I worked twenty-five hours of the day, or so it seemed anyway and was usually just exhausted.

During the second spring I planted a garden again and this one was coming along quite nicely - carrots, onions, cabbage and all sorts of stuff. Everything coming up like it was supposed to. Then, one morning, I went out and it looked as if a wave of locusts had hit. Hardly a blade of green left. The ducks had got in and polished everything off in one morning. It was fenced but of course that didn't stop them. They wanted salad greens too. I said, 'O.K., garden or ducks but not both.'

Ali had bought an old Model T truck and was trying to drum up a milk hauling route, because it was clear that the farm wasn't going to bring in much for a long time. He hauled milk from a few farms to the dairy but not enough to make it pay. He did whatever other hauling he could get. As it turned out, I wound up doing most of the work on the farm because he was too busy. I must say, he was on the go from early in the morning till late in the evening. But that still didn't help me any.

Getting around with that old truck required almost as much time for repairs and starting and tuning as it did for driving, especially in the winter. It was almost impossible to start in the winter. We used to warm the engine up by putting a small brooder stove under the hood before cranking. I would sit in the driver's seat and give it spark and throttle and Ali would crank. One time while we were doing that the engine starts to burn. We had just gassed up the day before and the tank was full. The truck was parked in the passage way between the house and the barn and if we had let the truck burn the whole farm would have gone too.

Actually, at that point I wouldn't have cared too much if the place had burned down. I was all for running because if that gas tank had exploded it have been the end of us. 'Never mind, never mind,' yelled Ali, as he always did. 'Push it out, push it out.' So we pushed the truck out and let it roll down the back field and into the pond. I thought, 'Well, so much for the hauling business.' But no such luck. Along came some neighbours with a team of

horses. They pulled the truck out of the pond and although it was all burned out or so it seemed to me, with a few hours of cursing and tinkering they had that rattle-trap running again. At least good enough to get it to the town where he got some more basic repairs.

About that time, the thousand chicks we had bought began to die off like flies. The guy we had bought them from had hatched them too hot and they developed a sickness called White Ruhr. When they were half grown they began to peck at each other. One chicken pecked the behind of another, they actually cannibalized each other. It was a nutritional deficiency. The feeds they had at that time weren't so complete and we didn't know about the various supplements that had to be added under different conditions. I mixed a poultice of loamy earth and plastered the parts of those chickens that had been pecked. It worked pretty well but we still continued to lose them.

There was no end of things that came up. The half grown chickens piled up together under the chicken house to get out of the wind. They piled up so thick that they would crush themselves to death, but they wouldn't go into the chicken house. You had to put them in by hand. That was a job in itself. Some animal started to kill the ducklings and even the adult chickens. It just killed them and left them. I think it was a large water rat. I used to lie in wait in the evenings with a rifle but I never caught him. Crows used to wait in the trees just out of range waiting for the baby chicks, which they would swoop down on. Then there were hawks. One goat died. My dog got distemper and though I saved him he was lame and retarded after. At that point I was ready to leave.

It went on and on. One little crisis after another and no money to show for it. In fact, we were completely broke and deep in debt. That was the result of almost two years of hard work and miserly saving. By that time it was the spring of 1928. We had been there for about a year and a half, but it seemed like an eternity. I said to Ali, 'Listen, you want to stay here and live like this, you stay. But I'm not going to drive myself crazy like the last woman who lived here. No matter what, I'm going.'

Ali kind of saw that it was hopeless too. But then he wanted to go to South America. New lands, open frontiers, building a home in the wilderness. From the frying pan into the fire. It might have been an adventure for him but it was no place to go as an immigrant. The only things that could happen would be that you



would wind up on a tropical version of that chicken farm, or worse. You might wind up working like a serf on some estate. Ali didn't really believe that but we compromised on emigrating to Canada. For some reason we never really considered going to the United States.

We owed money on feed and all sorts of other bills were coming up. We still had most of the payments on the farm to the government. So we sold off the chickens and ducks, gave the remaining goat and pony to the neighbours, packed our bags and left. The feed suppliers and the government could fight it out among themselves for the farm. We had put all that time, hard work, and savings into that place, and the only thing we got when we left was enough money to pay for Ali's passage to Canada and the twenty-five dollars needed as landing money.<sup>30</sup>

Well, Ali went to Canada and I went back to Berlin and got a job in Siemens. I took a room near where I used to live in Wedding. When he had a job and enough money saved up for passage he was going to send for me. We thought it might be for four or five months or so. I was a couple of months pregnant by the time he left but I didn't tell him anything because I thought he would feel obligated to stay and we might get bogged down in Berlin. My mother was living in Spandau again and was working herself. She had only a small apartment with just space for Erna and herself. So I took a small room on my own.

I was about five months pregnant and still riding my bicycle to work. I didn't even look or feel that big. One day coming home from work, I was almost home, a car clips me and knocks me flying. It ran right over the bike and kept on going. I wasn't hurt, I thought, but I started to bleed. Somebody helped me home, up three flights of stairs, and a few hours later I had a miscarriage. And I bled and bled. I don't know what we all thought, but neither I nor anybody else called for a doctor. A couple of the neighbour women next door nursed me and then my mother came for a few days. But I got worse and worse with fever and infection. Finally, they got a doctor and he rushed me to a hospital. There they operated. When I came to I had a scar from one side of my stomach to the other. It was almost a month before I got out of the hospital.

## 5. First Years in Canada (1928-1930)

### *Emigration; Immigration*

Ali was already in Canada and I was recuperating in Berlin. We wrote cheerful letters to each other. Although we both read between the lines and saw that things weren't working out as we hoped. It was only later that we both learned exactly how miserable a time each of us had had.

While we knew something about Canada, we read up about the country to check the impressions we had. The basic outline of our knowledge wasn't that far wrong. By the time we were seriously reading about it we had already decided to emigrate to Canada and it would have taken some pretty drastic expose to change our minds. Once we had started thinking about that step it sort of crystallized in our minds and almost anything we learned could be fitted in as something good or as something to be avoided. But the basic decision to go seemed to make itself.

We didn't expect to get rich and we didn't think the streets were lined with gold. But we figured one could lead a pretty good life in Canada, if you worked and after you got settled in. Of course, we didn't figure on the depression. Moreover, we half expected that you would be less surrounded by restrictions in Canada. I guess it was the feeling of getting a new start, corny as that may sound.

I think what attracted us most was that Canada was still a big country with a lot of open space and nature left but that at the same time it was civilized and orderly in a way South America or even the United States wasn't. We were always pretty certain that once we emigrated it would be for good, although we thought that we probably would like to return to Germany for visits once in a while after we got established.

We had a not too inaccurate idea of the regions and major cities in Canada at that time. Still, the size of the land, the tremendous distances that you covered when travelling, was something neither Ali or I had ever really imagined. At first it was just overwhelming. But that was partly what attracted us. One area that we really didn't know very much about was what the people (the society) were like here. Still, we weren't like Luigi Basco's 'Little Immigrants',<sup>31</sup> if indeed anybody was by that time.

It's hard to put all those feelings and experiences of coming to a new country into words. On the one hand it wasn't all that strange, apart from not knowing the language. Basically, after all, we were all part of the modern world. The feeling of strangeness really only came later, after we left Toronto and were both on the bum so to speak. And Western Canada really was a lot different than the east, at least at that time. Still, we weren't fully prepared for what we found and experienced over the first few years.

The main problems were straight forward enough, just trying to earn a living, learning the language, and getting to know the ropes. What we found the most strange was the pretty free and easy attitude to what you could get away with in some things and the tremendous provincialism in other areas. For example, Ali was once stopped by the police on a Toronto beach for wearing a topless swim suit. Ali, mind you, not me. That was in the first year we were there and we couldn't believe it. On the other hand, in a lot of places you could just go out into the woods and make yourself a cabin and squat there. That was just as unbelievable. In many ways Canada, of that period, turned out to be much more colonial than we expected. Of course, Canada is now very different from what it was forty-five years ago. There was another feeling we had too. The feeling that nobody, not the government nor any group nor even most people you knew seemed to care very much about what happened to you. Although that feeling may have been because we came just as the depression was starting and we were greenhorns to boot.

We had it in mind that Ali would get a job in Toronto and then send for me. Then later on, after we had saved a bit of money, we'd see what it was like in the west. When Ali arrived in Halifax he only had enough money for the train fare to Toronto with about twenty dollars left over. He could speak a little broken English but he was always very quick at picking up languages. So there he was in the summer of 1928, in Toronto. But he couldn't find any work, just a day here and there. With his last money he bought a train ticket to Winnipeg.

In Winnipeg he was lucky and got a job as a window washer almost immediately. He was at that for only a few weeks when somebody tried to steal his coat. Ali went after the guy and got stabbed in the chest in the process. He was laid up in his room with that wound for about ten days and when he came back to his

job the employer had given it to someone else. In those days if something happened to you it was just too bad.

It was still summer and when he got well enough to travel he headed out into the prairies. By that time he had learned about riding the freights. It didn't take long before he got a job as a hired man with a farmer in Manitoba somewhere. But he didn't stay there long. The job only paid fifteen or twenty dollars a month plus room and board.

Ali did have a pretty humorous experience there. Apparently electricity had just been brought in in that farming region and the guy Ali was working for thought that only Canada and America would have anything like electric lights. That was really typical of the way a lot of people here then saw the world - every place other than their little patch was backward, especially Europe. So, during the first day Ali was working on that farm, the owner, with a great deal of flourish, led Ali into the house, pointed to the light bulb, and turned on the switch. 'Light without lantern,' he said, pointing, expecting I don't know what. Ali of course burst out laughing.

Harvesting had already started in Saskatchewan and the story was that it paid pretty well. Hard work but good pay, if you could stand the pace. So Ali headed out to where the harvesting was. They already had mechanical harvesting machines at that time but they still used an awful lot of men to bring in the wheat crop. Even so, there were more men than there were jobs. Ali did some harvest work somewhere west of Moose Jaw but all in all he didn't come out with much of a stake when it was all finished. Actually, the depression was already setting in for many of the farmers and cash was getting pretty scarce. Seeing that there wasn't anything doing on the prairies, Ali and a friend he had made rode the freights back to Toronto.

He managed to get an odd day's work in Toronto, enough to keep himself going. But that wasn't the point. He wanted to get a job that would allow him to bring me over. So, late in the fall Ali and another guy decided to head out to Vancouver and try their luck there. That was late in the fall of 1928 and the trains were already full of men. Some rode on the top, others on flatcars and others inside the boxcars, when they could get in. Ali had all sorts of stories about his experiences riding the freights. How two trains would pass each other, one going east and the other going west, both of them full of men. Stories about how they were chased by railway detectives, and about various places

where he had jungled-up and how they had gotten together the ingredients for their slumgullion at different times. There were some real hoboes who had gotten used to that kind of life and didn't want anything else. But most of the men tramping around like that were more or less like Ali. They were mainly riding the rods from one end of the country to the other looking for jobs. Anyway, as far as we were concerned, the depression was already on in 1928. Although it got much worse after 1930.

Ali and his partner hit Vancouver late in December. He and his friend were able to get a job shovelling snow for the city and they made enough to build up a bit of a stake. The trouble was that the city wouldn't pay until the end of the month. So Ali and his partner panhandled for meals when they weren't working. It was Christmas time and people were sentimental when they might otherwise have passed them by. They slept in missions and in empty houses and somehow they got by until they received their pay. They stayed around Vancouver looking for work for a while and then headed up into the interior of British Columbia to find work. But of course they couldn't find anything. Then, in the middle of the winter, they crisscrossed the prairies, going from one town to another looking for work. Always without money and usually hungry and cold. Just imagine riding the freights in the snow and winter rain. Not only were they half starved, they almost froze. Some people actually did freeze to death on the trains, or lost their grip and fell under the wheels. There was a man we later knew who lived on Wall Street who did lose his leg that way.

Sometimes they got on the wrong train and wound up in places they had no intention of going to. Occasionally they got a day's job here or there or made their meals by sawing and splitting wood. They were barely surviving and in fact were becoming pretty run down physically. Finally they headed east again and landed up in Toronto in the very early spring of 1929.

As luck would have it, Ali managed to get a job as a maintenance painter in the Goodyear Tire factory. That was the first regular job he had in almost a year. He didn't tell me most of the hard times he had in his letters and we only talked about them later. It was still the plan that I would come over as soon as he had the passage money. Fares were relatively more expensive then. It was more than five or six hundred dollars fare from Germany to Canada in today's terms. There were no such things as 'travel now, pay later' schemes. Despite both of us working

and saving every penny we could, we still weren't making much headway in saving up the fare. There was also increasing talk around about stopping immigration into Canada. Luckily, Ali had gotten to know a guy by the name of Kurt Schroeder who had some money saved up and who had a fiancée in Hamburg whom he wanted to bring to Canada. She was terribly afraid of water. So this Schroeder advanced the money for my passage on the proviso that I would accompany his fiancée on the boat.

All right, fine and good. I was all set and within two weeks after I got the passage money I set out with this Olga Bush. Off we go. We weren't even out of the harbour yet when Olga gets deathly seasick. On top of that, a few days out and we run into a terrific storm. That was in late March of 1929 and there can be some pretty stormy weather on the Atlantic then. The ship, the *Cleveland*, had just come out of drydock for repairs. Just as we were out of the worst of the storm the engines broke down. For one day the ship was more under water than above. That was a bit frightening. But, all in all it was a big adventure for me and I enjoyed it. Olga and I had a room together. We were in a second class cabin but it was pretty high style. The ship was divided into all sorts of areas where you weren't supposed to go, depending upon what class passage you had paid for. I don't think people would stand for that kind of nonsense today. But I went wherever I pleased.

After the first day, even before we hit the storm, Olga was so ill that I got her into the sick bay and there she stayed until we reached Quebec. At times she really thought she was dying. She was rather melodramatic that way. I used to sit with her every day, and although I felt sorry for her I was also getting a little fed up with her complaints too. I wanted to enjoy the crossing. Apart from the few days of the storm when most passengers were holed up in their rooms, everybody got together and visited. There weren't too many passengers on the ship anyway. There were some tremendous feasts that they laid on in the dining room. I'd hardly ever seen spreads like that. The day before we landed the ship threw a big masquerade ball; they even provided crepe paper costumes for everybody to wear. Singing and dancing and a little bit to drink, very nice. It was my one real pleasure trip and I must say that I enjoyed it.

Actually entering Canada was uneventful. We had no trouble with Immigration or anything else and we took a train straight from Quebec to Toronto. I don't even remember what my first

impressions of Canada were, or if I had very many. I was too excited about seeing Ali again to have much interest in other things. We wired ahead and both the men were at the station to meet us. Ali already had a small furnished flat and after a few days it was almost as if the year in between hadn't existed.

### *Toronto the Good*

The first place we lived in was run by a woman who was like a caricature of the buttinsky landlady. She, or somebody from her family, would always watch you from behind the curtain every time you came or left the place. We weren't supposed to have any friends in or make any noise after ten o'clock in the evening. We used to walk around in stockinged feet and still she would say, 'Oh, my husband couldn't sleep last night; too much noise.' She used to catch Ali coming from work and complain to him. I couldn't understand English yet but he was pretty fluent. When she started complaining that I was using up too much water by taking a bath every day we decided that that was the limit. So we told her what she could do with her flat. It was fairly expensive too.

Toronto, then as now, was piled high with recent and not so recent immigrants. There was a whole industry, a whole strata of people who made their money to a large extent from the inexperience of greenhorns like us. It's an old story, the so-called employment agencies that you paid but which didn't find you jobs, or if they did they took a big rake-off. Or the employers who hired immigrants but paid them less than they paid already established Canadians. It wasn't just the sweatshops that had that practice either, but big companies. And there were the downright confidence tricks, like selling training courses, or partnerships or houses to those who had a little money. We were usually too cautious to be taken in by those schemes; besides, we didn't have any money to lose. But some people did. Still, a number of things happened to us, little things, mainly because we were greenhorns.

For instance, one day while I was walking around the city I just collapsed on the street. I had had a very bad time during the last months in Germany and was still pretty weak. I hadn't had the rest to build up my strength. Somebody got me to a doctor's office that was nearby. This doctor looked me over and asked me a few questions and then gave me a prescription. He had me

come back twice a week for the next two weeks for checkups, which consisted of him asking me how I felt. Actually, all I needed was good food and a lot of rest. Finally he presented me with a bill of eighty dollars for his services. That would be fairly high even today but in those times it was like five hundred dollars or more. I said to myself, 'If he had charged a reasonable fee, let's say twenty dollars, I would have dug into our meagre savings and paid him. But seeing he's so greedy and is trying to swindle me and thinks he can get away with that on a greenhorn immigrant, I won't give him anything.' And I didn't.

Another experience like that was the second apartment we moved into. It was the top floor of a private house. Fairly small but quite pleasant, in a neighbourhood with trees and open space. What we didn't know was that the house had been condemned and abandoned and the people we were renting from were only squatting themselves. Somehow they had managed to get the water and electricity turned on. The man worked, and in some ways they were pleasant enough people. But almost every time that the husband would get drunk, which was every Saturday, regular as clockwork, they would fight. It would often end up with him beating up his wife or chasing her around yelling he was going to kill her. Then she would run up to our place. After a few months we moved out.

Ali had already made a number of friends in Toronto. He was always outgoing and effusive and met scads of people wherever he went. There was one couple we used to visit fairly often, he was Norwegian and she was Canadian. Sometimes just Ali and I went but usually we were with other couples that he knew. Often we went swimming in the lake but most Sundays we used to walk in the hills around Toronto. They've probably all been bulldozed away or covered over with houses by now, but at that time there were little hills and valleys and streams right around the city where you could walk.

I wanted a job too but I still couldn't speak any English, apart from a few stock phrases. I had a grammar book and a phonetic dictionary and I started out reading 'True Romances' and 'True Detective,' those sorts of magazines. They were just what I needed. The stories and the words and the constructions they use in them are very simple. And the story lines and plots are primitive and predictable. I'd write down every word in English I didn't know, which in the beginning was most of them. Then I'd write the German equivalent and try to pronounce the English



word. Later on, when I had a fair stock of words, I'd make up imaginary dialogues. Ali helped me but what I really needed was somebody who could speak the language, because often my sentences weren't understandable. I made up my own phrase book of sentences that I thought I should have for going shopping and for chance conversations in the park and things like that. The first talking movies were coming in about then and I went to them fairly often, too. There were quite helpful.

All in all, I learned English relatively quickly after I had the basics down well enough so that I could carry out the rudiments of a conversation. In less than two years I read what were then modern novels in English without any trouble. Of course I used the dictionary quite a bit. In fact I still do now, when I'm reading, because there are a lot of words in print that you never hear spoken or that you can guess at but don't know the exact meaning of. The trouble is now that I forget more words than I learn, so it's a losing proposition.

We wanted to pay off the money we had borrowed from Schroeder as fast as we could. We didn't want that debt hanging over our heads. Each pay day we took out the rent money and a strictly limited amount for food, and the rest we immediately gave to Schroeder. We never had any money to spend on non-essentials. After about three months I decided to look for work so that we could finish paying Schroeder and get a little stake together. Besides I had had enough of sitting around home all day or going for walks.

So I tramped the streets up and down, going to all the factories I could find, looking for work. Before too long I got one at Neilson's Chocolates. My first job was wrapping sampler rolls of life savers. There were about twenty of us working in one room, all girls. And most were fairly recent immigrants. There wasn't any machinery and you didn't really have to concentrate on what you were doing so there was a lot of talk. It was a real babel of tongues. Everybody spoke a little broken English, some spoke Italian, others spoke Polish or Ukrainian. One girl who worked beside me spoke a dialect of Yiddish which was fairly close to German. So our conversations would be a combination of English, Yiddish and German. Working in a place like that, talking all the time, was a pretty good way to learn the language and I improved pretty quickly.

After working at Neilson's for about two months I found out that there was a minimum wage law that covered the sort of

work that we were doing. Most of us were only getting ten dollars a week while the minimum wage was twelve fifty. I talked to some of the other girls there about it and what they thought we should do. But most were afraid of losing their jobs if they said anything. Nobody wanted to go to the boss and ask for the raise to the minimum wage. I thought, 'If they're going to take that lying down, to hell with them. I'll go myself, and if I get fired, so what.' A year later I wouldn't have said that. I'd have been tickled pink to have a job for ten dollars a week.

That night I painstakingly composed what I wanted to say to the personnel manager. I wrote it out and memorized it. The next day I went to see his assistant, a woman of about fifty. I got a bit flustered so I just read from the note I had made. It went something to the effect, 'There seems to be a law which says that people working in factories doing my sort of job should receive a minimum of twelve dollars and fifty cents a week but I am only being paid ten dollars a week. Can you please explain this to me? I am very interested because I am eager to know how these things work in Canada.' Stilted and polite, but the point was there. They knew that I wanted something more than an explanation. Well the assistant went right into the personnel manager and in a few minutes she came out again. 'Everything is all right dear. The regulations don't work quite the way you think but Mr. So and So has found you a position where you'll be able to earn the twelve fifty and possibly a little more, if you apply yourself. Don't worry, everything will be alright.'

Right there and then they transferred me to another part of the plant. They didn't want me going back to the first section and talking anymore to the women there. I was supposed to wrap chocolate bars on a piece rate. You had to wrap a pretty high quota of bars in order to stay on. I think it was ten dozen boxes of ten bars each per hour. There was the inner wrapper and the envelope that had to go on each bar. They probably figured that I'd never be able to keep up and that they could let me go without any trouble. But I had worked wrapping chocolates before, in Germany. After a few hours practice I was right back in the swing of it. I was always pretty fast at my work once I had a system worked out. Of course not anymore. Now I'm a slowpoke, the king of slowpokes.

Our early impressions of Canada, what were they? It's hard now, after so many years with so many changes, to keep straight what we knew and felt then. Toronto was a relatively

small and provincial town compared to what I was used to. There was at least the beginnings of social security in Germany. None of it was enough or universal but it was a start. Here there was absolutely nothing. You have to remember that things like (Workman's) compensation, old age pensions, and welfare or any kind of social security only started slowly around the Second World War in Canada.

Then too, we were used to a long tradition of socialism in Germany. There were millions of people who were socialists, some for two or three generations. But here, socialism was still thought of by some people as some crack pot fantasy or some foreign plot. The churches really had a big say here in Canada. Now, today, it seems almost as if it's the other way around, judging from the people I meet coming from Germany after the (Second World) War.

Of course there were socialists and other decent people in Toronto in 1930. But they were relatively few and they were sort of isolated from anything to back them up. Actually B.C. was much better that way, even though it was supposedly a backland compared to Toronto. Of the other parts of Canada I can't say because I didn't see much of them for myself.<sup>32</sup>

What I think I really missed the most, and was most astounded not to find, was lack of social (i.e. cultural) facilities here in Canada available to ordinary people. Of course there were plenty of people here, and in Berlin, as everywhere who never did anything except visit their families, talk about their work and children, and go to their local pubs. But in my day, in Berlin, as in the other big cities of the world, there had developed all sorts of ways for ordinary people to have as full a round of plays and lectures and what not, as they wanted. Museums were next to free, tickets to opera and theatre were very cheap if you didn't mind poor seats. There were zoos. There were all sorts of well stocked public and loan libraries around. There was very little of that here. And that really did shock me. Now, of course, it is different. All of that exists here now too.

Of course, every time you said anything that compared Canada or some conditions here unfavorably with conditions elsewhere, or even compared it to what could be, nobody wanted to listen. Always somebody would say, 'If you don't like it here, why don't you go back to where you came from,' or something like that. That was almost like a catechism for some people. As if that were an answer to anything. As if things were so perfect here,

or any place else, that they couldn't stand a lot of improvement. Most of the time, if you told people about some promising starts that there had been in Germany at one time, they just looked at you like you were a Nazi. So I gave up talking about those things.

In any case, a few months after I started work at Neilson's, we rented a house in Mimico. Not an apartment, but a whole house. It was old and fairly small but we had it all to ourselves. It even had a small yard. Mimico was half country at that time. There were plenty of open areas and you could walk to the beach everywhere. Fall, winter and spring, it was always beautiful there, or so it seemed. In the spring we used to walk down to the Humber River almost every evening. There were open fields and bullrushes and little groves of trees along the Humber then. Just like being out in the country yet within a streetcar ride of downtown. That's still the picture I have of Toronto. I suppose it's all changed now. Just another sprawling, crowded big city.

I began to think, 'Boy, maybe there really is something to these tales of earning, if not your fortune, then at least a good living in Canada.' Things were beginning to look pretty good. Ali was working steady and so was I. We had a nice place to live and had a number of friends whom we visited. We were out of debt and were even putting thirty or forty dollars away a month without scrimping. That was a fair amount of money in those days. We were even beginning to think of settling in Toronto permanently.

Then, in the spring of 1930 Ali was laid off along with about half the crew of the Goodyear plant. My job lasted about a month longer and then I was laid off too. Times got worse and worse. Most of the money we had saved disappeared as we tried to find jobs around Toronto. Finally Ali said, 'We've got to do something. We've got to get out of here. I'll go take a look around the country. Somewhere there must be jobs. When I find something I'll send for you.'

In the meantime I was supposed to find a job as a domestic. That was about the only work for women which was still available. If you lived in as a maid you got your room and board and that was about it. I wasn't going to do that no matter what happened. Day work, where you worked all day washing and cleaning for some family paid so little that you couldn't even support yourself in the long run. I hated the idea of working as a domestic for anybody. But there was no other real choice. We sold what furniture and belongings we had because we couldn't store or cart them around anyway. With what we got for them and what

little we had left in savings we had a grand total of about a hundred dollars. Ali took twenty dollars and I kept the rest. Then he left for parts unknown to try to find a job.

At first I stayed with some friends, the Harvesters, who lived near Yonge Street north of Eglinton. That was almost the edge of the city at that time. Agnes Harvester went around with me in that search for a job because my English wasn't all that good yet. I could read fairly well and understand most of what was said but I couldn't express myself very well, especially when it came to job interviews. Everywhere we went the jobs were either taken or they wouldn't take me. Even with their lousy ten dollars a month jobs they could afford to be choosy. I remember we went to one address where a high school teacher advertised for someone to do housework. The woman of the house said, 'Oh, you're German. I wouldn't dream of hiring a German girl. I don't forget the war that easily.' As if I had anything to do with the war. I was sort of taken aback and my English wasn't very good when I got flustered. But Agnes, who was with me, got her Scotch dander up and really told that woman off. All that took place on the doorstep if you can imagine. You found that patriotic attitude among people scattered throughout the country. But I think that Toronto had more than its fair share of that sort of stupidity.

Finally I got a job with a family, the Christies, who had a house down by the beach. They were a lovely family, friendly and considerate. They had four children and a good deal of my job was to take care of them, cooking and taking them for walks and babysitting. I also cleaned up the house and washed and did general housekeeping chores.

The trouble was that I was about two months pregnant when Ali left. Again, I didn't say anything about it to him because he had enough to worry about. I'd been working for this family for about three months and I was about five months along. It was beginning to show. When one day, right on the stairs, I had another miscarriage. It was really bad. I just keeled over and started bleeding furiously. Luckily Mrs. Christie was home, because I could hardly move. She called an ambulance right away and got me off to the hospital. I passed out on the way there and when I came to I was in the emergency ward. They stopped the worst of the bleeding and then shipped me off to a ward. A few hours later I started to go into labor pains. But no matter how much I called no nurses came. In a matter of half an hour I delivered my dead baby, all by myself, in that hospital. Of course, if you tell

people these things they think you are just making them up. But there are all sorts of things which happen like that which are almost unbelievable unless you've experienced them. During the first miscarriage I had, in Berlin, it somehow didn't seem real that I had lost a baby. But this time it was real enough. There it was right in my hands, a small but well formed baby. But dead. By that time a nurse had come along and she called a doctor and he finished the whole thing off. At that point I passed out again.

Later on the same night I awoke again with this terrible pain, the most terrible pains I've ever known. I kept ringing for a nurse. I wanted her to bring a doctor or a painkiller or something. But no, they just told me to go to sleep. Think of it, 'Go to sleep.' After awhile they didn't even come any more when I rang. At times I was screaming, literally screaming with pain.

Now, I've always been pretty tough but that time I just couldn't stand it anymore. I dragged myself out of bed and over to the window. I was going to jump out and kill myself. There comes a point, no matter how strong you are or what you tell yourself, that you can't stand a certain degree of pain anymore. That goes for everybody. But one of the other patients must have seen me and had gotten a nurse. She grabbed me just as I was trying to open the window. Of course, you can never tell what you will do at the last moment, but I thought I was going to jump. Then finally they doped me up good and the next morning they wheeled me into the operating room. I'm not sure what they did but when I awoke two days later I had a second set of stitches across my stomach.

For the first week after that I didn't care what happened. I didn't even notice what was going on around me. But as soon as I was a little better the doctors and the nurses and some pencil pushers started to badger me. Where was my husband? What did I do that brought the miscarriage on? Did I have the money to pay for the hospital bill? Finally I convinced them that Ali would be returning from a job up north with money and I gave them the address of the family I was staying with. They had to be satisfied with that.

I was in the hospital for almost three weeks and when I came out I was still extremely weak. I really did look like death warmed over - anemic, with an almost pale green complexion. The Harvesters asked me to stay with them again. I had been there about two weeks, recuperating, when a letter arrives from the Department of Immigration saying I could expect deportation

proceedings to be started against me. I was a recent immigrant and I couldn't pay the hospital bill and besides the doctors wouldn't believe that I was married. They probably thought that I had tried to have an abortion. All that was more than enough reason to deport you at that time. The official reason was that I had shown myself to be a charge on the government.

In any case, I couldn't pay the hospital bill and I wasn't going to wait around and see what the results would be. As luck would have it, Ali had just written the week before saying that he had a job on a tugboat working out of Sault Ste. Marie. So when I got that letter from the Immigration Department I decided to beat it right away. Now, I wonder if that letter really did come from the Immigration Department or whether it was a scheme cooked up by the hospital to get their money. Of course, at that time I was in no position to take the chance that it was a hoax. I beat it to Sault Ste. Marie.

### *Heading West*

Sault Ste. Marie was really a very small town in those days. I got a room in a hotel that was a sort of family boarding house. The next day I went down to the office of the tug company that Ali worked for and asked about him. 'Oh yes, he's on the such and such tug. They're still forty miles out. They won't be in for a couple of days.' I just couldn't believe it. I figured that they had to get in by later that day if they were only forty miles away. So I waited and waited down by the pier. I was still weak and ill and frightened and very, very lonely. It seemed to be forever that I waited. I went back to the hotel and back to the pier. And sure enough, it was almost two days before that tug got in. That was the only time that I ever seriously considered going back to Germany. I was lonely and homesick and depressed. 'Whatever else happens, no matter what, I'm going to stick close to Ali,' I said to myself.

We found a housekeeping room in a family house. Ali was making a hundred and ten dollars a month cooking on the tug, which was absolutely top salary in those times when you were lucky to have any job at all. It was his first job cooking. The trouble was that pretty soon the company started laying up their tugs one by one, That was in the summer of 1930. Even the lumber and paper industry was beginning to close up and with them went the tugs which hauled the booms. We could see the

handwriting on the wall so we decide that I should try and get a job and make whatever money I could to give us a bit of a stake to go west when it came Ali's turn to be laid off. We saved almost ninety dollars of his monthly check.

I got a few odd day jobs here and there but in most of them I made next to nothing. Once I helped a very old couple for a couple of weeks. But they were so poor that I was embarrassed to take their money and made up a story about how I had to leave and that they should keep my pay until I got back. It was only a few dollars anyway and they needed it even worse than we did. I looked after the children of one family when the wife went to hospital. They did have some money, not much but they weren't hurting. They tried to wheedle their way out of paying the twelve dollars they owed me. So I took the husband's watch until they paid me. Actually, the only memorable thing which occurred to me in Sault St. Marie was in connection with that family.

Every day I went to that family's place and I always passed a garage that had a tame bear chained to the side of the building. I felt sorry for the bear and after a while I got up enough nerve to go over and make friends with him. After that I used to bring along little tidbits - few lumps of sugar, a bun, an apple. It got so that I could touch him and he would sit and daintily take what I had brought along. He took it very carefully out of my hand.

A week or so later I decided that I was going to show the little girl of the family I worked for the new friend I'd made. So we walked over to where the garage was. I had her stand behind me and very slowly we went over to the bear, because I didn't want to startle him. As soon as I got close to him he made a lunge at the girl and tried to swat her. Automatically I grabbed her and jumped back. The owner of the garage came running out, roaring mad. 'What do you think you're doing. Don't you have enough sense to leave bears alone, let alone bringing a kid along.' I couldn't understand why the bear had acted that way but I must say it was pretty stupid on my part. Later I thought maybe he was jealous because I had that girl with me or maybe he thought it was one of his cubs. I don't know. How should I know how bears think or what they think? But then and there I decided that however beautiful wild animals are they should be let alone. By the same token they shouldn't be chained up or even kept in most of those so-called zoos that you see around

Finally Ali's ship was laid up, it was the last to go. When he was laid off we decided to clear out and head west right away, before



we used up any of the little money we had saved. After Sault Ste. Marie I trailed after Ali as close as I could. We wanted to establish ourselves somewhere. We didn't want to float around the country separated all the time.

First we went to Winnipeg and Ali got a few odd day jobs there, loading and unloading boxcars and other things like that. But nothing with any prospects of permanence. By that time we wanted to go to Vancouver. Ali had hooked up with a guy by the name of Fritz Kurtzbach. He was about ten years older than us and had been in the country for a number of years, although he was in the same straits we were. There was also a young guy who had just come over from Ireland. We all chipped in and bought an old Model T Ford, a sort of two seater with a convertible top and a rumble seat. We were going to drive to Vancouver and while the weather was good it was a wonderful trip. No much money but a great adventure, we felt. Changing scenery, friendly company, lots of talk and quite a bit of enthusiasm. Sometimes we'd be singing away at the top of our lungs the songs we knew in English. One I remember was a parody of 'My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean' which had a verse which went 'Last night as I lay on my pillow, last night as I lay on my bed. I stuck my feet out of the window, and now all my neighbours are dead. Bring back, bring back, oh bring back my neighbours to me, to me'. And so on and so forth.

It was early September 1930. We didn't make much time, maybe a hundred and fifty miles a day, two hundred at the most. There were continual minor repairs and adjustments to make and we were constantly sitting and fixing the inner tubes. Our suitcases and boxes and bunch of spare tires were tied to the back of the rumble seat. There was always somebody sitting in the back fixing the inner tubes. If we drove thirty or so miles without a flat we considered ourselves lucky. The whole car was pretty haywire but as long as it continued to run we were going to stay with it.

We tried to stay in some farmer's house or barn each night. Either the boys worked off the room and meals or they paid a dollar or so. We still had a little money but we were saving it as much as possible for gas. Most of the farmers were quite willing to exchange a place to sleep and a meal for a few hours work by those three guys. And they seemed to enjoy having us as company, strangers talking about what we had seen and where we were from. Of course, that was a long time ago. But all those

farmers, without exception, were great to us. We were determined we were going to reach Vancouver before our money ran out. We had it all budgeted out so that we should have reached the coast with a little surplus left in our jeans. What with working for our room and board we didn't need much money except for gas.

One farmer we stopped with just west of Moose Jaw was exceptionally kind to us. We saw that farm away off in the distance. It had a bunch of trees planted around it and it looked like an oasis. So we went in and made our usual pitch and the owner said it was fine with him. In fact he wanted us to stay a few days to rest up, but I got a real scare there.

I used to love horses, though I rarely had the opportunity to ride any. To tell the truth I was also a little afraid of them. There were two big draught horses hitched up to a heavy farm wagon standing near the front of the house and I was saying how beautiful they looked. The farmer said, 'If you like them so much hop up and see how they feel.' I went over and touched them and stroked them, getting up my nerve. They seemed to like it so I climbed up on one and sat there a few minutes, joking with the rest of the bunch. I had just gotten off when one of those horses gave a leap and they were off. There was no stopping them. They ran in circles around the yard, banging the wagon against anything in its way. The wagon was smashed to pieces although the horses didn't seem to be hurt. That poor farmer. I felt so terribly guilty because I thought I might have done something to spook the horses. But he said, 'No. It wasn't anything you did' and even after that he wanted us to stay for a while. We did stay for two days and then we had to be off.

Those years were already pretty bad for the farmers. Everywhere you drove you saw abandoned farmhouses and empty barns, some already falling apart but others recently abandoned. Anyway, here it was in late September and we got stuck in an early snow storm. Actually it was more like a blizzard. It started in the early afternoon and it soon got so bad that you couldn't see anything. There we were sitting on the open prairie in an open car that broke down every few hours. Then we lost the main road, you couldn't call it a highway because in some places you could drive right off it without knowing it. We were all freezing but we kept on driving because there was nothing else to do. Finally we saw a house off to the side of the road. That was purely by chance because by this time we were going up a little

used side road. That house was right by the side of the trace otherwise we never would have seen it. The people living there gave us some tea and hot food and a warm place to sleep. They even gave us a shot of whiskey. The blizzard stopped that evening and the next morning a hot sun came out. By mid afternoon most of the snow had already melted. I thought, ' God, what a country fall, winter and spring all within twenty-four hours. Let's get out of here quick'.

A couple of days later we got to Medicine Hat where we stayed in a municipal park, then a tent camp. We were there two days because there were serious repairs that had to be made on the car and the garage had to get the parts from Calgary. That knocked us for a loop because the repairs cost almost as much as the car did. We started out for Calgary but by the time we got there it was clear that the only way that old jalopy was going to get over the mountains was if we pushed it. Even on the small rolling hills, less than hills, leading into Calgary you had to put the car into reverse and back up some of them. Somehow Ali managed to sell the car for twenty or twenty-five dollars. The other two guys took their share. The money Ali and I had left was just enough to buy me a train fare to Vancouver. They saw me off and then went down to see if they could catch a freight to the coast.

## 6. The Depression in Vancouver (1930-1934)

### *On Wall Street*

I arrived in Vancouver with twenty-five cents in my pocket and the soles coming off my shoes.<sup>34</sup> They were tacked together with thread. The first thing I did was to find a pawnshop. I had Ali's wedding ring, which he never wore, with me. I sold that outright and pawned my own wedding ring, which I lost before I could redeem it; it was a beautiful ring, gold with a little ruby in it. I just loved it. Those pawnbrokers knew how to press people out. You had to be pretty desperate to go to them and they knew that. They gave me seven or eight dollars for both the rings and with that money I bought myself a pair of sturdy shoes, had a big meal for a quarter, and got myself a room at the Y.W.C.A. for fifty cents a night.

The plan was for me to wait at the main entrance to the C.P.R. station on Cordova and Granville. At the time that corner was the hub of the city, what with people coming and going from the boats and trains. I was a little leery about sitting on the corner all day by myself. A few people sat down to talk to me but nobody gave me any trouble. About three days later my money gave out and they tossed me out of the 'Y'; no money no bed. I was sitting in front of the C.P.R. station pretty forlorn, wondering what I was going to do now, when up comes Ali. Rescued in the nick of time. They had gotten in the night before and had been around town scrounging up something to eat because they hadn't had any food for the last couple of days.

Ali knew of a place in Vancouver that took in destitute girls until they found their footing. It was the Grey Sisters Refuge up near sixteenth and Granville. You were supposed to pay four dollars a week for room and board but if you didn't have any money, which was the case of almost all the girls staying there, you could pay it back whenever you had a job. And if you never paid it back that was alright too. They even deducted a couple of dollars per week from that amount if you helped cleaning and washing around the place. All the girls there were unemployed; there must have been fifteen or twenty of us. We did the cleaning and tidying up and sometimes helped with the cooking. It was a huge old mansion with beautiful grounds. The Mother Superior was a quite attractive woman in her early forties who

had a wonderful trained voice. She used to play the piano and many of us girls sang. The other nuns, about six or seven of them, were quite an assortment of personalities. All pleasant, without exception. They used to mix and talk with us quite freely and without the holier-than-thou attitude that I expected. It was rather different than my conception of what nuns and a convent would be like.

The trouble was that Ali told them that I was Catholic in order to get me in. I soon found out that that lie wasn't necessary because they took in people of all sorts. He also told them that I was single and that was necessary because they didn't take any married women. Their view was that a wife's place was with her husband regardless of anything and they didn't want any part of breaking up a family. A little unrealistic to say the least, considering the times.

After a week or so Ali had found a place to stay in the east end of the city. He bunked with ten other young men in an old three room house on Wall street, overlooking Terminal dock. They were all unemployed and living from hand to mouth by odd jobs and panhandling and whatever. I looked around for whatever jobs might be available but it soon became clear that there was nothing. Absolutely no jobs to be had. So for a while I stopped looking. I used to walk down to Wall street from the Grey Sisters, spend the day there and walk back in the evening. That was a fifteen mile walk each day but we didn't think much of it then.

One day, who should turn up but Agnes Harvester's brother. He was a wonderful person, later killed in the Second World War. He was on the bum too and for short while he moved in with that bunch on Wall street. After few weeks or so he got lucky and landed a job in a small fish and chip shop on Fourth Avenue. When I say lucky I mean he got a job that paid eight dollars a week for fifty hours of work split up over two shifts. Sometimes he used to walk me down to Wall street if he was free. Sometimes he also managed to sneak out some fish and chips and we would stop in a park and eat them. That was a luxury although for twenty cents you got more than you could eat. Walking those six or seven miles from the refuge to Wall street you were approached a dozen times by people asking for a handout, despite the fact that we looked pretty poor ourselves. Especially on the Granville street bridge; panhandlers congregated there so thick that we would be approached three or four times from one end of it to

the other. It wasn't even 'Brother, can you spare a dime?' It was a nickle for a cup of coffee. At that time we didn't even have a nickle ourselves, often. But later on when Ali had a job I always tried to give a few people a nickle or a dime if they asked me. You couldn't give it to everyone who asked of course.

Looking back at it now it seems we took all those things that happened pretty calmly. That's not to say we accepted it. But we were young and resilient and besides what else could you do. Things were all right at the Grey Sisters except that every Sunday we were supposed to go to church and confession. They took all the girls who were or who were supposed to be Catholic down to the old cathedral on Dunsmuir street. 'When are you going to confession?' they started to press me. I always made up some excuse - I was ill or I couldn't speak English well enough or something. But it was pretty transparent. It was January of 1931 and I had been in the Refuge for a little over three months. One day the Mother Superior said to me. 'I've got a lovely surprise for you. I found a German-speaking Father who will come and take your confession right here. You don;t have to be upset about anything.'

I didn't want to face that priest for love nor money. As soon as he would have talked to me they would have found out that I wasn't Catholic and that I had been lying. Under the circumstances, seeing that they had been pretty good to me, I would have been embarrassed to death. The next morning I went down to Wall street and told Ali the story and he talked it over with all the other boys there. They were all very understanding. 'That's okay. We'll make room for you here. You and Ali can have the small room and we'll manage in the living room.' There were only two rooms and a small kitchen. So they moved their few belongings into the main room and I went back to the Refuge and said I'd found a domestic job where you had to live in and that I had to start the next morning. A little later Ali came along and carried my things back to Wall street. The Mother Superior probably knew that there was something fishy about the whole story but she was very nice and didn't say anything.

Of course we didn't have any furniture. There was just a table and few chairs in the house, The boys slept on the floor in their bedrolls which they folded away each morning. The guys in that house would go out looking for whatever jobs they could get. Shovelling snow in winter or cutting grass in the summer or helping to unload and load freight or anything they could find. A

lot of people still used fire wood for fuel and those guys would go from house to house offering to cut and split a cord of wood for a quarter, I think. They offered to do any odd jobs that the householder might have, like cleaning up a garden or toting some heavy boxes around for whatever the person could afford. There was a whole stream of men going from door to door doing that. If they couldn't find anything at all they would resort to outright begging, either on the street or going from door to door. Or they might go to various butcher shops and vegetable stores to see if they could find any bones or wilted produce to make mulligan stew.

There wasn't a hope of steady jobs of any sort at that time, especially not for recent immigrants. During the hungry thirties there were many ads in the papers saying that so and so would pay twenty-five or fifty dollars for a steady job. That was just an invitation to those who had the power to give jobs to take a rake-off. People worked twelve hour shifts in places like the White Lunch for eight dollars a week and one meal a day. The boys would usually bring home twenty-five cents a day, sometimes just a dime. Occasionally some of them would really hit it big and get a days work for maybe two dollars. Often they came home without anything, or maybe just an extra sandwich they had gotten somewhere. Actually, it wasn't too bad once you knew you weren't actually going to starve and had a roof over your head. There was a lot of camaraderie. But there wasn't any of this willing bohemianism, at least not among the people we knew. We had had too much of that. We would have all been quite happy to have ordinary eight to five jobs. But there just weren't any.

When we could we also got things from the land, so to speak. Although we were living in the city, Vancouver was comparatively small then. Some of that bunch were always out fishing and crabbing off the log booms and piers. Occasionally somebody would bring a sack of clams along from somewhere; there were mud beaches all along the shore of Burrard inlet then. An especially good spot for clams was just west of Terminal dock. But we were sort of leery about them for some reason and didn't often go clamming there. We had a couple of crab nets and some of the boys would climb out on the boomsticks, tie scraps of food to the nets and then sink them to the bottom. Then you'd pull the whole thing up fast, crabs and all. We had crab meat throughout the worst of the depression. Very tasty but after a while we really had enough of it; it was coming out of our ears.

It was there that I learned to pick and cook stinging nettles. They are delicious as spinach, although I don't know how nutritious it is. During the spring and summer we picked bushels of salmon berries and blackberries; they were growing wild everywhere. After all, that stretch of Vancouver was still half bush and vacant lots. Some of the boys would also make trips out into the Fraser Valley in the spring and summer and often they would bring back a big packsack bulging with vegetables or fruit. You could buy some things for next to nothing from small farms. You could even go out to Burnaby, which was mainly small farms at the time, and in the right season bring back a shopping bag of pick-your-own produce for fifty cents. If we had known how long we were going to stay in that house on Wall street I would have planted a vegetable garden with things you couldn't get easily or cheaply. But we always thought that during the next month or two we were going to find a steady job and leave, And I guess everybody else felt the same way. As it was, Ali and I lived there for almost two years.

There were various cooking arrangements. For a while everybody chipped in whatever they had managed to get and we made one big meal. Later on there were two or three different groups cooking, although we still used to share a lot of things. A number of times during 1931 and 1932 Ali and a friend of his went out to the little fairs in the Fraser Valley. They had built up contacts there and they were often able to stage wrestling and boxing matches, ten rounds usually. They would get the dollars split between the two of them for the event. That money often saved the bacon because it was sometimes the only money we had to pay the rent. Later on Ali also wrestled for the Western Sports Club and even down at the Exhibition Gardens. In fact he did that, off and on, until 1946 or 1947 to pick up a little extra money. But I never liked it.

For a while I tried to get work as a day domestic. I hated it but that was the only thing that there was. If you did get a job you could expect about a dollar a day, Most of the people I met who hired domestics really wanted a slave, somebody they could talk down to. Almost all of those types were miserly. They'd think up no end of ways to save a few pennies even if the hired help had to work twice as hard. Of course, what can you expect from healthy people who hire maids and then complain about how poor they are. Families with little white collar jobs puffed themselves into high and mighty burghers.



I did housework a few times but it just wasn't worth it. At the last place I worked they wouldn't even pay me the three dollars I had coming. So I took this woman's prize soup tureen out of the china cabinet and dropped it on the floor. Naturally it broke into a thousand pieces. I said, 'I'm so sorry, I was going to put it back in its place properly'. But I was obvious enough about it that the woman knew I did it on purpose. Those kinds of people always have to have prize heirlooms, which was usually junk. That tureen probably wasn't worth more than a few dollars anyway and if it was valuable, so much the better. She started ranting, 'I'm going to call my husband and he'll get the police. You'll see what happens.' But what could she do? It was my job to clean up around there, and I did. After that I said, 'No. Never again. Not even if I starve'.

The only dole that Ali and I ever got for the entire time he was alive was two or three weeks on relief during 1931. If you were married you had a chance of getting relief, if you weren't, like all the boys in the house, then forget it. The city just wanted you to pack up and go, no matter where, just get out of town. Relief gave you about two dollars and fifty cents worth of food, for two people, for a week. But they didn't give you the money. You had to trudge down to the relief depot, it was near Cordova and Main, and they handed out whatever they had on hand. Flour, potatoes, some old vegetables, a few scraps of meat that was mainly bone. You didn't even get the two fifty value. But even then, we only got a few weeks before it was cut off.

Ali and I were cut off relief because a woman who lived on the block circulated a smear against me. She went around telling people, 'There's a woman on my street who is living with a dozen men.' Well, you know what that means. She went down to the relief office with that story and they, without checking or anything, immediately cut Ali and me off the rolls. There were no why's and wherefor's in those days. That woman continued on the rampage against us the whole time we lived there. The next Christmas we were supposed to get one of the Christmas hampers that the *Vancouver Sun* gave out to the needy. A family that Ali knew put in our name and we got a note saying that we were going to get one of those hampers. Somehow, I don't know how, this Mrs. McCorky found out about it and right away she went down to the *Sun* offices and told them the story she was circulating against me. We were immediately taken off the list. At the time I didn't know why that was happening but

later on I found out from a women who knew this Mrs. McCorky. She was bragging about how she had fixed the bunch of immoral foreigners on her block.

During 1931 and though most of 1932 Ali and some of the other guys in that house made trips into the interior to look for jobs. Always riding the rails of course. Occasionally they found a few days work but never anything steady, Finally, in desperation, they tried prospecting. They tried all over the place and were gone for a week to four or five weeks at a time. They hoped to find gold or showing of some other minerals they could stake and sell to some mining company. Up in the Cariboo, into the mountains west of the Bridge River country, up the Lillooet River, through the Kootenays. They even got up into the headwaters of the Peace River. Ali went out maybe a half dozen times. The longest trip was in the summer of 1932 when he and five other guys went up into the National River country, north of Fort St. James. They were gone almost three months with nothing to show for it and came back looking like skeletons. Ali had all sorts of stories to tell about their adventures on those trips. But it wasn't really the time for that. Although I don't think Ali minded as much as I did, he was always a pretty adventurous soul.

Some of the country they went into was quite wild in those days. For all their hiking and bumming around, Ali and all of the other guys really didn't know very much about living in the bush. They usually tried to hook up with somebody who knew some thing about prospecting, but I think that most of them could have fallen over a rich (mineral) showing and not known it. For instance, the first time they were out they all brought in samples of fool's gold to an assayer in one of the small towns near them. They were happy as clams. They really must have thought that gold lay around waiting to be picked up. Somebody really does have to be pretty green to think that iron pyrites is gold dust. Those that stuck at it slowly learned about prospecting in the process. What with reading library books and talking to prospectors and trying various things yourself. After all that's how all of the old prospectors had started in their own time. But they never had a realistic hope of finding anything.

They would hitch a freight into the area they wanted to try. There they would buy whatever supplies they didn't bring with them from Vancouver, usually very little, maybe ten dollars worth. From then on it was hiking and packing and searching for whatever they thought they could find. They covered hundreds of

miles by foot on some of those trips. Once Ali went in alone and I was really scared that he might have an accident and there would be nobody around to help him. Because he went into the real back country where you often traveled for a week or more without meeting anybody. They carried everything on their backs, it wasn't much. Mainly flour and lard and some bacon, a bedroll of blankets and a tarp, a few utensils and maybe a change of socks and underwear.

Mainly they were looking for placer gold because that was the easiest to find. We all said that if we found a worthwhile claim we would move there and work it. But the main hope and intention, once they found a good deposit, was to sell it to some hydraulic operation. Those outfits had the equipment and the pumps and everything that we never could have gotten. But none of the guys ever found anything. You could find traces of gold all over the place in the Interior but usually not rich enough to pay for your food. The countryside of British Columbia was crawling with people with the same hopes, doing the same things and usually with the same results.

Occasionally they got a small grubstake from somebody. Whoever staked them must have been greenhorns too, to bankroll those guys. They used up whatever few dollars that they were able to scrap together. Once they were out in the bush they lived on almost nothing; bannock and tea and whatever game and fish they caught. They were always three-quarters starved when they got back. And they tried the dumbest and most foolhardy things, like rafting down rivers that they'd never seen before on a few logs tied together. Then they got lost in the bush a couple of times. Ali had a lot of stories to tell about those trips, constantly hungry, eaten alive by mosquitoes and nothing to show for it but the experiences.

While none of us ever actually went hungry when we lived on Wall street, we never had any money to spend. We all looked pretty tattered. You could get old clothes from the Salvation Army depots but they were just about as ragged as the things we had. Besides, I myself didn't like the idea of wearing somebody's cast off clothing. It's one thing if a friend gives you some clothes they don't wear anymore or if you get hand-me-downs for your kid from somebody you know. But wearing what some stranger has thrown away and has passed through one of those junk stores is another story. That would be just too degrading.

Although we hardly ever had any money we enjoyed ourselves as best we could. A couple of us had library cards and were always toting stacks of books home from the main library on Hastings and Main. I was always an avid reader and devoured books by the ton. We did an awful lot of walking, down to Stanley Park and around it. I'd either go swimming there or, in the winter, wander around the woods and then walk the seven or so miles back home. We hiked up into the mountains on the north shore. There was always fishing from the piers if you like that sort of thing. Often a bunch of us would go down to the movies; matinees were only a nickle in some theatres. I would usually pay but many of them would sneak in the back door if they didn't have any money or didn't want to lay it out for a movie. You could usually get in through the fire exit if you had somebody inside to open it for you. Once they were in they would disappear into the audience. A couple of times they were caught and thrown out but they did it again anyway.

Partly as a joke, a number of those boys put a matrimonial ad in a Toronto newspaper. It said something like, 'German-Canadian, financially independent, seeks attractive, cultivated young woman. Object, matrimony. Please enclose photo.' Something to that effect. Not long afterwards the letters from girls started rolling in. They came by the dozens. We would sit in the evening and read them out loud. I guess that was a dirty trick but then anybody who would answer an ad like that must have been pretty silly. Some of them were so comical we would be in tears reading them. With some we were a little ashamed because there were a lot of lonely girls around. But most of the girls who answered were pretty obviously out to catch what they thought was a rich husband so we felt justified at having fun at their expense.

We would have discussions about which of the girls would best suit each of the boys, according to what they said or according to how their pictures looked. We married off each of the boys two or three times. And we even answered most of the letters, although the postage was more than we had counted on. Every one of the boys got so many letters to answer, including Ali and myself. I answered a few which I thought were outstandingly stupid. Actually, it wasn't a complete hoax because one of those guys really did strike up a courtship through those letters and they later got married.

There was always a lot of company in that house. Many of the boys had girl friends, that is girls who were friends. Some were German but mainly not. There was always talking and singing and more talking going on. One of the girls who I knew from the Grey Sisters was in love with one of the guys there, Hans Katowice. He was a great big strapping fellow but a little shy. She was a lovely girl too, outstandingly beautiful in fact. I heard them talking once. That was one of the drawbacks of that place, there was just no privacy. She wanted a baby by him regardless if they were married or not. But no, he was too straight-laced, which was lucky for her. No marriage no sleeping together was his philosophy. Whatever lovemaking those boys engaged in, and I don't think there was much of it, they did elsewhere. They were almost all pretty puritanical that way. For all the progressive talk about free love it remained mainly that - just talk. When it came to the real thing they were all as puritanical as old ladies. No, that's not correct - I'm an old lady now too and even I'm not as proper and prim as we all were then.

There was only one guy in that bunch who turned out to be a rat. He was pretty uppity. One day one of the other guys found his diary, started to read it and then showed it around. That wasn't right because there should be some respect for privacy, but it was just as well that he did. In one place it said, 'I'm living with some elements of the lower classes, but I'm not too proud of myself for it, especially when I sit down to eat with them.' There were other entries like that where he ran everybody down. We packed all his things into his suitcase and put it on the front doorstep and on top of it we placed his diary, open at the page where he was complaining about eating with the rabble. There was a big rock on top of it. When he came along later in the day the rest of the boys came out on the porch and stood there with their arms folded. Nobody said anything. If he would have said anything they would have given him a good going away present. But he just picked up his suitcase and left.

Hummel, another of the guys who lived in that house, finally got married to a widow in Vancouver who owned two stores. She forbade him to visit us after that. Although he was a pleasant enough guy he was pretty weak-willed. She didn't want him associating with any of his old friends, especially if they were unemployed. A lot of people in those days used words like 'The Unemployed' like some people talk about 'The Hippies' today.

We were continually getting bits and pieces of news about people that one or another of us had known in Germany or in other parts of Canada. News of friends and relatives and travelling companions, about hundreds of people. You heard what people were doing and what had happened to them and what conditions were like in various other places. Often distorted I'm sure. Most of the boys we lived with on Wall street stayed in Canada despite the depression and got married and raised families here. At least those we kept track of. For the next ten years or so we occasionally saw one of them or heard about another but gradually we lost contact over the years.

Ali and I always want a child, two children actually. No matter what the times were like we figured, 'Worry about that when the time comes'. But every time I got pregnant I could never carry the baby to full term. My womb just wasn't strong enough and I always had miscarriages in the four or fifth month. Anyway, there I was in the spring of 1932 pregnant again. Strange to say, we were pretty optimistic. We thought 'things can't get any worse, they'll have to get better soon'. Besides, I wasn't getting any younger. It was my third or fourth month, I wasn't exactly sure because my periods weren't very regular.

One day as I'm walking home from town I begin to feel dizzy and nauseous and as if I had diarrhea. I got to the public toilets down by the old library and there, right on the toilet, I had another miscarriage. I started to bleed heavily and I should have called an ambulance and gone to the hospital. But of course there was no money to pay for that. Remembering how they had treated me in the hospital in Toronto and how the Immigration Department had come after me, I decided that I was going to tough it out on my own. I was afraid the authorities would deport Ali and me if we ran up hospital bills again and didn't pay them. We were technically vagrant and we were living in a house which some of the neighbours were complaining about. You can never tell how some petty government official's mind works and at that time they were particularly high and mighty, especially toward unemployed immigrants. So I walked all the way home to Wall street. It was pretty stupid actually but I got panicky. I was losing a lot of blood and a number of times I started to pass out. But I made it home and after a week in bed I was all right again.

### *Steady Work*

One day, I think it was in December of 1932, a warm sunny day, a car drove up to the house and a middle-aged couple got out. They came up to the door and asked for me. I thought, 'Now what? I don't know them'. They introduced themselves as the Svenssons and said they had a job for me as a caretaker at the Oddfellows Hall. I was so flabbergasted that for a minute or so I couldn't say anything. People coming around by car asking if you wanted a job was about as likely as somebody coming around asking if you wanted used hundred dollar bills. It later turned out that Mrs. Svensson was a lodge sister of that McCorky dame who was making so much trouble for us. But Mrs. Svensson decided that it was just a case of unemployed young people scrabbling through and they decided to help us if they could. That was pretty decent of them.

So I started this job at the Oddfellows Hall and a few months later Mr. Svensson got Ali a job at Burns slaughterhouse. Once Ali started to work we rented an apartment of our own. However interesting it was on Wall street the lack of any privacy began to grate on us. We kept those jobs for nearly two years and things were relatively uneventful for us.

The first place we rented was a suite in a private house near Exhibition Park. There were a couple of other places we lived in the next six months in the area and they were all about the same. You could rent an older, roomy house with a big yard in that area for about fifteen or twenty dollars a month at that time. That wasn't exceptional at all. Finally we got a house a couple of blocks from Windermere Pool. There was still a lot of bush around and you could see the harbour. It was a lot like living in the country. You can say what you like, there were none of the fancy areas of the city, however expensive the houses were, which were as pleasant as our part of the East End.

There were a lot of little experiences and happening which were important at the moment but didn't amount to a hill of beans in the longer run. For instance, one apartment we rented was run by a crazy woman. When we first moved in she pressed everything on us - home baked cookies, blankets, utensils. But after a few weeks she became paranoid. Lots of people are a little crazy in one way or another and I always closed my eyes to such nonsense if possible. But there are limits.

The landlady got worse and worse. One day I came home and she had changed the lock on the front door and wouldn't let me into the house. I could see her standing behind the curtain watching and I told her she couldn't rent out a place and then lock the tenants out. Finally she came out on the porch and started yelling that the police should arrest me because we were trying to rob her and plotting to take her house. That passed but it began to gnaw at me. She was a small, elderly woman. 'How can she harm me?' I thought. But then I began to imagine all sorts of ways in which she could. Ali got his back up at the thought of being forced out of an apartment because of the landlady's craziness. But I said that I wasn't going to stay there any longer and that there were equally good apartments all over the place for the same price. That's when we moved to the house near Windermere Pool.

Another time I was coming home from work. It must have been around nine o'clock in the evening. It was in the fall, dark and rainy and nobody on the streets. As I passed Hastings school two young men came towards me. Just as they came up to me they both pulled out revolvers. One stuck a gun in my chest and the other the gun in my side. Maybe they were toy guns but they looked real enough. They were very polite -money, they needed money. I started to argue with them 'We have hardly enough money for food ourselves. Why do you have to go around robbing poor people?' I had my house keys, some milk tickets and two dollars in my pocket and it was dumb of me to make any fuss about that. They took the two dollars and the keys fell down on the sidewalk, which one of them picked up and gave back to me. 'I'm very sorry madam but we just have to have some money to get something to eat'. That was probably all malarkey but they were very polite. Then they ran off.

Up to that point I'd been able to control myself but as soon as they were gone I started to cry. A man came along and asked if anything was wrong so I told him what had happened. 'Lady, don't argue with hoodlums, don't you know what might have happened?' And he was quite right. This man walked me home. Ali right away got excited and when he heard what had happened and was all for running up the place where I'd been robbed. But I talked him into phoning the police instead, although I thought 'What can the police do now?' About a half hour later a police cruiser comes to the door, 'Come along. If we hurry we may still spot them'. I thought, 'Boy, you must be kidding'. But no, nothing



would do but that I come along. So they drove around the area a bit and poked around the school grounds near where it had happened. As if anybody who had committed a robbery would hang around that spot for an hour. Then we saw a young man running down the sidewalk heading for the streetcar stop. 'Is that him, is that him?' says one of the constables. Incredible! A few days later they called me down to a lineup but I couldn't identify anyone with any degree of certainty even if they had been in that line. There are probably many innocent people who get put away by being identified wrongly and not having any alibi or a good lawyer.

I didn't see too much of Ali because he was working seven days a week and usually our shifts didn't coincide. It was just late in the evening after nine o'clock or so that we saw each other and then we were both pretty tired. There weren't many Sundays he had free. Ali left for work about seven in the morning and came home around seven or eight at night. While I would be free until one or two in the afternoon and get home around nine o'clock at night.

On weekends Ali usually worked while I either stayed at home and read or went for very long walks along the waterfront or up into the mountains. By the end of March I went swimming almost every single day, rain or shine. I used to swim in Burrard inlet down near Windermere Pool. The water was perfectly clean then, no oil or garbage or sewage. But the water was very cold. Despite the fact that it was near the Second Narrows bridge, with all the tide rips, I never thought too much about all the currents. I was a very strong swimmer at the time but I almost drowned there once. If I'd been alone I would have, I think.

It was still fairly early in the spring. I was pretty far out, swimming back and forth, when I got a cramp in one leg. I tried to massage it but it didn't help and I tried getting back to shore with a sort of breast stroke. I'd made some distance when in fairly quick succession I got cramps in my other leg and in my stomach. There were some people on the beach but they were a long way down the shore. Our dog - naturally we got a dog as soon as we could keep one - he was sitting on the bank watching me, I just called out once, and not even very loud, 'Streak'. And he really came like a streak. He got to me in no time flat. I hung onto his collar and he pulled me to the shore, It's pretty sure that I couldn't have gotten out of that by myself. It may sound like a dog story but that's what happened.

The next time we went down there I thought I'd see if he'd do it again if I called him. So I swam around a while and called him the same as I had before. But he just sat of the shore and wagged his tail. He knew very well. They must be able to tell if you're in danger or not from the tone of your voice. Nobody can tell me that dogs don't understand things like that.

During that year and half I got to know Mrs. Svenson's sister, Clara, pretty well. I visited her a lot. Although I knew a lot of Ali's friends and their girlfriends, I never seemed to know many women personally. Now I don't really understand why I fastened on Clara because there must have been a lot of other girls of my own age and background and interests around. There were a lot of things I couldn't talk about with people I knew and Clara was a good listener, actually a pretty good person, all in all. She was in her late forties then. Generous and kind in some respects but also the most possessive person I've ever known. Her husband had a supervisor's job in the city somewhere. She was sort of lonely and was beginning to show the first effects of Parkinson's disease. Clara had always had security and a certain amount of comfort in her life and she did absolutely nothing with it. Nor did she want to do anything,

If you were friends with her you had to be constantly prepared to stand up to her because if you didn't she could begin to treat you like her personal property. And could she ask questions, polite and quiet but searching and intimate, incessant questions. She just didn't have any shame that way. It was her nosiness and jealousy that got her into all sorts of arguments at one time or another with most people she knew. That's what led to our breaking off too, finally.

During the afternoons and evenings I worked as a janitor and caretaker at the Oddfellows Hall on Hastings and Kamloops. I got twenty dollars a month, which wasn't too bad for that kind of a job in those years. But I had to work for that money. The hall was in use pretty well throughout the week what with meetings and parties and weddings. I would scrub the whole place once a week, sweep and clean up every afternoon and straighten things up after every meeting. There were heavy canvas tarps laid down to protect the floors in the main hall and before and after each dance I had to roll and unroll them. That was quite a chore. When there were dances or weddings or parties I also ran the check room. People were always forgetting or losing something and turned up a few days later to reclaim their belongings. Fine.

After one of those shindigs I found a small brooch which I put in the check room. A nice piece of costume jewelry but only that. Two days later in marches this dame. 'Where is my pin, I know you have it. I'll either have my brooch or I'll call the police.' She was insulting and snooty as hell. If she had asked me civilly I would have given it to her right then and there. But she went on about how this brooch had diamonds and emeralds and that I'd better hand it back. Then and there I decided that no matter what she says she's not going to get that brooch back, I'd throw it in the saltchuck first. 'I never saw it. If you want you can look around wherever you like,' and walked away. Our dog, a pretty big German Shepherd, was lying in the check room and I didn't think she would put her nose in there. She just stormed out. That evening I took the brooch out and dropped in down a sewer.

Early in the spring of 1934 things started to slow down at the Oddfellows Hall and the manager decided that they were going to cut back on expenses, including my salary. They were going to pay me ten dollars a month for part time work. Ten dollars *a month*, not a week. So I said, 'Thank you very much. I quit'. Ali was working in the hide and fertilizer section of Burns slaughter house. It used to stand by the water, two blocks west of Lapointe pier. Then it was one of the biggest plants in Vancouver East, along with Rogers sugar refinery. Ali would constantly be going from the freezers to the outside, to the heating sheds and back again. Besides that there was always a cloud of fertilizer dust and ammonia fumes that he and the others worked in. It was heavy physical work too, lugging hundred and two hundred pound sacks and hides and carcasses and what not around. Ali often worked seven days a week. I think it was ten hours a day. I may be mistaken but they were very long shifts. Six days a week was standard - six days a week, ten hours a day, for fifteen dollars. On top of that Ali often took a Sunday cleanup shift in order to make a little more money. It was just too much.

Although Ali was always exceptionally healthy that combination of things finally got to him. He contracted TB of the lungs, or at least that's what the doctor told him. Slowly but surely his lungs got worse and worse and he got more and more thin. He looked just terrible. No matter how tough the times were we decided that he had to quit that job right away. In those days there was no penicillin and sulfa drugs and a lot of people still died from TB.

The doctor told Ali that he should go to a hot dry climate and have plenty of rest, fresh air and good food - as if we could just

take a California vacation. Tranquille was always full and had a long waiting list.<sup>35</sup> Besides, we didn't like the sound of it because we had heard of too any people who never came back from there. Those rest cures took a long time if they worked at all and you had to have some money while you were in there.

We had to find a place doing something that would give Ali a chance to recuperate. 'Never mind, never mind anything' I said, 'We'll leave this city and go up into the dry belt. We'll find something up there'. Ali already knew his way around the Interior from the various trips he had made out into the bush. So we took our couple of hundred dollars savings, sold off our furniture, bought an old car and set out for Lillooet to wash gold. However crazy that was, however many problems we had, that decision did pay off. Because regardless of anything else Ali did get his health back in the Cariboo

## 7. A Stint in the Cariboo (1934 - 1937)

### *Washing Gold*

We were headed for the Lillooet area. That country had attracted Ali when he passed through it before. Also, the Nicks, a couple we knew through the bunch of boys on Wall street, were washing gold nearby. We thought that they could give us some tips on the area. The last we had heard, Anton and his wife Mimi were working finds on the lower Bridge river, eight or ten miles out from Lillooet. So that's where we were headed.

We loaded up the car with a tent and bedding and a couple of suitcases of personal belongings, put our two dogs in the back and were off. It was summer and we drove along leisurely enjoying the scenery. On most of the roads you couldn't do more than thirty miles an hour and in the mountains we averaged about twenty. There were some stretches you just crept along. I remember we stopped twice going up Jackass Mountain in the Fraser canyon to let the engine cool down. Most cars couldn't make that hill without boiling over and wherever there was a stream you saw somebody refilling his radiator. The stretch from Lytton to Lillooet was quite an experience. Parts of the road were built on cribbing and it looked like you were hanging out over the side of a cliff. Actually, in some places you were. All of that last stretch of road was single lane, or better said three-quarters lane wide. It took us two days to get from Vancouver to Lillooet and it was all pretty exciting to me. Off into the wilds, or so it seemed to me at the time.

At first we had a lot of difficulty finding out where the Nicks were because in the time since we had last seen them they had moved their camp away up the Bridge river and were now settled west of the Moha road. That was a road in name only, only light wagons could use it. So we left our car and belongings at one rancher's house, made up a couple of packs and bedrolls and started out to Nicks' camp. It was a wonderful day, not too dry and not hot yet. The dogs were barking and running around and almost turning themselves inside out. I thought 'This is really going to be very nice if we can make a living at gold washing'.

We figured that it would be about ten miles to our destination. We walked and we walked and we walked some more but no sign of the Nicks. Late in the afternoon we met an Indian riding along on his horse and found out we were lost, going up the wrong trail.

Finally we got to the Nicks place in the early evening. We told them what the situation was and what we intended to do so they asked us to stay with them while we got on our feet. That sort of hospitality was almost taken for granted among friends during those times.

Anton was very handy with tools and he had built quite a large cabin and some comfortable home-made furniture in the few months they had been on that particular site. He had even dammed a little stream and had run off part of the water in a crude flume so that it ran right beside the house. They had drinking and washing water just a few steps from the kitchen. Of course, you can only appreciate that if you've had to pack all your water a half mile or more on cart or sled. Nicks were washing gold on a little bar on the other side of the Bridge river, which was pretty wild during certain times of the year. Anton had fixed up a raft attached to lines to cross the river on. Every day they went across to wash gold, after a leisurely breakfast. It can be hard work but they didn't kill themselves at it. The returns were always so little on those penny-ante operations that it didn't pay to over-work yourself. Ali went over to help them every day and he learned a few more tips on how to wash gold.

After about two weeks we headed back to our car and started to build a cabin of our own and try our luck near the mouth of the Bridge river. The whole area was dotted with fallen down shacks and even some substantial cabins. Many looked like they had been there for fifty years or more. Some were half burned out while others were standing up pretty well and a few were still in quite good shape. But all abandoned and unlived in. It was part of the easy come-easy go, boom or bust feeling that you got in that country.

A lot of people were doing what we were then. Some just moved into one of the abandoned places and fixed it up. We could have done that too but who knows; after you had fixed the place up you might have trouble with somebody who claimed to be the owner. Then too, we could site a new cabin where it suited us best. Besides, those old shacks weren't as wind and rain tight as a new log cabin and they would have been hard to keep warm in the winter. And there were rats and other small animals too that infested those old buildings that were the devil to drive out once they've established themselves. But a few months after we had our own new cabin built we were visited by a pack rat anyway. They carried away whatever was small and shining. Things of

absolutely no use too it, like forks and nails. We found some of the things cached away in the roots of a tree nearby. But this rat never left anything in return.

We had a big wall tent to live in until the cabin was built. Supposedly it never rains in that area in the summer but that summer it drizzled every day. We had a fly over the tent roof so it was water tight and quite airy. It was a warm rain anyway so it was actually quite pleasant. Ali cut down trees nearby and made logs out of them. I always had an aversion to cutting down trees. Besides, it seemed to me that backland or not you couldn't just go outside your door and cut down whatever trees you like. We were squatters technically. But that was accepted practice there. Although I'd been in the country for almost five years and already knew the ropes, so I thought, it was this time, living on the Bridge river, that Canada really struck me as a strange land. I thought, 'My God; this is like the Jack London stories I read as a kid'. You have to remember that I'd always lived in cities and all the countryside I'd wandered through as a girl was like a park compared to the wilds of the Cariboo. Ali just loved it, he was really in his element.

In a few days, less than a week, Ali had all the logs ready for our cabin. Then he packed those logs to the cabin site all by himself. They were big logs too because the cabin was sixteen by twenty feet. You're supposed to peel the logs and let them dry out before building with them, so you can get a tight fit and so the logs won't rot after a few years. A log house built with properly peeled logs can last a lifetime and more. But even if you don't they are bound to be good for ten years anyway. That was long enough for us so we just put the logs into position the way they were. Ali notched them and set them together by himself. It's really quite tricky to do a good job and get everything lined up straight and I don't know where he picked up the knack of doing those things. But a lot of learning about how to do things like that comes by trial and error. Ali made a good job of it too. There were hardly any large chinks between the logs, although some developed when the logs dried out.

I made 'dobe from loam and chinked up the spaces between the logs. That 'dobe gets hard as cement if you mix it right. It dries out pretty quickly so you have to keep it damp and keep jamming it into the cracks. We didn't bother putting a floor in the cabin. We were going to later but it wasn't necessary. Around there, if you scrape off the the top few inches of earth, let the layer

below dry out and walk back and forth on it constantly the floor becomes like cement. After you've lived in the cabin for a month or so the floor is so hard and solid that you can sweep out the dirt and dust that have accumulated during the day without disturbing the floor at all. Of course, you have to be careful about not spilling water on it because it can get muddy.

The roof of the cabin was made of peeled poles and a collection of shakes that we made out of old lumber and scraps of roofing that we got from one of the abandoned shacks nearby. Later on we covered the roof with about four or five inches of earth. You couldn't have done that with the coast climate but up there it worked pretty well. We rarely had a leak and the earth roof helped keep the place cooler in summer and warmer in the winter. The one drawback was that there wasn't very much natural light that got into the cabin because we made only one window. While it was warm we spent a good deal of the time outside anyway.

We had left the ends of the log rafters in the front of the cabin stick out about seven or eight feet. On the other end they were squared off. Over those protruding roof poles we stretched a couple of tarpaulins which made a porch. During the summer that's where we spent a good deal of our free time, having dinner out there or just sitting or talking. There was a beautiful view from that spot. You could look down the river through the trees, you could look up at the mountains and little flats and you could look across to the mountains along the side of the Fraser river. We were on a beautiful little plateau with pine trees and clumps of bushes and scattered grass and shrubs all around us. There was a stream about a third of a mile away and the road ran through the corner of the bench we were on. We were really very comfortable. We had a lot of space around us and a lot of privacy. You'd probably have to be fairly wealthy to afford something comparable today. In fact that sort of life probably isn't possible any more except in the most remote corners of the country, and even then not for long.

When fall rolled around we got empty cardboard cartons and cut them up into panels. We tacked two layers of that cardboard to the log walls for insulation. Then I pasted pictures to that cardboard. The pictures came from whatever source was available; I cut them out of every magazine that I could get my hands on. Over a period what developed was a mural of flowers and animals, seascapes and landscapes. It grew until it almost



covered all of the walls; quite attractive too. Some places I had tried to make designs of a sort and in other places the pictures were pasted up without much rhyme or reason. I did see a couple of old prospectors' log cabins that were fixed up with that homemade wallpaper something like ours. Some people who visited us were really fascinated when they saw that for the first time. Others must have thought that we were somewhat odd to have that mass of pictures pasted over the walls from floor to roof. In any case I liked it, especially when I lay in bed half asleep in the morning.

We made the little furniture we had ourselves. There was a big double bed with a wooden frame and a tightly strung rope spring. With a good thick mattress they can be quite comfortable but the rope has to be strung very, very tightly. Ali made a wardrobe out of old lumber and he made some easy chairs out of packing boxes, while I made some straw cushions for them. There was a big work table and a washstand that we had outside and we bought a couple of kitchen chairs and a small table. That was our complement of furniture and it served quite adequately too.

For a stove we had an oil drum that had been flattened on the top and bolted to two iron bars that were the feet. It was fairly easy to make that. That stove was really a marvel. Having a good stove was pretty important, especially in winter. If it smoked or was hard to start or if it burned wood too freely you would always be cold or always chopping more firewood and puttering around with the fire. We could put two and a half foot long logs in that oil drum stove once there was a fire going. They would burn for hours. We just burned wood of course. That was free for the cutting, at least around there it was. If anyone went into the woods today and just started cutting down trees on public land for firewood I think it wouldn't be too long before they would cart you off to the judge.

You used to be able to buy what were called 'camp ovens' - a sort of barrel-like affair made of tin that fit around the stove pipe. The heat from the stove would pass through the oven - they were quite effective for baking once you got the hang of working one. I used to bake bread in the oven every second day.

The cabin was getting to be quite cozy. We put up a few bright curtains and a beautiful table cloth that I'd brought along. We were young then. If money hadn't been so short, almost non-existent, it would have been quite enjoyable. But whatever else, no matter what the difficulties we later had, it was worth it.

Because Ali's lungs cured out there. And that had been the main reason that we had come to that area in the first place.

There was just one other building on the same bench as our cabin. In a sort of shanty, half cabin and half tent about two hundred yards from our place, lived a man with this young girl and their two year old child. He was over fifty then and she couldn't have been more than seventeen or eighteen. She was a strikingly beautiful girl and I always thought, 'What does a handsome girl like that see in an old character like him?' It was robbing the cradle I thought and that was probably why she and I never hit it off right. Which was too bad, because they were our closest neighbours. Despite that Ali got along well with the husband, Arnold Elgin, who was washing gold on the Fraser river too. And after we got our cabin built Ali threw in with Arnold as a partner in that gold washing operation.

They used to drive down to near where they were washing gold every morning. That struck me as pretty funny then, to be able to drive to your gold mine. Their diggings were on a small bar on the Fraser, a little below the mouth of the Bridge river and about a mile and a half from our cabin. Often I would would walk with the dogs to visit them during the day and see how it was coming along. After about a month of that partnership Ali and Arnold got into an argument. Apparently he thought that Ali and I were in cahoots somehow to high grade nuggets from that claim. My coming down there he interpreted as a scheme to pick up the nuggets. That was not only silly but downright crazy because you rarely found a nugget in that sand anyway. It was all gold dust, what there was of it. Anyway, that ended that partnership and not long later we set up our own own placer operation.

There were at least twenty or thirty individuals who were working placer operations within ten or fifteen miles from Lillooet. Almost none of those small placer miners actually filed on the claims they were working, unless they hit some exceptionally rich pay dirt. People moved their sluices around quite a bit and I think they often must have been washing on plots that were already pre-empted. None of them made more than the barest living, but there was always the hope that somewhere you would hit a good paying pocket. Not strike it rich but just make a decent living for a while. Real prospectors usually didn't even bother looking for placer gold.

Ali and I panned in various places up and down the Bridge river and the Fraser. You use the gold pan just to sample the sand, to

see if there are any traces. In that area you almost always get a few traces of gold, but rarely worth working. Mimi Nick told me that I'd get gold fever when I started to see specks of gold in the bottom of the pan. I didn't believe her but sure enough I caught it. You see a few specks of gold and you think that there's going to be a lot more in the sand than there actually is. Most of those traces you just have to forget about. Finally we found a showing at the very spot where the Bridge river enters the Fraser. First of all Ali tried the place out by using a rocker and grizzly that he made.<sup>36</sup> Either he didn't make it properly or the gold there was too fine. In any case, it didn't pay off. But our panning showed that that bar was fairly rich, or so we thought. We built a sluice box and starting working there.

Our sluice box was about fifteen feet long and sat on the side of the river bank. It's something like a short flume made of lumber. We had to build supports for it because the sluice had to be at such an angle that the water runs down at the right speed, not too slow and not too fast. On the floor of the sluice box, on the inside, you clamp in a layer of linen or burlap or strips of a blanket if you don't have anything else. Over that go sets of riffles which channel the water and sand back and forth as its coming down the sluice. Once you have that built you're all set to start washing gold.

We used to look for pockets of blueish-black sand. That's a pretty good bet for having some gold dust in it. We dug around and under stones and in crevices if we could get at them, where high water should have left some of the heavier deposits. You were working in the water with a shovel and pail most of the times. In order to work in that icy water you had to have a pair of hip boots big enough so that you could wear two or three pairs of thick woolen socks. If the water level dropped you could work on exposed ledges and bars that were usually covered. We always hoped for low water. Very occasionally you found a tiny nugget after you had run the sand through the sluice but mainly it was dust. Of course, the whole operation was very primitive.

You take the sand you've collected to the top of the sluice box. Once you have enough you begin hauling pail after pail of water up and begin sluicing the sand down the box. Stones and small pebbles get caught on the riffles and you would have to constantly pick them out by hand. The sand and the lighter material washes down and out of the bottom of the sluice box. The gold and the heaviest particles of sand filter down and settle

in the cloth. It took a bit of practice not to run too much water at one time.

At the end of each day you take out the riffles and lift out the strips of cloth that hold the gold and heaviest sand. Very gently you lift the cloth into a wash tub. We didn't want to lose a nickle's worth of gold that we had sweated for. First, you carefully wash off the cloth in the tub. Then you put the concentrate in a gold pan for the final panning to remove the sand. We'd do that final panning over the tub just in case any of the gold dust slipped out of the pan. At that point you'd begin to see how much gold you had gotten during the day, if any at all. There were usually a few flakes and grains about a quarter the size of a grain of wheat. Those we would pick out with a tweezer and put in a bottle, But most of it was gold dust and even finer stuff called 'flour'. That was mixed with various impurities and remaining bits of sand. You can't separate that by panning because you'd wash out a lot of the flour gold. We took that final concentrate home and stirred it with quicksilver [mercury]. Quicksilver adheres to the finest particles of gold. You mix it with the concentrate, just a few drops, and then pour it off. Finally you put the quicksilver and gold in a frying pan and burn it off. What remains is the molten dust and flour gold.

With all of that, working like beavers in the hot sun and cold water, lugging pails of sand and water up the hill, both Ali and I working most of the day, we managed to take out a dollar a day in gold. We never knew exactly how much we had made until we took the results to be weighed for sale. On the best days it was never more than a couple of dollars but on other days it was probably more like fifty cents. We'd tested a number of other spots in the area and that was about the best we could do. Just one in the year that we were washing gold did we find a nugget of any size. It was worth about fifteen dollars. We just made the salt on our bread.

We washed gold there during 1934 and again in the spring of 1935. It was just about a full year. Some years you could placer mine throughout most of the winter but the year we were there it was exceptionally cold and snowy. Even if the sluice hadn't frozen in it was too cold to work in the cold wind and the cold water and the snow. So we stopped for two or three months in the dead of winter.

One late spring day in May, it was almost summer, the river started to rise very quickly. We managed to move our sluice box

and all of our equipment up the side of the bank. We always used to leave our stuff on the site when we went home in the evening, Things just weren't stolen. We thought that we had secured our equipment and that the river would never rise as high as we had moved it. The next morning we go down there and what do we see, the river is a couple of feet above our cache. Everything had been washed into the Fraser. The only things that were left behind were a shovel and one pail which, for some reason, we'd left further up the bank. I felt like throwing those after the rest and making a clean sweep of the lot. Anyway, that was the end of our gold washing days. I think we would have soon given the whole thing up even if that hadn't happened.

### *Life in the Cariboo*

We got by with very little money indeed. We had our clothes and bedding and utensils and we bought absolutely nothing that wasn't essential. The cabin we built ourselves and cost us nothing. There wasn't any rent or utility bills or taxes to worry about; the fuel we cut ourselves. So it was really only food that we bought and an occasional tank of gas for our car.

Food was very cheap and we only bought the most inexpensive stuff. For instance, instead of buying ready ground flour, which was cheap enough anyway, we bought grade number two wheat by the hundred pound sack. I had an all-purpose hand mill and ground grain and corn and other things like that. I'd grind up enough flour to last one week at a time and every second day I would bake bread in my camp oven. At first I made ordinary bread but I had a lot of difficulty in getting it to rise. Then I learned how to make sourdough bread, absolutely delicious. Better than anything you can buy. That was our main staple and between Ali and me and our two dogs we went through a couple of huge loaves every day. I also baked rough cookies from coarse flour and sugar, 'poor man's cookies' I called them. They weren't bad either.

We bought a lot of things by the fifty and twenty-five pound bag - sugar, rice, beans and ten pound tins of lard. The only things that were fairly expensive were coffee and spices and meat. Although they still were remarkably cheap. Sometimes somebody would bring us a hunk of venison. When the salmon were running up the Fraser we had fish every second day. Indians from the whole area used to come down to dip net salmon where we washed gold. You could buy a big salmon for twenty-five

cents. Of course buying venison and salmon and game of any sort was illegal, but nobody bothered much unless the sales were flaunted under the eyes of the game warden. Usually we bought what meat we ate from a store in Lillooet. All in all, even though we were only making five or six dollars a week we were able to get by quite well. There was even plenty of leftovers for the dogs. I made extra bread for them. They would get that and a little of whatever it was we were eating. We always saved a little of our meat or fish for them. They were always healthy and full of pep.

We got our drinking and washing water from a spring about a third of a mile from the cabin. At first we packed buckets of water by hand every day but then the bright idea struck us of making a dog cart and getting our two dogs to haul the water for us. So that's what we did. Ali made the cart and then I trained Peggy and Barry to pull it. Most dogs like to pull sleds and carts if they've been taught properly and Peggy and Barry were especially keen. When she saw that I was getting ready to use the cart she would stand beside the harness wagging her tail. I had to train the two of them to take it easy when they were pulling the water home. At first I arrived back at the cabin with most of the water sloshed out, but they learned. In the winter we hitched them up to a toboggan for hauling. We also brought in all of our firewood by dog team, so to speak. They were just crazy about the snow.

It was about three miles into Lillooet from our cabin and whenever I went to get some supplies I'd hitch up Peggy. With a light load one dog pulling was a lot better than two. One time I had gone to get our supplies in Lillooet and had them all loaded in the cart ready to head back home. At the last minute I see a friend of ours across the street and I go over to talk a bit. There we were gabbing away when I hear somebody yell, "Hey, look at the dog, look at the dog." For a second it didn't register with me. Because Peggy was always very responsible when she was hitched up to the cart. But I turn around and see a trail of groceries and spilled potatoes down the main street with Peggy heading into a vacant lot, the cart banging along behind her, in hot pursuit of a cat. I didn't hear the end of that for a good six months afterward. Every time I came into town with the cart somebody would say something like, 'You better be sure to tie her up tight to the hitching post' or 'Are you sure you've got the emergency brake on?'

We always took our gold to a certain Chinese store in Lillooet. The owner would weight the gold, tell us the price and put it on our account. We could draw it in cash if we wanted but we bought all of our supplies at that one store. Most of the other storekeepers were okay too but the guy we dealt with had helped us over bad spots a couple of times with extended credit. Besides, there were only three or four general stores in town and they all had about the same range of goods.

The main street of Lillooet at the time looked like something out of a cowboy movie, many of the buildings were sixty or seventy years old even then. The centre of town straggled out over three blocks along the main road. There were really only two or three streets in town and all of the stores were only one or two stories, built of shiplap lumber and with high false fronts. All of them looked pretty weather beaten. The main street was unpaved of course and usually dusty and there was a wooden sidewalk on both sides of the street. Every store, cafe or hotel had hitching posts outside and they weren't for decoration because there were far more horses and wagons on the street than cars. When it was warm there was always a bunch of men and boys lounging around on the boardwalk in front of the stores. Most of the stores had benches outside just for that purpose,

We didn't know many people in town but in the short time we lived in that cabin, a year and a half, we made friends with oodles of people living scattered around the hills there and along the river. I can't even remember how we got to meet all of them. They were quite an assortment, each would have his or her own story to tell. And almost all of them were ordinary good people, with the exception of the way many of them treated their animals.

I don't know what it was but even many people who were decent in other ways were pretty callous when it came to animals. It was a sort of indifference that often bordered on downright brutality. There was this one man we knew who had a small ranch and some beautiful horses. He was a fairly decent man in many ways but he never cared for his animals. In the late fall he'd just turn out his horses to forage through the winter, even his riding horse that served him so faithfully. Often there was almost nothing to forage. Each winter many horses starved to death, as did his beautiful white mare. 'Oh well, that's too bad', he said, He was kind of sorry but never enough to put in the work to raise winter hay for his horses.

There was a family that I knew, the Watsons, who lived up on the Moha road, a good fifteen miles from our cabin, sometimes I would get a ride part of the way with another family that I knew who had a ranch about half way between Lillooet and Moha. Eddie Watson had been wounded during the war, the first war that is. He had a silver plate in his skull which gave him a lot of trouble at times. When he returned from the war he took out a veterans allotment, that's a sort of homestead, in what was called the West Lillooet Block. The government had thrown open this land way up in the mountains and had encouraged people to farm there. It was criminal if you ask me. Most of them scrabbled away on those stump ranches, with the hardest work and were still always broke. Well, if you liked being independent and lots of isolation I suppose it was alright, but you still couldn't make a living at it. Living stuck away in those mountains made people a little bushed. The first time I went to visit the Watsons their kids all hid because I was a stranger. Their mother was a very warm person, a little younger than myself. I used to enjoy visiting them but in the end we lost touch because it was just too long a way to go.

There was one guy we met up there who we knew for many years later. His name was Fitzpatrick but he wanted to be called Pat. In all the years that we knew him we never learned his real first name. At the time we first met him he was already in his sixties and living in a small cabin not too far from where we were washing gold. He had come over from Ireland as a young man and had worked all over the place as a general jack of all trades. Finally he ended up working for the P.G.E. railway. He was retired and living on next to nothing when we first knew him. I used to stop in and visit him quite often and after my son was born I'd take him along. Pat kind of adopted him as a godson. The cabin he lived in was always topsy-turvy and pretty dirty. But it was a healthy, outdoor kind of dirt.

A couple that we knew from Vancouver, Theo and Angie Jenson, worked on the farm of a local minister, an all round Soapy Sam type. I'd often go down and visit them but they were usually so busy they hardly had time for anything. We saw a lot of them in later years back in Vancouver though. Nicks were still around although they soon moved up to French Bar on the upper Fraser. That was really wild country then and there they lived, washing gold for ten more years. Ali sometimes talked to a travelling priest from Shalath who walked, literally walked, all



over the region visiting the little settlements and rancherias. I don't know how that acquaintanceship got started, because Ali certainly wasn't going to get himself back into the fold at his age. But there were dozens of acquaintances we had and Ali had people he knew stashed away everywhere.

A thousand and one little incidents happened. None really amounted to very much although they were things you remember. Minor crises, little humorous things that happened. All of the episodes really very short, a few days, a few hours, some that lasted only a few minutes, so many years ago. It's hard for me to believe that they all took place in such a short time.

For instance, the cows from a nearby ranch often used to come by our cabin on the way to their water hole. Every time I hung out the wash I'd have to keep an eye out for the cattle because they would walk right through it and pull the lines down. Once a cow stuck its head in the open door and the dogs who were sleeping inside jumped up and started the whole herd running, taking my wash with them. Once I was walking to the Watsons' place with a bunch of kids when we came across a wild stallion with a herd of mares. He started coming right for us. It was no use to run. 'Freeze. Nobody move a muscle.' And we all stood like stone statues. This mustang came closer and closer and started circling us, snorting a bit and looking us up and down. I was so scared that I almost peed my pants. He came within thirty or forty feet of us and then just turned around and galloped off and took the rest of the horses with him. Another time Ali and I ran across a bear and her cubs in the woods when we had our two dogs with us. We didn't know whether to run or climb a tree or just stand still. But nothing came of that either.

One incident I do remember very vividly. I used to visit a Mrs. Campbell who had a small farm on one of the benches on the other side of the Fraser river. To get there I could either cross the river on the railway trestle a half mile from our cabin or make a four mile detour to the nearest bridge. So I always used the trestle. There weren't many trains on that line then, they went pretty slowly and you could see them for a long ways off, or so I thought. It was just an ordinary train trestle with no walkway or railing but the ties were laid very close together and planked over. There was no danger of falling over and even Barry walked across with me without any hesitation. But it was a pretty heady feeling to walk over the trestle; the wind whistling

down the canyon and a hundred feet below the wild Fraser boiling along. That was one of the reason I liked crossing there.

So, this one time I'm coming back from the Campbell's on an early summer evening. Here I am about in the middle of the trestle and I see the train coming down the grade toward me. It was a long trestle and I could see that there was no way of getting off it by the time the train reached me. There were a few small platforms attached to the side of the trestle. Why they were there I don't know but I ran for the nearest one with the dog right beside me. It was a couple of feet below the roadway and somehow I managed to get Barry down without the both of us falling off. There was barely enough room for me and for him to sit; I held on to a post with one hand and to Barry's collar with the other and kept saying 'sit'. A half minute later the train rushed by. The wheels were about two feet from my head. The roar of the train, the whole trestle shaking, a foot away the edge of the platform and below the Fraser river boiling along. With all of that the dog sat still as stone. I didn't think I would make it. As soon as the train was by I broke into wild tears. Very carefully we climbed back up to the roadway and ran to solid ground. Barry ran ahead of me and when he got off the trestle he barked and rolled on the ground and ran around in circles. If I had fallen off that platform it would have been the end of us and nobody would have even found the bodies. After that I always used the bridge if I wanted to get to the other side of the river.

By the summer of 1935 our gold washing was finished and Ali was scouring the countryside for whatever jobs he could find. I tried my hand at running a hot dog and coffee stand at some of the stampedes that used to be held during the summer at Pavilion and at Fountain. They were little affairs mainly made up of friends and neighbours. The biggest one was the Lillooet stampede on the first of July. That used to be a bangup time, even in the middle of the depression. For about three days the population of the town doubled because everybody from the surrounding districts seemed to come in for the stampede. Liquor flowed like water, maybe even a little more so. The hotels and bootleggers just coined the money. Even people who literally counted their pennies through the rest of the year came in with a little cash to spend during that time. For three days we operated the hot dog stand eighteen hours a day.

Coffee was five cents a cup and hot dogs were a dime. We could make a pretty fair profit on that except that a lot of the

customers would buy a nickle coffee, drink half of it and then fill the rest of the cup with sugar, which they spooned up as a kind of dessert. At that rate coffee was a losing proposition. One time our business was really bad because most of the crowd was in another part of town. Ali and a friend of his from the road gang said, 'Oh, we'll fix that.' So they spread the news that there was going to be a wrestling match in front of our stand. And about a half hour later they squared off and started to wrestle. That certainly attracted a big crowd. It was a ten round match. The only trouble was that hardly anybody bought anything. All in all we made about fifteen dollars, which wasn't too bad.

Ali was away for much of that summer working and looking for work. So I was alone in the cabin much of the time and I was pregnant again. Every Saturday there was a stream of people heading into Lillooet from the surrounding districts to buy supplies and some to stay and drink. The road to Moha and to two rancherias led right by our cabin. Almost every Saturday night when Ali wasn't home there was this one group of Indian men, teenagers and grown men, that came around the cabin trying to frighten me. They'd throw pebbles against the window and make animal noises or they would ride around the cabin whooping it up. A woman living alone in those places was a target for that sort of stuff. I never found out who they were but it was always the same bunch. I had the two dogs with me and they would bark and growl to beat sixty, so I felt fairly safe with them around. But nevertheless, after a while I just didn't feel comfortable there alone.

Early that fall when Ali had a job on one of the road gangs and was gone for long stretches of time we decided that I would move into town. We sold the cabin to a very old man living in Lillooet. He was an old Chinese prospector who was almost blind and could hardly get around. Somehow he managed on his own but I was always afraid he would fall into the river some day. He had friends in the area he could have stayed with but he was used to living alone and liked it. After he took over the cabin I visited him there a few times but I found it almost impossible to understand what he said. He was a little odd but always cheerful. Actually, he bought that cabin from us for twenty dollars. But after a while we began to think it wasn't right, since we couldn't use the cabin anyway and nobody else would pay us anything for it. Besides, Ali had a job by that time and this old guy was really living from hand to mouth. So one day Ali took the money and

bought groceries which he delivered to the old man. I'm glad we did that too because about a year later this guy died in that cabin.

Ali had made an arrangement for me to stay on the ranch of a friend of his. The deal was that they would build a cabin where Ali and I could stay, a place with somebody around while Ali was away. In addition I would get ten dollars month for cooking and doing the housework and generally keeping an eye on the man's son. That was okay. Ali and I were hoping that this time I would really be able to carry the baby to term and we didn't want to take any unnecessary risks.

Goulet's wife had died a few years before, leaving him with their boy who was eleven years old at the time I knew him. Goulet himself had a permanent job with the railway. He had that plus a small veterans pension and his little ranch. All in all he was fairly secure. They had about ten acres of arid bench land near town. There was a small spring on his property and he had about three or four acres planted in corn, beans, fruit of all sorts. With water that sandy soil turned in a veritable Garden of Eden. He sold some of the garden produce to local stores and even shipped a little out. I made barrels of wine out of the stuff they grew, all kinds.

Goulet was above all else a real gentleman, a little stingy but really a fine man. He had grown up somewhere else in the interior. He didn't talk much about anything but when he did tell you about growing up in BC during the first year of this century he had some fascinating stories. Usually he had to have a couple of drinks with visitors before he got started. During the First World War he had volunteered and gone to France where he was badly wounded. Occasionally he had to go down to the Veterans hospital in Vancouver for treatment of those injuries. But he somehow managed to escape that anti-German hatred that so many people of his background had. It's sort of strange but often I found that those men who had actually been in the trenches and had returned were much less militaristic and nationalistic, in a narrow sense, than those who had never gone and had been safe during the war. I don't know. Maybe in that war those who survived, if they had really been in the battles, knew that the real enemies, those who were responsible for the war weren't the enemy soldiers. Although I may be imagining that. In any case Goulet was all right. And he stood by us as a friend when we needed some help.

Ali and a friend had built us a shack of rough lumber and tar paper about a hundred yards from the main house. I had some regular furniture and a small wood heater in there. That was okay in early October when we moved in but as soon as it started to get cold it became like an icebox in there. The wind would cut right through the walls on some winter days. At times I thought that leaving our cabin wasn't such a good idea. If it was really cold outside I would have the heater going full blast and the water in the water buckets still froze over.

At that time we were half seriously thinking of settling down in that area if we could make a living. Ali started combing the whole district for whatever jobs he could find. He'd get an odd day here and a few days there, maybe a couple of weeks work on the roads some place else. Travelling twenty, fifty and more miles from job to job. In our imagination Ali and I sometimes talked about how nice it would be to have a small farm on one of the benches on the other side of the river from Lillooet. Good climate, wonderful view, near enough to a town yet not too near. Of course, with us it was mainly a pipe dream because we had no money to start a farm. That would have been the ultimate insanity during the depression anyway. There were a lot people who eyed those bench lands for ranches or farms but at that time there was no way of economically getting water up to them. I think what in a way attracted us was the wildness of some of those spots. We used to see wild horses browsing there, real wild mustangs. I used to watch them with a pair of binoculars that I borrowed from Goulet. It's hard to believe how wild that country was even then, even that close to the town and the roads and the railway. Of course, that was almost forty years ago.

We still had our two dogs but in December (1935) somebody shot my Barry. The first time he managed to crawl back home and I was able to patch him up. When he got better I made a big wire mesh cage for him. But an active dog likes to run around and he was used to that. A little later he managed to get out and didn't return. The next day I went looking for him and found him dead, shot by someone.

In late January Ali and I were getting ready to go to Vancouver for me to have a baby. That was the first time I had managed to carry a baby that long and we wanted to be in Vancouver in plenty of time and have me in hospital early in case something happened at the last minute. We didn't know where we'd be, what we would be doing or what chance we would have of keeping a

dog. So we decided, against my better judgement, to find the very best home for Peggy.

There was this one stump rancher in the hills who Ali knew. Everybody said he was just great with animals, that he loved animals. So we talked to him and he said he'd take Peggy and look after her real well. I turned Peggy over to him and got out of there fast because I didn't want to see or hear her trying to get off the chain to follow us. Even now, after all these years, whenever I think of it I feel so terribly guilty. When we came back about five months later Peggy was dead. We found out that that rotten bastard had let her starve to death. When I learned that I felt like killing him. If I'd been a man I would have beaten the living daylights out of him. But of course I didn't, and Ali didn't do anything either except threaten to knock his block off. Let's drop that; it makes me feel too angry.

I was in the last months of pregnancy. If you needed medical treatment you had to go to Lytton, which was about fifty miles away. But we wanted the best doctor and hospital services that we could afford because we thought it might possibly be touch and go. So we went down to Vancouver in mid-February of 1936. I thought that the baby wasn't due for at least another month. It was some trip. The hairpin turns, the roads covered with ice, with barely enough room on the road for one car till you reached Lytton. Then down the Fraser Canyon road. Now that's a superhighway but then it was just a glorified back road with barely enough room for two cars to pass under the best of conditions. Often we slithered around from one side of the road to the other. Luckily there was hardly any traffic. I can still see that trip in my mind's eye. I just sat, hardly saying anything, holding my breath. Finally we reached Chilliwack. Down in the Fraser Valley it was almost spring, at least comparatively. It was wet and rainy and foggy.

Very late at night we made it into Vancouver and got a room. The next day we made arrangements with a doctor who was supposed to be one of the best obstetricians in Vancouver. He set a fee of a hundred and twenty-five dollars which was pretty high for those days.

We sat around in our room taking it easy. For about a week we went to a movie almost every night. I had a craving for bananas - bananas and cream was about all I ate for days. Then on the third of March I started to get labour pains. 'Well, what's this,' I thought. 'I'm not due for another three weeks yet.' At first I

thought it was another miscarriage. So right away we rushed to the hospital. That was in the evening and I was in labour on and off most of the night. Oh, it was terrible. It was really one of the interns there who did most of the work delivering the baby, except for me that is. Finally the obstetrician arrived in the early morning, gave me some gas and delivered the baby with instruments.

Actually, Ali hardly turned up at the hospital. Some fathers would have been pacing up and down the floors waiting for the delivery but Ali just went home and went to bed. Despite that, he was even more keen than I to have a child. And there he was, a son. Everything perfect, normal and in working order.

Although I grew up in a big family I didn't really know anything about child rearing - except the basics. But then, who does? Certainly not the people who write those silly psychological books on child care. All I knew was that Ali and I would have to lead a more regular life. That was fine with me, although that's not the way it turned out in the next few years.

What did I feel about having a son? Well, a lot of things. One was a kind of general hopefulness; here was a new being that we had produced ourselves who could start fresh from scratch. That's why we picked what we felt was a good new name for him, Jon, that none of our friends or relatives had used, so to speak. Something different, but still not arty or outlandish. Ali had already changed our surname from Krommknecht to a Canadian name the year before.

Expectations? Well I didn't really have any fast and firm expectations; how could you have when you didn't know what would happen from one month to the next. All I know is that I wanted Jon to grow up with more chances and opportunity to do something with his life than we had.

When I got out of the hospital and we had paid the bills, almost all of our money was gone. We wanted to stay in Vancouver if possible but Ali couldn't find any work. He looked everywhere. We sold the car and that gave us about seventy-five dollars to live on for a while. We rented a room in the Rainbow Lodge, a motel out in Burnaby where the winter rates were very cheap. After about three weeks Ali decided to head back into the interior to look for work anywhere he could. I couldn't traipse around the country with a babe in arms so I stayed on in Burnaby. I was down to my last ten dollars and was wondering what I was going to do when that ran out. After I paid the rent and bought the baby

formula I had only a couple of dollars left to live on. In those days there was no question of going on welfare. So in late April I moved in with Angie and Theo Jensen who by that time had a sort of small farm in Burnaby. That was an uncomfortable arrangement and I was glad when Ali wrote and said he had a permanent job on the road gang near Lillooet again and that I should come up and join him.

Ali certainly always tried his best. Although he never seemed to be there when I really needed him. But he was always out trying to make a living for us. He was very correct that way and would send almost his entire pay check back. I often told him to keep some money for himself but he didn't. Often he didn't have enough money left for even a few bottles of beer after he sent me the money.

### *Main Street, Canada*

I got back to Lillooet in May 1936 and moved back into our cabin on Goulet's ranch. After a while a whole stream of people came up to visit me and see Jon. That was sort of strange because I hardly knew some of them and our place was some distance from town. They all oohed and ahed, as people do with babies, and said, 'Oh, he looks just like Ali.'

At first it didn't register with me, but then I figured it out. All those people thought that because I was living on Goulet's ranch and taking care of his house while Ali was away I therefore must be sleeping with him and that the child might be his. When I came to that conclusion I got boiling mad, especially when I met them on the streets and they said hello but I could read their thoughts. I would just give them an icy stare. Except for a few friends, I just closed the door to my cabin to anybody who came around, even if they saw me. That soon stopped people from coming around to see the baby but it didn't exactly make us popular in town. But who needs the acquaintance of people like that anyway.

The majority of the people in Lillooet itself were just exactly like the picture I always had of small town people, only more so. Anybody who had some minor position, even as a government clerk, or who had some penny-ante little business, thought they were big cheeses. The town was very clique ridden. There were only two or three hundred people in town and maybe twice that number in the surrounding area. That clanishness and holier-than-thou baloney was mainly among families living right in the



village of Lillooet itself. Mrs. Jones didn't talk to Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Brown didn't talk to either of them. That was all within the established society of the town. Oh, they would all greet each other on the street and say how nice this and that was and how terrible it was that so and so happened. They they would go and tear each other down.

If there was an elite in that town it certainly wasn't based on much. Just about everybody, in fact you could say everybody, was just getting by at best. Even the most successful businessmen and officials were really just little fleas in the scheme of things. Whatever bit of power they had didn't amount to much outside of their very narrow backyards. Maybe they could provide a little credit to some and deny it to others, or get the occasional government job for a friend at times or talk to a magistrate. But all in all, I think it was mainly hot air that they dealt in. Still, all these people were high and mighty and one group looked down upon another.

The Murray bunch, Ma Murray, her husband and their daughter's family and a couple of other families in town made up one clique. They thought that nobody was good enough for them. The Murrays had a printing shop and ran the local newspaper. Her husband had been a member of the Provincial Legislature a few years before and he always wanted to be treated as The Honourable Member, as if his measly position was a hereditary lordship or something. They were the local kingpins of the Liberal party but I don't think that amounted to much in those days.<sup>37</sup>

The TV shows and magazines make so much fuss about Ma Murray and her newspaper now - 'The crusading editor of the Bridge River and Lillooet News.' But it was always an inane and empty little sheet. If saying 'Damnshur' at every conceivable place makes one an editor then I suppose she was one, but all that homespun wisdom that she's touted for always struck me as simple minded, at best. I think those commentators who make all that hoopla about her have never read a copy of that rag. I don't know, maybe just living to be eighty and saying the same things for the last sixty years is enough to bring you fame. But I came to dislike her intensely.

Of course what could you expect from a town like that? I've known people from mining towns or from farms and homesteads who were pretty knowledgeable and with broad outlooks. But certainly not Lillooet. Oh, there were some exceptions, like the family that ran a small printing shop in town. That man grew up in

the dust bowl of Saskatchewan but knew as much about the world as anybody I ever met. There were a few other people like that. But the local society, if that's what you want to call it, really were pretty backward. It's really no wonder that that same kind of Provincial government always got into power, with all the little towns like that. Maybe it's different now, but I doubt it.

We didn't belong to any clique at all. Which was all right with me. I must say, it seems to me that many of the people living in the area but outside the town, scattered around in little cabins and on the stump ranches, were really a lot more decent than those giving themselves airs in the town itself. Some of those people really did have a kind of homespun wisdom. Most of the small ranchers living in the district, Indian and others, didn't even bother much about Lillooet. They got their supplies and mail there but they had their friends scattered around the countryside.

I spent the days looking after the baby. Or I took him to visit Pat or some of the people I knew from before. During the summer I also spent a lot of time working in that huge garden, three or four acres, that Goulet had. There was no necessity to do that but I enjoyed it, especially doing the irrigating. That just fascinated me. A little bit of weeding, picking some of the vegetables, irrigating it. It was very pleasant. Ali had a job cooking for a road gang and worked fourteen hours a day, seven days a week, but he used to come home twice a week. The pay was fairly good for those times, ninety or a hundred dollars a month plus room and board. We were able to start saving money again. Whenever he had a job we always scrimped and saved. We didn't live much differently than when he was unemployed. Of course when he was without a job we used up the little money we had saved, which was never more than a couple of hundred dollars under the best of conditions.

By the end of August Ali and I had saved up a few hundred dollars again and Ali was beginning to talk about working for himself. 'Oh, oh,' I thought. 'Now what?' Actually I already knew what Ali was leading up to because there was a small bake shop in Lillooet which the owner wanted to sell. I let Ali talk me into buying that place because I didn't want to go on living separated, with him coming on visits a few times a week from his job. But we really should have known better than to get into a small business in a small town where we were still strangers. And we should have known what to expect in terms of income from the way the

former baker and his family were living. His wife was so fed up that she was ready to leave the whole kit and kaboodle whether they sold it or not. In fact, I think she gave him an ultimatum, 'Sell it or else.' The real tip off should have been, if we needed any more, that this guy boasted that he bought his little girl an ice cream cone every day. A five cent cone. But we got into the business anyway and shot the few hundred dollars that we had managed to scrape together in the most miserly fashion. Boy were we dumb. We should have enjoyed our money whenever we had it and let the bad times take care of themselves. The money we were able to save never made much of a difference anyway if things got rough.

There we were in the fall of 1936 with almost no money but with a bake shop which the previous owner had gone broke on. It only lasted until the next spring but by that time we were not only broke ourselves, we were also in debt to suppliers. It certainly seemed longer than six months that we had that place. We were on the go from morning till night. The longer and harder we worked the more we went into debt it seemed.

The mines in the Bridge River area were booming and for a while we sent a lot of bread and pastry up to a number of them. The trouble was that many of them were just fly-by-night ventures. Here today, gone tomorrow. Some of them never paid, or only paid part of their bills or only paid after a long wait.

We sold a fair amount of bread to the Lillooet stores but we only made about a penny a loaf. If they couldn't sell all of it we would have to take back the remainder. We also baked cookies and various types of pastry. Danish pastry was three for a dime, fresh, and very good too. People would come in and buy one piece for tea or maybe buy a dozen cookies for a nickel. Fresh bread was a nickel a loaf, a big loaf too. But even then we had trouble selling it. Some customers would have you put all their purchases on the cuff and then wouldn't pay, except maybe one third of what they owed. When they paid that they wanted more credit and if you really pressed some of them to pay up they would just leave in a huff and not pay anything. We sometimes brought bread and second day pastry to some of our friends and acquaintances who did have money. But most of the people that we would have liked to have given this stuff to, who had really been friends and helped us, wouldn't accept it as a gift and usually were determined to pay for what we brought them. That was like pushing our wares and I didn't like doing that. If there

were any bums heading through town we were always good for a loaf of bread and maybe some pastry. But for some reason there weren't that many bums<sup>38</sup> coming through Lillooet.

Then, out of spite or for reasons I can't fathom, this one clique in town started circulating rumors that we put defective, poisonous, flour in our bread. At first our sales in town fell off almost completely. A couple of stores started shipping bread in from Vancouver. But after a while, most of the sales, such as they were, returned. What was most galling was that you had to be polite and talk to people who you didn't like and who you knew didn't think much of you. Because they bought five cents worth of bakery goods you would have to stand there and say, 'Well isn't that interesting' and 'Oh my, isn't that terrible.' Of course, that was what was considered polite behaviour in general. But if you didn't run a store and weren't dependent upon the good will of your customers you didn't have to be bound by it. Ali was always working in the back and hardly had anything to do with the customers. I would spend my days selling the stuff and listening to all that small talk. I'll tell you, there is absolutely no worse way to make a living than running a small store.

Besides wrapping up all the bread and running the selling end of the shop and keeping the accounts, I had to do the other household duties too and look after Jon. By that time he could get around already and ran around like the wind. I had it so arranged that I could see into our one room from where I worked. There was also a small fenced area beside the house where he used to play when it was sunny and I could watch him through a side window. But a number of times he got away from me and I went frantically searching for him. Once I had searched the house and gone up and down the town asking if anybody had seen him. I was beginning to get pretty scared. Finally I found him, curled up in the dark corner under the back porch, asleep. The trouble is that kids that age are just fearless; you have to keep a pretty sharp eye on them until they are old enough that you can tell them what's dangerous.

That whole miserable show went on for almost six months and then Ali finally saw the light. He managed to get a job baking in the Pilot Mine. It was only about fifty miles away but so deep in the mountains that it took a good day to get there and a day to get back. So we had to separate again. Although the pay was pretty poor he was still making more in a day or two's wages than we took in during an entire week in the bake shop. What we

should have done is just declared bankruptcy and let the whole mess go. But we hoped to get out a bit of the money we had invested in equipment. So the plan was that I'd hang on to the bake shop and try to sell it while Ali worked to get a bit of a stake. Sell it, indeed. Nobody in his right mind would buy a bake shop in a small town during the depression. And nobody did. We placed ads in various newspapers painting it in attractive terms, with a low down payment. Not even a single nibble. Others were smarter than us.

I didn't have any qualm about walking out on the biggest debt. That was to the Kelly-Douglas Company in Vancouver and they had made enough money out of us. But I did feel rather guilty about leaving still owing a couple of the local storekeepers. Two of them had always been pretty fair to us. It was only twenty or thirty dollars we owed them in total but that was quite a bit of money to lose in those days. But we decided to leave and make a complete break with that town. Actually, the equipment we left behind in the shop was worth more than the debts we'd run up.

We packed our bags, said good by to a few friends, and just left. Ali headed back up into the Bridge River area and I got on the stage to Lytton and headed for Vancouver. A few people asked me where I was going. I had a couple of suitcases in one hand and Jon in the other, so they knew something was up. 'I'm going south for a rest cure,' is all I said.

We were only in Vancouver for a couple of weeks when Ali sends down a message saying he has a permanent job baking in the Bralorne mine and I should come up and join him. So we did. He already had made a whole raft of friends there with other families and somehow had managed to get a tiny house from the company. Rented of course. Bralorne was a company town at the time, like the two or three other mining towns in the area. Everything, from soup to nuts, was owned or run by the company. The people though were quite different from what you found in a place like Lillooet. At least while I was there. Most of them were pretty new to the town and they were more like ordinary working people from a city than anything else. It seemed really sort of pleasant. I was getting to know new people who were friendly and it was beautiful country. Besides, I was glad to get away from all the pressures of that bakery. Of course, who knows? The place did have a sort of closed-in feeling about it and in the winter or after a year or so you might have gotten the

feeling of being hemmed in. A number of people said they felt that way. In any case, I wasn't there long enough to find out.

## 8. Edge of the Maelstrom (1937-1942)

### *Hitlerite Germany*

For most of the years we were in Canada I didn't write to my family too much - maybe a letter every second month to my mother. At first more, but later less. But about a month after we were in Bralorne a letter came from Kurt, my younger brother, about my mother. I'm not even sure how that letter reached us because it was addressed to Lillooet. In it Kurt pleaded with me to come back to Berlin immediately and said that if I didn't come my mother might commit suicide because of the things that had happened. You see, Fritz, Kurt and Werner had all been in concentration camps and Erna had just died, been killed actually. My mother had been terribly depressed and Erna's death really unbalanced her.

Erna had had a serious operation on her middle ear. She'd been pretty ill and had been off work for a long time. But she was healing nicely. At that time people in Germany had to report to *Vertrauensarzt* ('Confidential doctor') after an absence from work of over four weeks. They were special government doctors who determined whether one was fit to return to work or not. They were in those positions to make sure that anybody who went on sick leave went back to work as soon as humanly possible, whether well or not.

Erna went down to see this one insurance doctor after six weeks or so. She took a friend of hers along because she was still weak and dizzy. The doctor had hardly looked at her when he started to call her a malingerer. He came over to her. 'There's nothing wrong with you. Do you think you can fool me with those bandages.' And he tore them off. She passed out but her friend somehow managed to get her back to my mother's place. After that Erna was in terrible pain, only semi-coherent. They got her own doctor to come right over. When he first saw that the dressing was gone he flew into a rage. 'Who removed that dressing? I told you not to tamper with that. Somebody is going to answer for this.' But when my mother told him what had happened and the name of the doctor who did it he just shut up and didn't say a single thing more about it. Very early the next morning Erna died.

Erna had been the only child left at home with my mother. Besides, Erna was always her favourite. That, and the horrible and unnecessary way she did die drove my mother more than half mad. Somehow she got herself a revolver and was determined to shoot that doctor. Maybe she had that gun hidden for years, it's possible. She disappeared for about a week and it turned out she was laying in wait for the doctor who did it. She turned up at his office and wandered aimlessly in the streets with this revolver in her purse. But luckily or unluckily, she never ran across him.

Finally my mother came home and Kurt managed to get the gun away from her. The whole family talked to her and told her that killing that doctor wouldn't bring Erna back and that it would only mean her own death too. Besides, our whole family was on the blacklist. If she had shot that Nazi doctor, justified or not, there was a good chance that all my brothers would wind up back in the concentration camps. That's the way it often worked. After a while she quietened down a little only to go into such a deep depression that they were sure that one day she would kill herself. Some of this they wrote me and some I found out later. They asked me to come and stay with her if only for a little while.

I was torn between what to do worse than anytime in my life. On the one hand I thought, 'What can I do that all my brothers and their wives can't do?' But then I was the only remaining daughter. Even if we weren't all that close as mother and daughter, there are still some feelings that my brothers didn't share and couldn't understand. On the other hand, going back would be like jumping from the frying pan into the fire. I thought, 'Who knows what will happen there? Who knows if I'll have trouble getting back to Canada?' Actually, if I had understood just how touchy things were I wouldn't have gone. One never knew when a new wave of arrests might start again there, especially when my brothers had been carted off once and were constantly under suspicion. Even on the practical side, Ali and I didn't have any money for a trip to Germany and back for me. I weighed all this back and forth and I no sooner decided on one thing when I changed my mind.

A series of letters came in short succession pleading for me to come back. My brothers must have been pretty panicky too. Ali always did things on the spur of the moment. The deciding thing was what he finally said to me. He shamed me into going. 'Your mother needs you, the mother that raised you and cared for you is calling to you. You wouldn't abandon her, would you? You



wouldn't sell her down the river.' Those may not have been the exact words but they are pretty close to them. And coming from Ali that was quite powerful. So I decided to go.

There was the problem of what to do with Jon. Ali was working and he couldn't take care of him. I considered leaving Jon with somebody here but I didn't really trust anybody with my baby a year old. And deep down I wanted him with me anyway, even if it wasn't the smartest thing to do. There was no choice anyway. With the money that we had and what Ali was able to borrow we were just able to pay the one way fare from Vancouver to Berlin. I had about forty dollars left over for meals and emergencies. But we couldn't raise the cash for a return passage. Ali was working then and said that within two months, or three months at the longest, he would be able to send me the return fare. That was about as long as I intended to stay anyway.

Going to Montreal by train was uneventful. Once I had decided to go there was no turning back so I didn't think too much about the sort of difficulties that might arise in the future. I was able to board the ship without waiting and we had a beautiful, sunny, smooth crossing. But on the third day out, out of the blue, I ruptured something and started to bleed. It wasn't a miscarriage but it had something to do with miscarriages I'd had. They put me in the sick bay and took pretty good care of me.

We disembarked at Southampton and went to London where we had to lay over before we could make connections with a ship to Bremen. But I was still very weak and landed up in a hospital in London for the three days until our ship left. We got on the ship to Bremen okay, but back in Germany the immigration officials only gave me a four day visa. And by the time we reached Berlin I was completely out of money. I had about ten dollars left.

My mother was still very depressed when we arrived but she was beginning to get a grip on herself. She probably would have been all right even if I hadn't come. None of us had any money. Certainly not enough for all of us to live on. In order to support us for a while my mother sold most of the furniture that she had left. But that wouldn't last very long so I had to get a job to carry us through until Ali could send some money.

It was late July 1937. Three days after I got to Berlin I had to report to the main police station in Alexanderplatz in order to get a visa that would allow me to stay for a number of months. It was a huge building with an endless flight of stairs leading up to it. The building, the drab rooms full of people waiting for some

stamp or another, the way the bureaucrats in there treated you - it was all pretty forbidding. I spent most of a day there and finally I was led into a room where a couple of plainclothes police questioned me on a whole range of things. Was I coming back to Germany to stay? Why did my husband stay behind? Had we been good Germans in Canada? Whatever that meant. What did the newspapers and people in Canada say about the new Reich and about the Fuhrer? The purpose of all that was to sound you out. I just played dumb, without being servile or hostile. The interrogation room of a police station is no place to speak your mind. I knew enough not to engage in empty talk about what you thought under those circumstances.

First of all they said, 'Nothing doing. No work permits for visitors.' They were glad to provide all the necessary papers right on the spot if you signed a statement saying you were a returnee. There was an official policy of encouraging all persons of German extraction to return to Germany. If you swore to that statement, saying you were a returnee, you immediately got whatever papers were needed. Plus some money to get you settled plus help in getting housing. Jobs were easy enough to come by if you had the papers. But I was afraid if I signed this statement I wouldn't be able to get out of the country again and that if I did I might have difficulties getting back into Canada. So I told them that I couldn't sign it without my husband's permission. I said he was working in the far north where I couldn't get in touch with him for three or four months. I laid it on pretty thick, and never did sign that statement.

The police officials got their backs up when I wouldn't sign that returnee affidavit. For a while I thought they were going to deport me right away. But I elaborated about how I had come back to care for my sick mother and all that. Of course I didn't tell them the story of why she needed care. First they gave me a visitor's visa but no work permit. I kept going to other government offices, and kept asking for a work permit. Finally this one guy, in some civilian bureau, stamped my papers so that I could apply for work.

The first job I got was in a big machine factory doing various sorts of jobs like operating drilling and filling machines. At least a third of that plant was made up of women, mainly married women. Jobs were plentiful but the wages, in comparison to the prices, were very low. Both the husband and wife had to work to

be able to support their family at a minimum decent level. One wage earner just wasn't enough.

There was supposed to be jobs for everyone; (class) harmony and unity. Well, there were jobs for everyone who wasn't on one of the blacklists. But the unions and the workers' factory councils that I'd known when I last worked in a Berlin factory were gone. The bosses and their straw bosses really ruled the roost. Some of those foremen were all right, as some always are. But the owners knew they held the whip hand and they let you know it too. There was none of this flitting from one job to the next, taking off a few weeks or just not coming in for a day. For all the talk of (class) harmony, factory workers and especially factory girls were looked down on more than ever. There was a real step backwards in the ten years I'd been away. Still, despite the times and despite the conditions, the ordinary men and the women who worked in the factories were a good bunch to be with. In a way I guess I had sort of missed Berlin people, although I hadn't realized it.

After a couple of months I thought I'd better try and get a better paying job which would allow me to add something to my return fare. Ali by that time had lost the job he had when I left and had been able to send only one pay check. By that time I had realized that the smartest thing would have been not to come in the first place. But it was too late for those sorts of reflections. I needed some job where I could earn more. I finally got one with a company that made very expensive hairdryers. Although there were quite a few things which were scarce there were still plenty of luxury goods around for those who could afford them. My job was to nickel plate a part of the dryer. It was all piece work and though the rates looked good on paper it turned out that I didn't make much more at that second job than I did at the first. It was just enough to get by on if you were careful and with very little chance of saving any money.

There was the problem of what to do with Jon. He was a little over a year and a half and there weren't any nurseries where I could leave him. Not any that I could afford anyway. My mother had started working again as a part time seamstress in a hospital. She wasn't all that responsible yet and I would have had qualms about leaving Jon with her all day even if it had been possible. There were two or three old women in the neighbourhood who looked after children during the day at a

nominal price. So I left him with them. I didn't particularly like that either but there was no other choice.

Sometimes I would just stay home from work and go on walks with Jon but then the next day there would be a lot of trouble with the boss. They treated absenteeism almost as a crime. The worker had very little comeback either. So I couldn't do that very often. The whole time I was there was just one long grind for me. I was often ill but still had to go to work. And there was never a cent left for anything. We were poor in Canada too but except for the very worst times there was always something that we could enjoy and somehow we always managed to find a little extra money, even if it was only for a movie or a car ride.

On paper there were all sorts of new and extensive social security schemes (in Nazi Germany). But they were mainly on paper as far as the ordinary worker was concerned. There were supposedly creches and day care centres for the children of working mothers, except that they didn't apply to many categories of workers and were always full with a long waiting list even where they did exist. There was supposed to be a complete hospitalization and medical coverage scheme. Erna had gotten that. Even if social security schemes were fairly effective in some things, you more than paid for them through wage rates. In any case, they were a lot worse than when I had last worked in factories in Germany.

Every month or so there was a team from the S.A. that came around for donations to the *Winter Hilfe* (Winter Relief). That was a sort of charity campaign run by the Nazi party that provided coal and clothes and maybe some food to the very poor and disabled and old age pensioners during the winter. It was a sort of mass advertising on how concerned the Nazi party was for all classes. They would deliver those supplies to the recipients themselves, all dressed up in full regalia. That gives you some idea of how far they had gotten with their social security schemes. It was supposed to be a voluntary donation but it was collected by big strapping fellows in uniforms and maybe wearing a revolver. They made the rounds of all the apartments and houses and work places. It took a pretty brave soul to say no to them. We gave as little as we could get away with because we were poor ourselves. It was really infuriating to have to give money to them knowing what they had done to your people. But you couldn't avoid it. Sometimes we were berated by some zealous collector for not giving more.

When I came home from work there was my mother, sitting and waiting for me. Often she would just sit and stare at the walls or the door or out the window. Although she had never been a possessive person she wouldn't let me out of her sight. If I came home a half hour later than usual she would berate me for not wanting to come home. Every day, every single day without fail, rain or shine, nothing would do but that we had to go to the cemetery where Erna was buried. My mother would tend the flowers she had planted around the plot and sit there and cry and cry. She had been a pretty strong woman but Erna's death had been too much for her. It was nerve-wracking. Somehow I couldn't tell her to let it be, to let the dead rest. I loved Erna too and I felt rotten and angry about it too, but still I was getting fed up with the whole scene. When we were together with Fritz or the others we were all a little more cheerful, all things considered. But right below the surface was the tension and fear. Both Fritz and Kurt were on the verge of cracking up. But that was very understandable. In fact, I often wondered how they managed to hold themselves together.

Fritz had been a communist since the Spartacus days and he had been on the run most of his adult life, if not from one government then from another, if not one month then the next. Although he was a pretty small fish in the party he was certainly on the Nazi blacklist. I'm not sure if Kurt or Werner even were party members. If they were it was pretty late when they joined.

Fritz was already in hiding in 1933 but he still came home occasionally to sleep with Hadel, his wife. There must have been a surveillance of his house or one of his neighbours was an informer because one day in 1934, just after he had sneaked in, the S.S. drove up, pulled Fritz out of the house and threw him into a truck. Hadel ran out and pleaded with them to tell her where they were taking him but they never told anybody anything. For weeks after that she tried to find out where he was, if he was all right or even if he was still alive. She went from one office and one police bureau to another but of course she didn't learn anything. Much later she was informed that Fritz was in a concentration camp. That happened to many, many people. In fact, my brothers were among the luckier ones because they all escaped with their lives.<sup>39</sup>

Kurt landed in a concentration camp too a bit later for distributing literature telling people to resist Hitler. In one sense, Kurt was lucky because at home he had hidden a big stack of

pamphlets he supplied to other people who distributed them. While the police came and made a perfunctory search of his apartment they didn't find anything. Later, people doing that, especially if the leaflets advocated sabotage, just disappeared for good. To top it off, a short while later Werner was caught tarring up some anti-Hitler slogans along a railway line and he vanished too.

Kurt and Werner were only in the camps for about a year or so but Fritz was in for almost three years. He had just gotten out before Erna died. When they were released from those camps they had to sign an oath that they would reveal nothing about where they had been or what happened to them on penalty of death. By that time most people knew there were such things as concentration camps but not what they really were. Of course, as with a lot of things like that, many people just didn't want to know.

Released prisoners weren't supposed to tell even their wives or parents where they had been or what had happened to them. They didn't really want to talk about what happened to them or what they had to do to survive anyway. Fritz and Kurt did tell us some things, in the barest outlines. Prisoners were regularly beaten up and systematically terrorized. While they were in those camps, the slightest infraction meant that they could be shot, even for talking against the government or talking about communism. I think that was intended to break the will of the prisoners, and it probably did to a large degree. Of course the more important leaders never reappeared from those places again. Although the camps weren't what they later became, there were already thousands of people being murdered in the camps as early as that.

Fritz had been in Sachsenhausen 40 and before that he was in a camp where the commander was a particularly vicious character. Once this commander brought a number of his friends and girlfriends in. They led a bunch of prisoners, Fritz among them, into a big room. There was some sort of music playing and the guards, the men in that party and even some of their girlfriends amused themselves by beating the prisoners with electric truncheons and making them do all sorts of degrading things. While that was going on the rest of the party was sitting there drinking beer and wine. Understandably, Fritz didn't want to talk about those years.

Once they got out of the camps, those that did, they were constantly under the eye of the police. They had to report to the police constantly and were always being watched. They lived in daily fear of being picked up again. The special police and Nazi party bonzers ('heavies') and the thousands of little informers there were made of a point of keeping after people like Fritz. Anybody who had been in a camp or who was under suspicion had to watch every step he took. Fritz went into hiding a few times and that probably saved him. There was the threat that some minor party leader or some group would mete out punishment to him on their own. One hand of the state often didn't seem know what the other hand was doing, even though it was all part of the same apparatus. Some people disappeared into the camps for the most trivial things or because of some personal quarrel with a party official. Yet others seemed to get away with quite a bit fairly openly, at least at that time.

While I was there all of my brothers had a hard time to get a job with their records. They occasionally got some temporary work but even then they would be fired. They all stayed in Berlin and that was probably the safest place for them. I think their wives supported them.

Despite all of that, we did some pretty foolhardy things. It was forbidden to listen to most foreign broadcasts by the time I was there. In fact, I think shortwave radios either had to be turned in or you had to get a special license for them. Kurt had an illegal shortwave radio, just a receiver. Sometimes we would get together and listen to broadcasts from Russia. We sat around with our ears to the radio, turned down so low that even we could barely hear it. That was pretty ridiculous because we never learned anything that you couldn't read between the lines of the newspapers. Even if we had learned something unusual we couldn't have done anything with it anyway. And if we had gotten caught listening to a Russian station there would have been a severe penalty, especially for my brothers.

My mother did some pretty foolhardy things too. If you had any official business with government officials you would usually be required at some point to say 'Heil Hitler.' But she used to say 'Keil Hitler,' that is, 'Thrash Hitler.' Those two words can be sort of slurred together but if they would have listened to her closely she would have gotten into real trouble, even as an old woman.

During my free time, when I wasn't working or looking after my mother and Jon, I tried to dig up some of my old friends.

Actually, I didn't have much time for myself or even much energy. The second Sunday I was in Berlin I went to see Sophie. She had gotten married in the meantime. Emile, her husband, was the worst womanizer I ever met. He propositioned every single woman, girl, lady or dame he came in contact with. Including me. I wasn't there two minutes when Sophie went out for something and he propositioned me. He must have been crazy. I don't know why Sophie put up with him. Sophie spent most of her spare time with her three year old son. And good friends as we were, even Sophie and I didn't get together much.

Emile had a pretty checkered career. When they were first married he was a minor functionary in one of the big union federations. When Hitler came to power, right away they picked him up and put him in a concentration camp. Treason.

After about a year in one of the camps Emile made his confession and was converted, so to speak. Now, to get out of a situation like that you can always say whatever you're supposed to say and keep your real thoughts for the right times. There's no purpose to suffering or dying just for the pride of not giving in. That's just stupidity. The first thing is to stay alive. But what I can't understand is that not long after the Nazis let him out of the camp Emile got a job as a teacher. I never did figure out what he did, but Emile was pretty shrewd.

Ali's stepmother lived in Berlin too. She was pleasant enough in her own pretty way, but very simple minded. I guess you would call her part of the silent majority today. There were plenty of people like that then, as there are everywhere. Whatever the government said, whatever propaganda was shoved under their noses, they just gobbled up. And they acted as if they had some say so in the matter. If it wasn't the government, it was the priest. If any two-bit official said something she took it as guaranteed truth. 'Our Fatherland,' she always said. 'Her fatherland,' indeed, when she was living in a hole in the wall room which she would have been tossed out of as soon as she couldn't pay the rent and was working for starvation wages as a cleaning woman.

She had one son, Zeppel. That would have been Ali's step brother. In many ways he was a decent person, considerate and even idealistic in some ways. But he was a two hundred percent Nazi. For some reason, after I arrived he often came to my mother's place to visit. He would hang around waiting for us to invite him to join in in whatever it was we were doing. But we



never dared to have him around long. You had to watch every word you said when he was around. Even though he loved me as a sister, if I had said the slightest thing against Hitler or the Nazis he wouldn't have thought twice to denounce me.

I think he kind of looked up to Fritz in a way because Fritz had been a front line soldier in the (First World) war and was a 'former' communist. Zepple probably knew in his heart that Fritz was still a communist. Still, if we had said or done anything that might be interpreted as subversive, Zepple undoubtedly would have turned us in, although he would have felt terrible about it. He would have thought it was his patriotic duty. Zepple would probably have been a quite decent person under different conditions. In fact, in narrowly personal matters he was decent enough. There were lots of others like that. But as long as they were bound by 'their duty' who knows what they might not have done, or did do. Anyway, Zepple fell in North Africa during the war. That's what he got from his fatherland.

As for real opposition, political or otherwise, there just was none. Not even in the biggest factories, at least not as far as I ever noticed. There wasn't the constant fear that the secret police were looking over your shoulder, not for most people anyway. At least not the way you see it depicted in films. Of course, for some, like Fritz, it was pretty close to that. It was more that the authorities, or some little Nazi leader had complete power to do pretty much what they liked. Most ordinary people had just turned in toward their own very personal lives.

When I got back to Canada some of our friends, both those who were German and those who weren't, thought that the people in Germany were just waiting for the moment to rise up and overthrow Hitler. I said, 'Are you kidding? Can't you imagine what it's like to live under those conditions?' But they just thought I was blind or stupid or something. True enough, there were many, many people, especially working people, who would have liked to have seen Hitler and the Nazis kicked out. But by that time they had learned to keep their feelings to themselves. And by that time it was clear that it couldn't be done from inside the country. People were just living their lives from day to day as best they could.

I was ready to get out three or four months after I got to Germany. By the winter of 1937 I was really getting anxious to leave. I saw that there wasn't very much that I could do for my mother. Living under that tension was beginning to get me down.

It was like waiting for something awful to happen at any time. But strange as it may seem, neither I nor most other people thought that another war was in the offing. Wishful thinking, I suppose, because there were preparations for war going on all around us. Air raid shelters were being built. There were air raid practices and a system of block wardens. War construction was going on everywhere but nobody wanted to believe that there could be only one conclusion to it.<sup>41</sup> In any case, I wanted to get back to Canada as soon as possible.

It took Ali almost nine months to round up the money to bring us back again. He sent a bit of money at first but a couple of months after we left he ran into a stretch of unemployment. He had been laid off at a couple of mines that closed down, and he'd been pretty active in collecting money and distributing leaflets for the Canadian volunteers in Spain. In fact, he thought of volunteering himself. That would have been a really crazy situation, with him fighting in Spain and me sitting in Berlin. Anyway, in February 1938 he did manage to scrape together enough money for the fare. There was one last get together before Jon and I left. All my brothers and their families were there, and my mother, and Sophie - we laughed and cried and said goodbye. In the back of my mind I thought that it might be the last time I would ever see any of them.

### *Happy Days Are Here Again*

A few days later I caught a ship going direct to Halifax, steerage class; actually it was third class dormitory but you could call it steerage. When I got to Halifax I just had my train fare to Vancouver plus ten dollars left. At that point I found out that I wasn't a Canadian citizen, regardless of whether Ali was naturalized or not. I was terribly afraid they would deport me. By that time you couldn't enter Canada unless you could show a fairly sizeable bank balance or unless somebody posted a bond for you. The Immigration Department wouldn't let us leave and we had to live in the special immigration detention building in Halifax until Ali found some way to get us out.

Ali was doing some wrestling in the Western Sports Club in Vancouver but he didn't have a steady job and certainly no money. But after a couple of days he talked the manager of that club, Morris Tamoine, into posting a bond for me. Tamoine really was a friend in need. Although he was next to broke himself and

had a big family he posted that bond through a lien on his house. There are people who spring up out of nowhere to do things like that for you and you never forget them. But he's dead now, too.

As soon as the bond came through Jon and I took the train for Vancouver. I was so relieved that I think I slept most of the way. That was all right too because I had so little money left that, what with feeding Jon, by the time I arrived in Vancouver I was flat broke and hadn't eaten in three days.

Ali was unemployed and staying at the Arco Hotel on Pender and Abbott, near the edge of the skidroad district. The owners of that place knew him and were willing to put the room rent on the cuff for a few months. Ali had worked in a whole string of those small mining camps in the Bridge River area - the Paymaster, Pilot Mines Pacific Eastern, Minto and probably others - while we had been gone. All in that short time. He was fired from Minto Mine because he collected for the Spanish volunteers. He'd been in Vancouver unemployed for almost two months by the time we got back, and was pretty depressed. Broke and jobless and living in that fifth rate hotel, it still felt good to be home.

We decided that Ali should stay in Vancouver until he got a job of some sort, no matter what happened. We hung on with almost no money and hardly anything to eat. By May we were getting desperate, no jobs, no relief. So Ali finally went to the Salvation Army. While I don't like their bible thumping I must admit that they did help people who were down to their last cent. At least at that time. They didn't give you any of this hemming and hawing and filling out forms and then never delivering. The Salvation Army arranged meal tickets the same same day. That tied us over until Ali started to get some occasional day jobs.

It was during the time we were living in the Arco Hotel that we discovered the Cassidy Cafe, down on Cordova and Cambie Streets. For fifteen cents you got a meal that would hold you all day. For instance, one of their fifteen cent specials would be soup and all the crackers you wanted, liver and bacon with potatoes and two kinds of vegetables, a big stack of bread and butter, dessert and coffee. And it was good food, too, well prepared. Ali and I would order a portion each and fed Jon from our plates. We had our last dog from Lillooet with us at the Arco Hotel, and we would make some of the food into sandwiches for him. He would be lying under the table. We always had enough, for thirty cents. Even in those days I couldn't understand how they

managed to break even let alone make a profit. There was an even cheaper place in town, the Wonder Lunch, which had meals for a dime. But it was a pretty rough place with a lot of drunks and real derelicts. Women never went in there anyway. Ali and I were only in there once and we didn't like it.

We ate at the Cassidy for years and years, even after we had some money. It was cheap, the food was good, it was sort of homey. The Cassidy had a pretty regular clientele, a lot of older men. After a while you got to recognize some of the people who ate there and you might say hello to some, even though you didn't know their names. Pretty soon we got to know the people that ran the place. They were almost all relatives of one Chinese family. The waiter might come over and talk about little things, nothing important, just to pass the time of day. It was never very busy in that cafe.

The cafe itself was an old place. I think it probably had the original furnishings it was built with forty or more years before. It was what the loggers' cafes on Cordova Street must have looked like when it was first a main drag. In fact, the place was named after some mining camp that boomed about the time the cafe was first set up. Today the Cassidy would fit right into that whole Gastown development and they would be charging five dollars a meal, or more. Only the people who ran the cafe weren't greedy enough to fit into that crowd down there today. They went out of business about 1950 when the owners of the building remodelled it and got a fancy high-priced Danish furniture store to come in. I don't know what happened to that family afterward, but I hope they had a decent life because they certainly deserved it.

Around the same time, in the spring of 1938, the unemployed took over the old post office on Hastings and Granville. They finally got fed up with being put off and marched in and occupied the post office. That was pretty much the center of town then and I suppose they had hoped that that would put some fire under the government.

Ali had been involved with the Union of the Unemployed off and on for the last few years, so we knew quite a few of the people in the post office.<sup>42</sup> We didn't have very much to eat ourselves but many times we wrapped a bag of lunch or dinner and brought it to the guys in the post office. It had to be something that was already cooked or suitable as a cold meal because they didn't have any cooking facilities in there. They had their own guards at

the door but nobody ever really stopped us. It was all pretty open. Friends and sympathizers and just curious people went in and out to visit. The men occupied the post office for weeks. Inside, they were reading and writing letters or talking to each other and to visitors. Or just sleeping. Sometimes you heard some singing and maybe an accordion playing but in general most of them were pretty depressed, for all the good face they tried to put on it.

In some areas there were door to door collections of food and money for the strikers. We tried that too but we had so many bad reactions from people, who were mainly ordinary workers themselves, that we gave it up. Actually, when it really came down to the pinch there was very little real support for those men apart from their individual friends, and the Union of the Unemployed. What strength and support they hoped to get from real (labor) unions and the public in general didn't come to much, as far as I remember. The police finally forced them out of the post office with tear gas and clubs and arrested them. Some who weren't arrested ran down Hastings Street and a few smashed windows in Spencer's and Woodward's and other stores. That wasn't necessary but what could you expect. The newspapers of course had a field day.

In those days there were lots of parades of the unemployed and there were various tag days and a few big run-ins with the police. In one, down at the old Powell Street grounds, a friend of ours got his collar bone broken when he was clubbed. May Day was always celebrated on May Day, the first of May. The parades were pretty big. They marched through town and usually out to Stanley Park. If we were in Vancouver we would go down and watch for a while and then join in. There would be some organized groups and some bands but most of the people in the parade just joined in in small groups of friends or families. It was a sort of demonstration. There would be speeches in Stanley Park, usually around Lumberman's Arch or Second Beach. But they were pretty long winded and often pretty patronizing too, I thought. Soon families or groups of friends would drift back to town or go for a picnic in the park. Still, it was sort of nice.

We knew quite a few people who talked about going to Spain to fight against Franco. Some were serious about it but many were not. We only knew one person well who actually went to Spain. Ali talked about going too. He had been pretty involved in going to meetings and collecting funds for the volunteers over the last

year. But I really put my foot down when he talked about going himself. Going to fight in other people's revolutions, without any real support. Maybe to be killed there or crippled, or if not, a very good chance that he wouldn't be able to get back into Canada again. No, that was too much. I told him his first responsibility was to his family. He saw that himself. Finally his talk of going to Spain petered out although he continued to go to meetings and what not.

Not too long after that the surviving volunteers came home. Many of those that did come back alive were hurt or crippled in one way or another. There were no pensions or disability payments for them. They got a hero's welcome from their friends when they returned but that was about all. And many were blacklisted in their own home towns or by employers for years after that.

That whole life, the whole way people thought and felt and acted during the depression ended when the Second World War started. Actually, all the resources were there. The money was there or could be created or freed. All the factories were there. They all started up pretty soon after the war began. But for ten years everything had been paralyzed and according to the leading lights there was nothing which could be done. Still more insulting, in the later part of the thirties, radio shows began to advertise, 'Wasn't the depression awful?' Intimating that the depression had passed.

For ten years they couldn't find a way of providing jobs for people and getting them enough to eat or a place to live. But as soon as the war started all those problems were solved, if you call that a solution. And the same thing today, although on a smaller scale. All those hundreds of thousands of people on the streets with no jobs and no chances of getting jobs. All the values are there, all the money and resources are there. But supposedly there is no way to solve the problem. It makes me wonder if people ever learn.

Of course, you can easily begin to feel helpless if hard times last too long. It's almost impossible not to. You begin to think, 'What can a single person do about it? You can't do anything.' Your thoughts are about how rotten it all is. Most of our energy and thought was concentrated on scraping together enough to keep a roof over our heads and getting barely enough to eat.

Ali finally got a few odd jobs around town and we moved into a run down old building on Beach Avenue, near Sunset Beach,

almost under Burrard bridge. Rent was nine dollars a month, furnished. We had a single room, about twelve by eighteen feet, with a partition between the sleeping space and the front part. The front was the kitchen, dining room and living room all rolled into one. There was one flight of wooden stairs in the middle of the building, with about a dozen rooms like our own on each floor. To get to them you had to walk along an open veranda past all the other rooms. Ours was on the second floor near the end of the building. We all got our water from two cold water taps, one on each floor. And there were two very dirty public toilets. Rather than use those I used a chamber pot.

The building must have been fifty years old even then, crumbling apart and like a tinder box. To top it off, each one of those twenty-five odd rooms had a wood burning stove. In fact it's almost miraculous that that place hadn't burned down long ago. I always kept a knotted rope curled under the bed, one end tied to the feet of the bed. I had it planned that if a fire should break out and we couldn't get down the stairs I'd throw the rope out the back window and climb down. It was only about ten or twelve feet and there was a vacant lot on that side. I taught Jon, who was three at that time, to hold on to my back if we should have to escape that way. But it wasn't ever necessary. In fact that building is still standing today.

Those sorts of buildings used to be called 'coolie cabins.'<sup>43</sup> People said that they had been built for Chinese coolies, but I doubt it. Everybody thought that only the poorest of the poor lived in them. But we paid a pretty fair rent; nine dollars a month was by no means the cheapest there was. A cross section of ordinary poor people lived there, a pretty wide assortment of people. In some rooms there were two or three single men - guys out of work. There were quite a few pensioners too. With four or five families, including ourselves, there were always a bunch of kids running around. Then there was Grace Carter, who became one of the best friends I ever had. She lived next door to us.

Grace's birthday was on the same day as mine, although she was a few years older than me. We hit it off almost immediately. She had three kids, the eldest a teenager and the youngest about eight or nine. Her husband had just up and ditched her a couple of years before. They were on relief but with what they got they would have starved to death. Relief was a joke, a very cynical joke. She developed a pretty steady arrangement with this one guy. He was a great big giant of a man, very good natured. In the

end that broke up too. It was a pretty big responsibility for any man to take on a full grown family.

Grace had to earn some extra money in order to make ends meet, but what with the kids and relief and all she couldn't take a regular job, even if she had found one. That woman never sat idle, not even for a few minutes. She either knitted or crocheted when she wasn't doing something else. She made some beautiful sweaters and shawls and all sorts of apparel. The two boys would go from house to house trying to peddle the stuff. She got such a low price for it that all that work never brought in more than a few extra dollars each month after the wool was paid for. Those sorts of schemes are pretty crazy because who can compete with machines? But Grace had a lot of buoyancy and resilience. Almost nothing could get her down for long. That's really a wonderful quality if you have it. She just took things as they came and enjoyed what she could.

Whenever I went out somewhere where I couldn't take Jon he would stay with Grace. He ran in and out of the two rooms during the day anyway. Usually I took him along everywhere, shopping or for a walk in the park or to visit friends. We always walked of course, but we often covered miles and miles. So when he got tired I just loaded him in his wagon which we usually had along.

The area immediately around our place on Beach Avenue was pretty run down, a mixture of rooming houses and small factories. But the beauty of that area was that it was close to everything. You could walk to the center of town in twenty minutes. Best of all, we were only a few minutes from Sunset Beach. The beach was undeveloped then and in many ways more attractive than today. There weren't that many people who used it and you could take your dog along or make a little picnic fire or do pretty well what you liked. Stanley Park was only fifteen minutes away even in leisurely walking time. We went either to the beach or to the park almost every day. A walk to Second Beach, through the woods, around Lost Lagoon and back home along the waterfront. All that sort of thing has vanished now. All you get are masses of people everywhere you go and signs saying don't do this and don't do that. In some ways life seems even more restricted here now than it was in Berlin when I was a young woman. I can certainly see how many young people, and others who are not so young, feel boxed in.

While we lived on Beach Avenue Ali searched around Vancouver and the surrounding areas for any kind of job he could get. 'He



even looked under rocks for a job', as the saying goes. But nothing doing. Although we enjoyed the area, although we had a lot of friends - enough is enough. We got to hate that hand to mouth existence.

### *Living in Camps*

Then in the very early spring of 1939, Ali landed a job as a cook in a large logging camp up in the Queen Charlotte Islands. That was pretty distant country in those days when you only travelled by boat along the coast. Old Allison, the man who actually owned the outfit, lived in the main camp with his wife and their son. The son was the day-to-day manager. Myself, the wives of the two Allison's, and the wife of a highrigger and the widow of an old stump rancher were the only women in the area. There were no kids at all, just the young baby of the highrigger's wife.

It was a pretty big operation with at least two hundred men in the main camp. There were a few small float camps connected with that outfit scattered along the coast too, but we never saw the guys from those camps. The main camp was a full scale logging railway camp and the owners were proud of it. The men rode out to work on flat cars. They had to go a long way into the woods. The tracks ran right through the center of the camp, right past the cookhouse, past the bunkhouses, and on to a trestle built out over the saltchuck. That train would come rolling into camp three or four times a day with flat cars piled high with huge logs. The trestle was built on a sort of pitch, so it would tip the logs off. They'd unchain the logs and shunt the rail cars out to the pitch and you'd see a big splash as the logs rolled off into the water. A second or two later you could hear the crash, like thunder. It was quite something to see.

Ali was cook and I was lunchman in the camp. I don't know how Ali talked them into giving me that job because there were hardly any women working in those camps at that time. I got ninety dollars a month and Ali got a hundred and ten or a hundred and twenty. That was the height of wages at that time, except for a few special trades like fallers and such. Of course, we worked a sixty or seventy hour week. There was nothing deducted, no income tax, nothing. If your wage was ninety dollars, you got ninety dollars at the end of the month. There was no rent and no charge for food so you could save almost all of your pay if you were determined.

Making sandwiches for over two hundred hungry loggers is a full time job, let me tell you. I made about six hundred to seven hundred sandwiches a day, about fifteen different kinds. You had to slice the bread and meats and prepare the spreads, make the sandwiches and wrap them and make all the side dishes. There were cold cuts and fried chicken and cakes and pies and fruits and all sorts of things. Almost everybody seemed to like them. They could take along as much as they wanted and whatever they wanted. You have to work out a system and be pretty fast. Otherwise you'd be at it all day and night. After I got into a routine I turned out batches of sandwiches while I was daydreaming away and singing.

No matter how bad the conditions were in the camps during that time, the food was good. But the waste was just unbelievable. If you tell people who have never been through those camps what it was like they would never believe you. When the loggers came from town they would really dig into the grub. For the first week or so everything was fine. After that they started to complain. And the same process happened with greenhorns who had never been to camps before. I remember two young men from the prairies, partners, came in. They were fresh from the farm, they'd never worked in a camp before. Nice kids, too. When they saw all the food that was served, three kinds of meat, all kinds of vegetables and potatoes, pies and cakes of all descriptions, and salads, and cold cuts as well, their eyes just bugged out. They ate like tigers. But after a week or so they started to carp, too. It didn't take long for them to get into the habits of the camps. They said, 'I'm so hungry I could eat ham,' and meant it too.

For a while I put out boxes of tinned sardines because they seemed to be a great favorite. There were two or three dozen men who would take along tin upon tin of sardines for lunch everyday. I thought that was sort of strange. How could anyone eat tins of oily sardines every day? I later found out that they would just take the wrappers off the tins and throw the sardines away. Apparently the wrappers were coupons that you could send in for various premiums. Well, I just saw red when I learned that. There were still a lot of people in this country without a square meal in those years. I didn't care about the cost to old Allison because he was doing okay. But the idea that these guys who were earning good money and eating high off the hog were just throwing food away wantonly to get a penny coupon was too

much. So I took all the wrappers off the sardine tins before I put them out. The next day the men came in and looked at the sardines but they didn't dare say anything. After that there was just the occasional tin of sardines taken out each day.

Ali cooked all day, from before six in the morning to after seven or eight at night. I saw him off and on during the day and in the evening for an hour. Sometimes he would go over to the bunkhouses in the evening and talk to some of the men he knew. The trouble was that we never had any block of time to call our own. It was so hectic at times, but I still enjoyed it in a way. Even the work, monotonous as it was, wasn't too bad. If we only would have had more leisure time and a chance to get out a bit more. I think we could have enjoyed it for a couple of years.

It was always raining in the Queen Charlottes. Almost every single day it rained. Still, I kind of liked it up there, away from the city. Strange as it sounds, it was peaceful in a way. I sometimes managed to take off a couple of hours in the afternoon and Jon and I would go for walks along the shore. Down to where the highrigger's wife lived, about twenty minutes walk from the main camp.

The highrigger was a young guy, maybe in his mid-twenties. A very nice guy. He made very good money, but what a job. He liked to show off his skill and once he climbed up a tree to show me how highrigging was done. I figured he earned every penny he got for that work. He had this habit of playing practical jokes and telling tall tales. Most of the men in the camp told tall tales, some real whoppers. You could tell that was what they were. But this highrigger was so straight-faced and so realistic and detailed in his stories that you never knew if they were true or not. He told about the most gory incidents and his voice and demeanor and everything would convince you that this time he really was serious. Then when you got back to camp and asked around it turned out to be all made up.

Ali and I and Jon and the whole kitchen crew would eat together in a leisurely style after the main gang was fed. When we all went back to work and Jon would find something to amuse himself. I always tried to watch him with one eye out of the window of the lunch room and he would play in between the cookhouse and there. But sometimes he wandered away and I always used to worry. Those camps were really no place for a young kid to play in. Jon was pretty careful because I drilled him on all the dangers that were around - stay off the tracks, keep away from the edge

of the water, don't go near the booms, don't go wandering into the forest or away from the camp, stay away from the machinery. But still, kids are kids no matter how much you tell them something. They can get into all sorts of mischief.

As I remember it, Jon never seemed dissatisfied. He had plenty of places to play around the camp. Most of the men liked him and some would play with him after they came back from work. In the whole camp there wasn't on really bad character, some a little stupid sometimes, but all basically okay. It wasn't like the construction camps which Ali and Jon later worked in, which were full of alcoholics and just plain dead beats. There weren't even any big drunks and fights during the time we were at Allison's camp. Some of the men played cards with Jon and some told him stories or he just sat around and listened to them talking. How much he understood of what they were saying I don't know. But when we came back to Vancouver Jon used to spout what I myself only later learned were some very obscene ditties. But that didn't last long.

Most of the men who worked in camps were pretty decent, in normal times. Except that they were downright callous when it came to animals. There was one guy who was a friend of Ali's, Paul Runer. A big Norwegian feller, very jovial and always friendly. But even he was always wandering around in the bush trying to shoot something, anything, just for the fun of it.

A child in a logging camp was a novelty at that time. Jon used to go around the bunkhouses to see what was going on, or sometimes some of the loggers would take him along on the way back from supper. One day someone brought Jon home screaming and yelling. Some guy had been throwing him up in the air and somehow Jon slipped and fell on the edge of one of those steel camp cots and broke his collar bone. The first aid man came and said, 'Oh, that's nothing. Even if it is broken kids heal fast. Don't pamper the kid.' We weren't certain if the bone was broken but it kept getting worse and I thought I'd better take him out on the first boat. I was determined to get him to a doctor but there wasn't a boat due for five days, and then it was two days late because of a bad storm. By the time we got into Vancouver the bone was already mending. So the doctor taped it up tight and let it go at that.

I was absolutely determined that Ali and I would save enough money to buy or at least put a good sized down payment on a house in Vancouver. I wanted a place we could call home. I had

had enough of continual moving from pillar to post. But I couldn't look after Jon and work at the same time. So I decided to leave Jon with Angie Jensen. They had a farm in Burnaby and she was more than glad to have him. She always liked children. I really had to steel myself to leave him. I thought that in the long run it would be the best thing but it just about broke my heart.

As it turned out, that could all have been avoided. Because two months after I returned to Allison's camp we were fired. The Second World War was on. There were all sorts of wild stories that Ali was sabotaging production by putting salt peter in the stews in order to make the men impotent. Just a week before they fired us old Allison himself came over to see me and talked to me like a father. He had brochures of some boarding schools that took very young kids Jon's age. 'You have to think about what's best for your son. I know this school and it'll be very good for your boy. He'll have other children to play with and they'll take very good care of him. And it's not too expensive.' I was sort of considering it. I thought that if Ali and I could both work another year up there we'd have a good stake and be able to buy a house outright and probably have a little left over besides. We wouldn't have to worry about having a place to live if things should get really tough. But at the very time Allison was talking to me he had already hired a new kitchen crew. About a week later, a couple of hours before the next ship came in, his son told us we were fired. No union of course.

Most of the men, who had been quite friendly to us, acted just like creeps at that point. We had all our furniture and belongings with us and it had to be packed and moved to the pier in a few hours. A bunch of those loggers, who we knew, sat on a bench snickering as we struggled to get our stuff together. Just the highrigger and two young boys who had come from a Borstal home helped us. Without them we never would have made it. Old Allison disappeared on his boat and nobody would tell us why we were fired. The people who worked there were basically decent but they were caught up in the patriotic hysteria that was being whipped up. It brought out some mean and narrow things in people.

When we came back from Allison's camp I went up to Angie's to get Jon. But he didn't know me anymore. I had only been gone for a couple of months but for the first day he looked at me out of the corner of his eye and didn't say anything. I thought, 'Is that possible, that he can forget his own mother in such a short

time?' We went back to living on Beach Avenue again and Ali went around looking for another job in a camp. We were still determined to get the money together for a house, if we possibly could. Of course, houses were extremely cheap then, old ones anyway. Now you wouldn't even consider the possibility of earning enough in a year or two to buy a house.

After a month or two Ali got a job up in Musketeer Mine. It must have been in the spring of 1940. He was up there for about three or four months and then he arranged to have me come up as a cook's helper. We didn't tell them we were German, we told them we were Swiss. I don't know if they believed us or not, but they hired us anyway. You could say you were Canadian but that meant nothing at all. Even if you were born here. If you could be identified in some way as German or Ukrainian or Swedish, that's what you were. I still had an accent and they could tell I was German. Some people, like Ali, after a few years don't have even a trace of an accent, but not me.

Jon and I left the place on Beach Avenue in the middle of the night for the boat to Victoria. Jon had an ear infection and was yelling and crying, partly I think because he was afraid to leave again. As it turned out, the boat didn't sail until morning. Union Steamships were known for that. They might be an hour, or a few hours, or half a day late; their schedule was only a rough guide. But they went to every small harbor, settlement and camp along the coast. Their boats were very old tubs even then, although comfortable in their own sort of way. I know we travelled to the Queen Charlottes on the old *St. John* and I think it was the *Maquinna* that ran into Tofino, but now I'm not sure. It took about three days to get to Tofino and we had to wait in some harbor for a storm to pass. There were mainly working people who travelled on the Union boats and you could talk to everybody. In that respect it was much better than the ocean liners.

Tofino was a tiny isolated fishing village. We had to lay over there for two days till the guy who ran the gas boat from Tofino to the mouth of the Ursus River arrived. Boy, did he ever load that boat down with supplies and equipment and people. I wondered if we were going to make it. From the tide water to the camp was about ten or fifteen miles. They had built a road on the grade of an old logging railway. I was really surprised because the surroundings looked very primeval to me - huge trees and underbrush and not a single house or anything. Apart from some

tall stumps you'd never know the place had been logged over. The only building there was a fallen down sawmill at the water's edge.

At first there was no road and the crew lived in a tent camp. Everything had to be packed in with horses - supplies, equipment, machinery and everything. That may sound pretty exciting and adventurous but at the time I just thought, 'What a primitive, haywire operation.' By the time we got there they had some of the bunkhouses and the cookhouse built. Even so, it was still very rough and ready, as all those small fly-by-night mining camps were.

Ali had a big room over the cookhouse waiting for us. I started to work the same day I arrived. Ali used to get up at five in the morning to get ready for breakfast. I got up at about six o'clock and prepared the tables for dishing out breakfast. When everything was ready I'd go out and bang a large triangle and all the men would come in to eat. For about twenty or thirty minutes you had to almost run to keep up with the calls for more of this and more of that. Camp style. Nobody talked. That was an unspoken rule in all these camps. Come in, grab your food, eat as fast as you could, get up and leave without saying anything. Then they would sit outside or in their bunkhouses to talk and smoke until ready to start work. After breakfast I'd clear off the tables and help get ready for the next two meals. I used to wash dishes and pots and peel vegetables.

Some of those guys used to drink pretty heavily whenever they could get their hands on it. But nearly all camps had a rule against liquor in camp and that was generally accepted by the men. Sometimes the bull cooks were bootleggers and usually there was always one guy in each camp that tried to swipe the vanilla extract from the kitchen. But all in all, there wasn't much drinking.

The men there were polite to me personally. They hollered like bulls for the various dishes and used some pretty rough language, but that was just their style. There were an awful lot of kids from the prairies and from the interior of British Columbia. Not many were real old-time camp men. I didn't have much conversation with the men who worked there. It wasn't done for a woman to have any friends in those camps, in fact it was very rare to see a woman in one of them. Besides, I was on the go from morning to night. Ali had a few more contacts, but even he, who always made friends, kept pretty well to himself.

In a way, we liked working out in the bush. It was so wild and unspoiled. If we had had more time to enjoy the country, if we worked let's say only eight hours a day with one day off a week, it would have been fairly nice. But as it was we hardly had any time to get away from the job. Most of the men were decent enough, basically. If it hadn't been for the war and the fact that we were German and the fact that we were working in the cookhouse, which is the focus for most complaining in any camp, it would have been all right. For a few years anyway.

Usually I had an hour free between breakfast and lunch and I'd rest, because I needed it. Then the same thing all over again for lunch. After lunch I was usually able to take an hour or two off and that was when Jon and I would go for our daily walk, or maybe play inside if it was raining too hard. Although the rain normally didn't stop us from going out. I would be through after supper, around six or seven, although I usually had to wash the towels and linen every second day and dry them in the attic. Ali worked the whole day, cooking and baking and cleaning up the kitchen, from five in the morning till eight at night. The only time he had off was maybe an hour in the afternoon and in the evening, and then he was too tired to do much.

The hour or two I was able to take off in the afternoon was my time to spend with Jon. We used to dip in the Ursus River. But most of the year it was so ice cold that within a minute or two you were numb. It was fairly shallow with some pools where you could swim a few strokes. We swam there often, but you had to dry off right away and get into some warm clothes. The men in the camp thought we were crazy to swim in it. Other times we used to walk up to the former camp, about a mile or so through the jungle, and that forest was like a jungle. The superintendent's wife was living up there in the old cookhouse. It was a big log house. They had it fixed up quite nicely.

She was a former teacher and began to teach Jon the ABC's and simple arithmetic. He started learning the principle of addition and subtraction using empty beer bottles. She was quite pleasant and I was sort of starved for companionship. Fifteen or more years later Ali worked on the Squamish highway project where he ran across the same man supervising the camp. That was the way it worked in camps. You would meet many of the same people again somewhere else. With all the moving around, people who knew each other were crossing paths in the strangest places.



They blasted almost every day at Musketeer Mine. The signal was three whistles and then a few minutes after that there would be the blast. Sometimes rocks and stones flew all over the place. They were constantly repairing the roofs of the buildings. If we were out in the open, that sometimes happened during our daily walks, Jon and I hid behind fallen trees until we heard the 'all clear' signal. Actually, it was pretty crazy. He would be playing around the camp and wander off sometimes, even though I told him not to. There were all sorts of ways of getting into mischief - sharp tools, and equipment, and holes. He wasn't supposed to go around where the men were working because they didn't want to be bothered naturally. What could you do? You can't leave an active child of almost six locked up in a room all day except for the hour or two I had free in the afternoon for a walk. Once one guy told me that they had found him playing with some sticks of old dynamite in an abandoned cabin. The stuff was all wet and spoiled and it couldn't possibly have gone off, but my heart dropped into my boots when I heard that.

One day while Jon was playing in the kitchen he cut his hand very badly, right to the bone. I can't remember how we stopped the bleeding. But it was pretty bad, he lost a lot of blood. Then we bathed the hand in alcohol because there was no other antiseptic around, and Jon screamed even louder. I swathed the whole hand in a mass of Mentholatum and wrapped it up tight with bandages and gauze and it healed pretty well on its own. There was nothing in the first aid kit of any use anyway. Kids get those sorts of cuts and accidents and seem to heal pretty well on their own, and that's what Jon did. After about a month or so, by the end of January, he could use his hand again, although it was still tender and the index finger was always a little crooked afterward. I was afraid that he would lose the use of one or two of his fingers, but they healed.

They were lucky in that camp, because as long as we were there nobody was injured badly. If they had been it would just have been too bad for them. There was no medical help available. There was no doctor in Tofino and it was a three day trip to Victoria by boat. Airplanes weren't usually available and couldn't have gotten into that camp anyway. By the time we would have gotten any injured person out over the river and along that rough road and the various boat transfers they would never have made it. Men being killed or badly injured on the job was pretty common in those camps, both mining and logging camps. You saw lots of

permanently crippled men around town. Especially down around Cordova and East Hastings.

There was just a small crew in Musketeer Mine, about forty men. Most of the time we were there the mine wasn't even producing. The concentrating plant wasn't operating until just before we left. They started to ship out some concentrate but by that time the camp was on its last legs anyway. There were quite a few so-called mines like that on the west coast of Vancouver Island. Whoever put money into Musketeer Mine just lost it.

The outfit that ran it were selling stock at the same time they were getting ready to close it down. Most of those mines were promotional deals. There was a whole string of them in that general area for a while, the tail end of the Zeballos rush. Even where there was gold in the ground it was too expensive to get it out. They reduced the crew and only paid Ali's wages. So I decided to go down to Vancouver to look for a place to settle down. I'd had enough of camps by then. After all, I'd been working for a living pretty well straight since I was fifteen. Almost twenty-five years at one thing or another, apart from a couple of years when there was just no work. We were up in Musketeer Mine until February of 1942. Ali came down to Vancouver about two months later.

## 9. A Place of Our Own (1942-1946)

### *Country Home and Garden*

After we came down from Musketeer Mine we started looking for a house in town, around that part of East Vancouver where we had lived before. We liked it there. There was still a lot of bush around in some places and it was close to the water. Lots and houses were going dirt cheap then, just incredible, now that I think of it.

By 1942 all of the shore line of Burrard Inlet, from Buckerfield's all the way out to Ioco, was pretty well lined by squatter's houses. They were called 'boat houses', although almost all of them were built on stilts on the edge of the water and over the water, and not on boats or barges. People just built their own houses from whatever lumber they could buy or scrounge. You could get enough second grade lumber to build a shack for a hundred dollars or so. They were along the C.P.R. right-of-way and over the water. Most of them were pretty rickety, although no worse than many other shacks you saw on land. But there were also some large, well constructed houses too. There must have been over a thousand of them in various parts of the city.

Much of False Creek was covered over with a network of those houses. We knew a couple who had a house down there. Those boat houses were under many of the bridges in town and along the North Shore in a few places. All sorts of people lived in them. Many were retired people who didn't have much to pay rent with and who liked the feeling of being by the water. In that respect it was quite nice, hearing the water lap around your house. There were families on relief and families where the men were working. In general, poor people, but often no poorer than many others.

We looked at a few of the better houses that were for sale down along the water. Some were quite roomy but none of them had running water or electricity. People got their water from taps in the nearby saw mills or from the docks. Of course they didn't pay taxes or any utility bills either. They used coal oil or gasoline lanterns for light. But if there was a fire it was just too bad, because many of those houses were tinder boxes and fire engines couldn't get to most of them. Another trouble was that the sewage went through the toilet hole into the water below. The tide carried that dirt out or it just stayed there. It wasn't too healthy.

Ali and I sort of liked the idea of living over the water but what really decided us against buying one of those houses was that there was no

guarantee that you would be able to stay there. People said, 'Don't worry about that. Nobody would try to move you out of here, they won't dare.' But it was a good thing that we didn't buy one because about seven or eight years later the city forced all of those people to move. Everybody had to go and they couldn't salvage anything from the houses they had built.

When the squatters got their dispossession notices, they fought like tigers. There were petitions and deputations and most said, 'I'm not moving, no matter what.' It was worst for the retired people who lived there. Because if they had to leave all they had to look forward to was a hole-in-the-wall room in one of the fifth rate hotels.

The group in False Creek were the first to go, and they were particularly strong. It was like the live-in recently down at the Four Seasons Park.<sup>44</sup> Only instead of hippies they were poor people, and instead of trying to save a park they were trying to save their homes. But the city couldn't be budged. They delayed the plans to clear a certain area for a few months here and there, and they didn't force everybody out all at once. It was a process that took three or four years so that some people who were thrown out of one area went further away and tried to establish there. Occasionally the city backed off from a particular eviction if it looked like it would come to a real fight. But sooner or later they squeezed all the people out. By the early 1950's they were all out. A few years later they filled in the space by Terminal Dock where those squatters' houses had been and used it for a lumber loading area. That was what they really wanted the people out for. They wanted more commercial waterfront space. Now the Inlet is just one long dockyard or factory site. People who see it now can't imagine how undeveloped yet human the area was thirty or forty years ago.

So, luckily, we decided not to get a house on the water. But we still didn't find anything we liked and could afford. We went around for months, living back in the Arco Hotel. We walked and searched over the east end of the city, through North Burnaby and around Trout Lake. At that time we didn't want to lay out too much money on anything or get involved in long-term payments because we never knew if we'd be able to get jobs and pay off debts. And we didn't know what might happen to us during the war.

Finally, one real estate salesman mentioned a house which was for sale on Wall Street. I knew the place as soon as he mentioned it because it was only a block from where we had lived with all those boys in the depression. The area was largely still bush. The land had been held by the C.P.R. for a long time and not much building had taken

place. You could barely see the house for all the trees and shrubs and hops. What really decided us was the lot and the view. It was a big lot with bush on both sides of it, with a deep gulch behind that dropped down to the railway tracks and the waterfront. You could see the end of the whole coast range just across the harbour. It was a panorama stretching almost from the Second Narrows to out past Lion's Gate bridge. If you stood there for a little while you would see tug boats and freighters, barges and log booms, all sorts of water traffic going by. In all my life I've never seen any better view. A lot of nature and a lot of human activity.

The house itself was just a shack, a very run down shack, worse than many of those squatters' houses. There were two and a half tiny rooms with no toilet and no basement. It was made from waste lumber and was leaning a bit to one side. The full price was seven hundred and fifty dollars - lot, house and all. That was the total amount; one hundred and fifty down and two years to pay the balance, with no interest.<sup>45</sup>

During the first year we lived on Wall Street Ali worked with a painter who specialized in murals and interior decorating. He did the decoration in many of the beer parlours in Vancouver. I remember one job they did at the Belmont beer parlour. The ceiling was done in designs with strips of silver paper, real silver mind you, thin as a gossamer, so that it shimmered in the light. It was beautiful. The guy who ran this small painting company, Firch, did the actual designs and drawings, and the crew, including Ali, would paint in the less delicate work. It was very slow work but interesting. The trouble was that he didn't pay much, and there were always periods when he didn't have a contract. But this Firch was a real artist. I remember one large oil canvas he did of wild ducks taking off from an ocean marsh with an abandoned old sawmill in the background. I would have loved to buy that picture but it was much too expensive.

Then Ali worked painting office buildings for Bochard's. They used to work on hanging scaffolds ten and more storeys up. I never did like that. Safety precautions were bad. Ali quit there after there had been a number of accidents in town and after one man was killed in a crew that was working with them. He got a job spray painting in the shipyards, mainly in North Vancouver. He stuck that out for almost two years, during 1943 and 1944. The pay wasn't great but it was regular.

Ali felt like he was working his life away with no results, with no end in sight. He wanted to build up a stake so he could get away from that dreary run. But how could he, how could anybody? Then he started to

get sick from the paint. A lot of painters got that. It was a slow form of lead poisoning, I suppose. It was especially bad when they were painting in the holds. The respirators they wore weren't much help. Towards the end he was sick almost all the time; he lost weight and he actually began to look green. So he gave up painting and went back to baking.

He worked in the big bakeries, Weston's and a few others. It was deadening assembly-line work. Ali was a master baker, that was what he had apprenticed at, and machine baking or factory work in general was something he didn't like. You did one or two operations and had to keep up with the machines. He was always dead tired when he came home, and the pay was pitiful. Well, what can you say? It was work, come home and go to work again. There's no romance in jobs. At least not those jobs. Nothing happened. People counted the various days and small outings and the few hours they had free, maybe in total a few days over months, as great events. A day's picnic at Wigwam Inn, a boat trip to Bowen Island, maybe a movie and a meal out in a restaurant with the family. They stood out because otherwise it was work, work, work.

Living in our part of Hastings East, down by the water, it was still a little like living in the country at that time. Much of Burnaby was still bush and little farmlets. We hiked up the Lynn Valley a number of times. Over the Second Narrows bridge, up the Mountain Highway, over an old logging bridge that used to cross the creek, and then another mile or two up the Valley to where some friends of ours lived. There were still deer and bear and all sorts of wild animals roaming around up there then. It must have been seven or eight miles one way. That area is all closed off now, part of the Vancouver water district - until some developer gets his fingers on it.

For shorter walks we'd walk up Seymour Creek. Whenever they had a picnic or festival at the Swedish Park we went there. A good friend of ours used to direct their choir. That area was still pretty open; kids used to camp where now there are all housing tracts. All the North Shore was beautiful at that time. Everywhere you went there was open space and country.

There was bush and vacant lots all around our place on Wall Street. There were even small wild animals that lived in the bush. Birds by the thousands, the occasional partridge and rabbit and quite a few big black rats that came from the ships. Luckily the rats lived outside and didn't come into the house.

During those years I spent a lot of time on a garden. I really built it up from scratch. At first only hops and morning glory, quack grass and

some trees grew well. That was nice, too, in a wild sort of way. Everything was grown over. Everything was shady in that lot even on the most brilliant summer day. But I wanted a real garden. So I started to root out the quack grass and morning glory and the hops. That's some task, let me tell you. We cut down some of the trees so we'd get a little sunlight, although there were still plenty left. We left quite a few mountain alders because they have bunch upon bunch of orange berries which birds just love. The place was always swarming with birds.

Then I started in earnest to improve the garden. We dug in peat moss and lime and all sorts of Buckerfield's fertilizer and soil conditioners when we could afford it. We put on wheelbarrows full of soil and turf which the city cleaned out of ditches in the neighbourhood each year. And I was constantly raking rocks - there seemed to be an endless supply of them. After the course of a couple of years the garden really began to flourish. I could grow almost any kind of plant.

For the first few years we had a big vegetable garden. It was a big lot by today's standards and the house didn't take up too much space on it. I grew corn, tomatoes, peas, beans and carrots, and onions and radishes, in fact every vegetable we ever ate.

My whole life I wanted to have a good sized garden and time to grow whatever interested me and now I did it with a vengeance. There were all kinds of tricks in gardening and canning which I learned from acquaintances or by reading and a lot by trial and error. I used to can beans and a ready-made green bean goulash by the dozens of jars. We ate that all year round. I used to preserve rhubarb, corn and mixed peas and carrots, turnips. You name it and I had it. Potatoes and tomatoes were so plentiful we didn't know what to do with them. And the same with all of the salad vegetables. The garden provided fresh vegetables during the summer and fall, with enough canned stuff for most of the winter. We rarely bought any tinned food.

We used to pick masses of blackberries from vacant lots - blackberries for dessert and blackberry jam all year. Very tasty. I'd also pick stinging nettles as spinach; pick the new heads, chop them finely, blanch and can them. With butter, onions and potatoes it makes a good meal. During the early summer we had fresh salmonberries for dessert almost every day. The gulch and the vacant lots were just loaded with salmonberries. We never got tired of them, but unfortunately they can't be preserved.

I experimented with different ways of growing and combining plants. But after a few years all sorts of insects and plant diseases started to appear, which had never been there before. I think I must have made

the garden too tempting. Clubroot disease and cutworms and various insects took over. They mainly attacked vegetables, particularly the roots. And there was a plague of moles and aphids too. In order to discourage the moles I inter-planted the rows of vegetables and flowers with chives and daffodils and with some other plants, but it didn't help much. The last year I planted a vegetable garden there was hardly anything left after the insects and diseases and moles were through.

After that I only grew flowers. I always loved to have masses of flowering plants around. I should have just planted shrubs and plants which take care of themselves right from the start. I stuck all the spare change I could save and a lot of my time into that garden for years. Too much of it, I know now.

Around the time I had the vegetable garden going full tilt we started to raise rabbits. The Koeppens, some friends that we'd met in Beach Avenue days, had pre-empted a homestead behind Cultus Lake in the Columbia Valley and started raising angora rabbits. Ali and I got interested and thought we could make a little money on the side by raising angoras and selling the wool. The price of angora was pretty high at that time. But I didn't have any idea of how much time they take. Ali built a large shed with tiers of wire and wood hutches. The shed was cut into the gulch, with steps leading down. It was all made of scrap lumber fished from the saltchuck or taken from that part of the house we had torn down. We bought a few good animals as breeding stock and eventually had about a hundred angoras. And then the fun started.

A pound of first quality angora wool, plucked, was fifteen dollars. That was a lot of money. But you rarely got wool of that quality and each grade went down in price. A great deal off the price if it had been sheared instead of plucked, nothing if it was dirty or matted. We got an average of eight or nine dollars a pound for the wool, but it took lots of rabbits to produce a pound. It wasn't only feeding and watering and plucking them, you also had to curry them frequently and make sure their cages were absolutely clean. All the adult rabbits had to be in separate cages or their wool would get hopelessly tangled and dirty. Each day, during the spring and summer, Jon and I would pick a couple of sacks of grass and dandelions for the rabbits. They loved dandelions and lettuce above all else. In winter we bought green hay. All the hay had to be sorted by hand because any thistle would get entwined in the rabbit's coat and cost half the price of the wool. There were all kinds of other problems that arose, like rats attacking the baby rabbits. Finally we sold the whole kit and kaboodle.



It would be nice having a few rabbits running around in your garden or backyard. But a paying proposition it isn't. I think we made a few hundred dollars on them over three years. I spent a lot of my time tending rabbits instead of enjoying life. The few lousy dollars we made didn't do us any good anyhow.

My days were always full. While I didn't have many people to visit or talk to, I was always busy. Along with taking care of the house and gardening, and working with the rabbits when we had them, I still did a lot of things I'd always done. I went for long walks and swims and read an awful lot, late into the night.

In some ways, things were really pretty old fashioned. Not like living in a city at all. There was no television of course, although we did have a good short wave radio. We couldn't afford a car and for many years we didn't have a telephone. No fridge, nor even an ice box. There wasn't a single electrical appliance in the house, other than the lights. For a while I even used irons which you heated on top of the stove to press the clothes. Actually, the wiring was so old and flimsy in that shack that you couldn't have loaded it with anything anyway.

And like I said, for a few years we had a miniature version farm and rabbit ranch in our backyard. All in the city, mind you. For quite a few years we still used a latrine on Wall Street, a regular one holder outhouse set down in the gulch. For bathing we had a big zinc tub. I'd set all the pots I had full of water on the stove to take a bath. I did the laundry each week in a big copper bottomed laundry kettle they used to sell just for that purpose. That and a scrub board and wash tub and hanging the clothes on the line. Dreadful. We had the money to buy a washing machine but by that time many manufactured goods were hard to get. Finally Ali found a second hand washing machine and it was, wringers and all, a godsend. The people who buy that junk in antique stores these days should have to work with it for a couple of months. 'Junk the stuff,' I say.

For heating we had a big McClary kitchen stove which burned just about anything -wood, coal, coke, everything. There was a conversion unit to sawdust that we put on when other fuel was difficult to get. We also had a pot bellied stove in the back room. We'd use six or eight cords of wood in a winter, plus coal. Coal was delivered in sacks. 'McLeod Hard' from Alberta was the best but sometimes you could only get a poor quality soft coal. Then you had to build a roaring fire before the coal would burn right; otherwise you'd get smoked out of house and home. As for sawdust, you might as well burn peat moss - miserable stuff that never burns hot. A nice wood and coal fire is pretty hard to beat, and that was a great stove I had. But there was always the

carrying and chopping and stoking and starting the fire and cleaning out the ashes. Years later, when we built a new house we finally got an electric stove and fridge and an oil furnace. It was like a dream come true, although after a while you get to take it for granted.

During those years, until well after the war, there was a steady procession of pedlars who went from door to door. There were Chinese vegetable men who had old T Model Ford trucks, who came around from house to house twice a week. The black Model T truck was their trademark. Each had his own districts and it would always be the same guy who came around. They had everything, everything that was in season, every kind of vegetable imaginable. I mainly bought fruit. It was good quality produce and as wide a selection as you could get anywhere, and usually cheaper. The man would come to the door and ask what you needed that day. Maybe he would say he had some very good pears or onions or whatever. Then you could ask for so much of this or that, or you might go out to the truck to see what they were like. They would often give you a baker's dozen worth too. If you paid for a pound it would often be a little over; they would weigh it right in front of you. It was usually on the cuff too, once he knew you. 'Okay, put it on the cuff today.' They had an account for each customer and after the next pay day you'd pay him off, a week's worth or two weeks. They didn't try to force anything on you. It was sort of personal, you got to know each one somewhat. One had our route for three, almost four years, then he sold out to another guy who had the business for two or three years more.

There was another guy who came around by truck twice a week selling fish. He stopped every half a block and rang his bell, something like an ice cream vendor. If you wanted fish you'd go out with a container and he'd cut off however much you wanted and flop it in your dish. There was also a man who came around selling eggs from a truck. Some bakeries delivered from door to door every morning, bread mainly. I didn't like their bread so I'd usually get my bakery stuff on shopping day.

Then there was the milk man. For many years they still used horses and wagons. The horses knew the route all by themselves and the milkmen would just get in and out of the wagon to get the bottles. They came very early in the morning before most people got up. You would leave money in the bottle. But there were too many kids raiding the milk bottles for spending money so the dairies switched to using milk tickets. The only other people who still used horses were the junk men. They would travel around the streets and back alleys on their old wagons pulled by a single horse. They used to be pretty broken down

looking horses and I often felt sorry for them. The junk man would drive along slowly calling out, 'Junk. Junk,' in a certain set call. If you had any stuff you wanted to get rid of they would usually buy it - rags, old metal, bottles, whatever.

The Watkins and Raleigh men came once a month.<sup>46</sup> I usually bought what I needed from the Watkins man although the stuff from those two outfits was pretty much the same. You got used to one brand and then the other kind just wasn't the same. They sold patent medicines, Sloan's liniment, Mentholatum and Carter's little Liver Pills. They sold cosmetics and kitchen utensils, cheap brushes, spices and drink flavourings. And they gave you a small sampler present each time, maybe a tiny bottle of cologne. Actually, I liked some of that cologne, like Sweet Pea and Lilac, better than most of the expensive perfumes. There was one Watkins man who had a big family to support but I don't know how he managed, because nobody bought more than a couple of dollars worth at one time. Ali used to call me the salesman's dream. I always bought something even if I didn't need it. I thought, 'They work pretty hard for their money and they are always coming around, so buy some small thing.' 'Live and Let Live' is my motto. If any of those salesmen was a high pressure, Soapy Sam type, slick, he soon got frozen out. I and most other people would close the door when we saw the guy coming. There were just a couple of salesmen like that and they didn't last long.

There were a lot of people trying to make a living by house to house selling in those years. But most of that died out when times got better and people were able to get jobs. Just a few remained who either liked it or had a better than average sales route. All that door to door selling was in its heyday when there was no welfare. People had to scratch up a living somehow, by whatever means they could. People don't do that anymore, which is fine.

You also got a constant stream of people coming around begging, in a polite sort of way. There were always partly disabled people coming around selling stuff like shoe laces. That was just a way of asking for a hand out, which I always gave. Not very much but maybe a dime or so. There were also always guys coming along looking for a meal or a hand out. Some guys just off the freights. Many of them were down on their luck but some were real hoboes. Still I always gave them at least a good thick sandwich and sometimes a meal or a dime; sometimes a quarter if they looked like they really needed it. We were near one of the spots where people would drop off the freights. That might happen once a week, or two days in succession, or not for a month. Sometimes

I gave them a hot meal if food was ready. You couldn't do that anymore. I'd be afraid to ask them in.

### *Enemy Alien*

Soon after the war started, even before we lived in Wall Street, I was classed as an enemy alien. That was because I couldn't become naturalized until five years after my return from Germany in 1938. Actually, I had thought that I was naturalized with Ali in 1935, but I wasn't. The Immigration Department just didn't recognize all the years I'd lived in Canada before. I was supposed to register in 1940. But I thought, 'I don't care what the law says, I'm not going to register. I'm not going to put myself in the hands of some officialdom which is full of hopped up patriots.' There was this panic, hysteria actually, about spies and saboteurs. It seems that the further people are away from the fighting the more they have to manufacture some scare to keep themselves busy. Some aspects of that hysteria would have been humorous if things hadn't been so serious. For instance, 'Japanese oranges' became 'Mandarin oranges' and 'German shepherds' became 'Alsations.' The letters to the editor were full of arguments about whether Beethoven's Fifth Symphony should be used for the 'V for Victory' signal.

I didn't register until late 1942. Then they finally caught up with me. I got a summons which said to report to the R.C.M.P. in so many days, or else. I had to go to the R.C.M.P. barracks out in Little Mountain. Finally, I got in to see the sergeant in charge and he started to threaten me. Who did I think I was, disregarding the laws in war time? I was supposed to have registered and never did. What was I trying to hide? Didn't I appreciate the chance I had been given to live in Canada? The safest thing they could do might be to put me in jail. That's what he said.

Well, I usually didn't cry, but that time I did - from anger and frustration. Because here were the characters who could ruin your life and they knew nothing about anything. Then I said, 'That's okay. You put me in jail, I don't care. You just give me a lot of books to read and leave my child with me and I'll be alright. I don't care.' They had jail cells right in that building. The sergeant showed them to me to frighten me, a silly thing, I thought. He was sort of taken aback. Finally he backed off and cooled down and gave me the pass I needed. After that I had to go every month to have it stamped.

Sometimes they would question you about one thing or another. They might ask you where you lived and what you did in the last month, but not usually. I always used to take Jon along because I had nowhere to

leave him. Some of the Mounties were all right but some of them were just plain goons. They thought it was their duty to exact retribution upon an enemy race, so-called. In the registration papers I was listed as a member of the Teuton race. I still have those papers to prove it. When I first saw that, I asked, 'The Teuton race, what's that?' The official said, 'Well that's what we have to put down, that's the official classification.'

There was really nothing to reporting, it was even a pleasant sort of trip out to Little Mountain. But it was very humiliating and a little frightening because you knew that some half-wit had the power to make decisions that could make it tough for you. And it made me mad, too, because many of these same bureaucrats would probably be Hitler supporters if they were in Germany.

If you wanted to leave the locality you lived in you had to get permission first. There were areas of the country, like along the coast, where you had to get special permission to live. But that didn't affect us because we were in the city. Finally, a year or two later they shifted the administration of the reporting over to some civilian agency and that was a bit better. Actually, reporting in wasn't any real burden. It was just that feeling you were under suspicion and that the government might change its policy after all and pack you off somewhere. I realize that compared to what was happening in Germany and some other countries it was a fairly mild injustice. Nevertheless, that didn't make it seem any better.

There was a Japanese family living across the street from us on Wall Street when we first moved there. Jon used to play with their two boys. That family had a wonderful garden. The kids would all go wading in the big gold fish pool that they had. The parents couldn't keep the kids out of it, it attracted them like flies to honey. But not long after they had to sell everything and leave. What reminded me of that was an article I read in the paper recently, about a book which a woman wrote about her life as a child in a Japanese internment camp in B.C.<sup>47</sup> I'd like to read that, although a child might not know too much about what the situation was like.

In 1942, they had to pack up and leave. They lost their house and their car, and the man lost his fishing boat. They were given a very short time to move and anything they couldn't take with them they had to store or sell. They got almost nothing for their years of hard work. It didn't matter if they were born in Canada or not, whether they were naturalized or not. All had to go. First they moved them down to the Exhibition Park. That had been turned into an army camp. The place was crawling with army and police. A whole flood of people, all in a few

weeks. They must have been crowded in those old display buildings like sardines. Old men, young men, children crying, and mothers carrying the belongings they could take along. It was just terrible. We thought, 'Oh, oh, now it starts in earnest here.'

And the papers in town whipped up a hysteria of hate against them. At the same time they were writing about fighting for freedom they were whipping up lynch mob feelings here. The newspapers during that time were absolutely beyond description. They engaged in the most simple-minded hate mongering. That was doing their share for the war effort, I suppose.

What a rotten bunch. The newspapers, the city politicians, the Canadian and B.C. governments - most of the leading lights of the country. Of all the people who had any position at all it was only a few of the C.C.F. leaders like the two Winches and the McInneses and some others who stood up for the Japanese. The Japanese-Canadians that is. Whatever else people like Winch did or didn't do in later years, you have to give them credit for that.<sup>48</sup>

There were a few ordinary people who thought the whole thing was a rotten shame and privately were angry about what was happening to the Japanese. But usually, like us, they were afraid to say too much, although Ali got into some fights about it. In general there was a feeling of pure hatred. A lot of dirt poor, ordinary working people felt that way, and the so-called better educated people were worse than anybody. As if those Japanese people here had anything to do with the war. It was pretty frightening and we didn't know if we would be next. It showed you clearly just how much you could depend on 'justice' when the chips were down.

They didn't intern us but quite a few German-born men were interned. If you didn't have your naturalization papers you were technically an enemy alien. Men who were enemy aliens were interned. One guy we knew was in internment camps for most of the war. And very few of those people in the internment camps were actually supporters of Hitler or the Japanese government. Of course, those camps weren't any worse than the relief camps that many single men lived in during the thirties. Many persons, Ali included, wasted away even more of their lives working in logging and construction camps with nothing to show for it, which wasn't that much different. Still, prison is prison, no matter how you doll it up.

When the war started Ali thought he should join some regiment here in Vancouver. But they didn't take him either because he was of German origin or because he was over thirty-five years old. That was at the beginning. Later they tried to get anybody they could. What Ali

was thinking of I don't know, and he didn't talk about it. He was too old to be drafted. Maybe he did it just to say that he had tried to join.

There was one former friend of ours, Alfred Doff. He was German-born but somehow he got into the Airforce and became a bombardier. When we first knew him he was a pacifist. But once he joined up, he became the worst sort of militarist. Once he came back on furlough and told us, 'Ah, the life of a soldier, the soldier's life, that the life for me.' He became one of the worst shouters of anti-German hysteria. 'They have got to be broken once and for all.' He gloried in the bombings. Maybe he bombed his own parents. We threw him out of the house.

There were a lot of communists we knew who turned into super patriots. Some communists! They couldn't even distinguish between the German people and the Nazis. There were some of them who were okay, they retained their perspective.<sup>49</sup> But that was the case among all types of people, communist or not.

During that time you met people whom you had known before and who had always been friendly. But because of the war and because you were German they passed right by you with their noses in the air. That happened to me a number of times in those war years. And while I said to myself, 'Well, if you want to be that stupid to hell with you,' it always made you wonder what people were saying about you behind your back. Later some people on the block who I had been friendly with started snubbing me if we met on the street or were downright hostile. There was a family on the block who used to invite Jon in to have cookies and cocoa and then would pump him about what we said and did at home. It turned out that the mother of that family spread rumors about how we sang Nazi songs at home and all sorts of other rubbish.

There was some more direct harassment too. Looking back it didn't really amount to all that much, but under the conditions you were always pretty tense wondering what would happen next. Rocks were thrown through our windows a couple of times. Once, while I was out, somebody came into my garden and stamped down many of the flowers and plants and pulled out some of the shrubs. Another time somebody broke into the shed we had behind the house and threw the paint and the tools and garden implements in the gulch. None of that was very important in itself, unless you thought about what the intent of that vandalism was. You heard people talking about sterilizing all Germans.

I know Ali got into a couple of fights with people about what they had said in regard to the war. But he was an adult, and a bear of a man, so he had some protection. He never said anything very much about the arguments he got into, but he became pretty bitter. But it was

probably worst of all for Jon during those years. Kids can be pretty vicious about such things. I heard neighbourhood kids taunting him sometimes about being German. A couple of times he was beaten up or got into fights for that. How it came out I don't know, because he was born here and didn't have any accent or anything. But he was pretty closemouthed about the whole thing and there isn't really very much you can do to protect your child from those sorts of difficulties. Surprisingly little.

There was one incident that happened to him which I really would have done something about if I had known at the time. But Jon only told me about it years later, when he was already a young man. It appears that when he was in grade five, sometime toward the end of the war, one of his teachers assigned the class to memorize 'In Flanders Fields.' Apparently Jon did that but when the teacher asked him to recite it he said he wouldn't. The teacher, a man in his fifties or sixties, pulled Jon out of the class in the hall and started to berate him in front of another teacher. Jon said that the poem was militarist and he wasn't going to recite it. I don't even know where he picked that up because we didn't talk that way at home. Anyway, the teacher just went wild and called Jon all kinds of names. He started to beat Jon up and threw him down a flight of stairs. The other teacher didn't even do anything. As I said, I only learned of that many years later. If I had known at the time it happened I really would have intervened in no uncertain terms.

A few of the people I knew in the neighbourhood weren't affected by that hysteria and we remained friends. They treated you fairly and decided whether they liked you or not as an individual. But there were very few people like that. And they were often people that you wouldn't have expected it of either. There was a couple who worked in the travelling carnival and another who was a two hundred percent English man. But the war really brought out pettiness and viciousness in what were otherwise decent ordinary people.

### *Life in the East End*

During the war there were only a few people that I ever spent much time with. There was Pat, the old man from Lillooet who was living in town by then. And for a few years I saw an awful lot of Grace Carter from Beach Avenue. There were a few others, but mostly I puttered around on my own.

Pat had moved to Vancouver and there he lived in a series of the most run-down row cabins. Some of them must have been shacks even when they were built, probably before the turn of the century. There



was one I called the 'Black Hole of Calcutta.' He managed to get relief in Vancouver and later the old age pension when he was seventy. Even at that age he was well preserved and looked like a very healthy sixty - white hair and a tobacco stained handlebar mustache, a big strapping man.

The first years we lived in Wall Street we used to bathe in a wash tub. One day I saw what looked like a bathtub with legs walking down the street toward our house. It was Pat. He had gotten this big galvanized tin tub and carried it out to our house - about two miles. It was a real treat to take a bath in a tub for a change. We used that thing for quite a few years, until we could get a regular tub. Another time, we were running out of sawdust and couldn't get any because we had no money. Sawdust was the fuel we used for a while. One day, out of the blue, a truck appears and starts delivering a ton of sawdust. Pat had ordered and paid for it. He was such a proud man. I always wanted to take him some food or give him some money when he was short, or if not that, to do some mending for him. But he was too proud to take a favor from anybody, yet he himself gave favors to all sorts of people. He was a wonderful person, just wonderful.

I used to visit Grace Carter and her kids pretty regularly. At that time they lived down on Semlin Drive, right in the heart of the warehouse district. It was about a mile from our place and Jon and I would walk down there two and three times a week. We'd usually cross over the tracks by Terminal dock and then walk along Commissioner Drive. That took you past some still open stretches of waterfront and a place where fishing boats and tug boats were tied up. Past the Sterling Shipyard - they used to build gillnetters but then they were making war ships. Down to Lapointe Pier and over the tracks again. We'd often meet sailors off the ships or people working in that area. We'd usually go in the early evening after supper and with all the types we met on those walks I don't think a single one of them ever got fresh.

I remember three Russian sailors we met on Commissioner Drive one time. They were playing with those long strands of kelp that used to grow in the water. They couldn't have been more than fifteen or sixteen years old. We used the half dozen words of Russian I'd picked up from Ali and they had a stock of about the same number of English words. So we used sign language and exchanged some cigarettes. I thought, 'They're just kids but maybe they'll have to die because of this lousy war,' because a lot of those ships were sunk. Usually I tried to force everything about the war out of my mind, although that wasn't really possible.

Grace had married a guy who was an engineer on one of the coastal boats. She hoped she could settle down to a comfortable, predictable routine for the first time in her life, not having to worry where the next month's rent was coming from. Grace was really in love with him. But a couple of years later he left her flat. Still, Grace was the same as ever. In fact, she was about the same at forty, when I first knew her, and at sixty when I last saw her. Always busy, always working, cheerful but not in addled way. I can't even remember what we talked about - little events of the day, what we thought, what our kids were doing, but not too much about that. Her kids were already grown or half grown up by that time. The oldest was working in a logging camp, the girl was just going into her man crazy stage where she had a crush on some different boy every week. The youngest boy got into trouble and had a brush with the law. But those were all passing phases. After a few years they grew up, got married and settled down.

For the first couple of years after we came back from Musketeer Mine Jon had a lot of difficulty adjusting to school and to other children. He was okay around adults, even pretty independent. But he just didn't seem to click with children his own age. About school there wasn't very much to tell; he could already read a bit before he started. They didn't learn much in the schools they went to, there weren't the kinds of new maths and new subjects they seem to load kids down with today. He never liked school much. The only thing he ever got into trouble about was for staying at home too often. I thought, 'Well, as long as he's doing well, if he's bored enough to stay home, let him stay home.' After the first grade he could read well enough and he brought books home. But of course there's a limit to the absenteeism a school will take. So we occasionally had the school nurse coming around.

Parents didn't involve themselves with schools. There weren't any parent-teacher associations or anything like that. In grade school the school nurse usually came around once or twice a year. If the child missed a number of weeks of school she would usually come around to see what was wrong. Those nurses were all pretty good, sensible, down to earth people. That was about the only contact I had with the schools. There was always a Christmas school concert which I and most parents went to. Apart from that, I found out what was being taught through the school books Jon brought home and what he and some of his friends said about school. As for the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic, it all seemed pretty straight-forward and that was about all they dealt with. Jon never talked about problems and things that went on in school much anyhow.

He used to spend a lot of time playing with his dog; they used to go for walks together. That end of town was good for walking then. And he used to read. We went to the movies every Saturday, usually the Rex or Beacon. You'd see about four hours of films and cartoons and previews for fifteen cents. Some weekends all of us went on outings, maybe to Burnaby or a walk way up into the mountains near Lynn Creek to visit friends. Sometimes Ali couldn't come along and there was just the three of us - me, Jon and Peggy, our dog. During the summer we walked down to Windermere Pool for a swim almost every day. Ali would come along, unless he was working on the night shift. Other times, especially on weekends, we took the streetcar down to Stanley Park and walked around Second Beach and English Bay. You had an outing for the price of streetcar tickets and some ice cream cones.

During the first few years of school Jon was pretty lonely, and he looked it too. For a few years there were two older boys around there who he used to tag along with, Dennis and Joey. Both of them were pretty responsible kids. In fact Dennis was already earning money at odd jobs when he was thirteen, which was pretty important to his family. They were really hard up. The father was crippled and didn't get any compensation or pension, just relief. I don't know why those two boys actually put up with Jon. That was something, but it didn't work out too well because there were a lot of places they went where Jon couldn't go along, not at his age. For some reason he didn't make many friends at school in those years and if he did it never lasted long.

When Jon was in grade three Dennis drowned, right down by one of the places they used to play. How it happened nobody knows, but he drowned in a couple of feet of water. When we first heard that we didn't believe it. Jon just would not believe it so I thought it would be best to take him to the funeral parlour where they had Dennis. But even after that, and even after the funeral, Jon still refused to believe that Dennis was dead, although by that time I could see he knew it was true. He just wouldn't talk about it and I could see there was nothing to say.

As things happen, a few months after that Joey and his family moved out of the neighbourhood, too. For quite a long time Jon just moped around and I wracked my brains about what I could do. It's surprising how little you can do for a child in those circumstances. But things sorted themselves out because during the spring of that year he hooked up with a bunch of kids about his own age and they became close friends for quite a few years.

Jon was then in grade four, he must have been around nine or so, when the Gainer family moved into one of the shacks along the

waterfront below our place. There were four kids in the family and Jon became close friends with them right away. That lasted pretty well until he was a teenager. Of course, there were occasional fights when one or the other of them wouldn't be talking to each other, as with all kids. I was very glad for him because what he had always needed was a bunch of kids his own age to play with, and the Gainers were a very good bunch. Their father was usually out in the logging camps somewhere and the mother was often away too. So the kids often had to look after themselves. Which they did pretty well.

The oldest at that time was about thirteen and the youngest was around six or seven. Sometimes they were loaded with money and went on a movie and cake-eating spree, but more of the time they just had bread and a can of beans in their house, if that. One of them, a younger brother, was a bit wild - he got picked up by the police a couple of times for stealing money out of milk bottles and out of the cash register in the corner store. But all in all, they were fine kids.

Of course, they're all grown up now, married, with children of their own I suppose. Although I still remember them as kids. Only the oldest didn't make it. He started working in some camp at about fifteen. Lots of money to spend, a high-ho time. Finally, and it wasn't too many years after, maybe ten years, Ali met him down on Cordova Street. He had become an alcoholic. Once that starts it's curtains.

There were only two things I didn't like about the Gainer situation. One was that the mother had TB of the lungs and I was afraid Jon would pick it up. So I made sure he had a TB check up twice a year at least. The other thing I didn't like was that from then on Jon spent most of his time playing down by the waterfront, and there were all sorts of dangers there. A dockyard area isn't like a beach after all, and kids at that age are pretty stupid when it comes to danger. In fact, remembering my own youth, we did all sorts of dangerous and foolish things on a dare.

There was a big park nearby with all sorts of space. There was bushland and vacant lots to play in besides, but they had to play on the docks and around the railway tracks or on the ships. From some place or another they always managed to round up an old row boat to paddle around in. For a couple of years they had a wooden canoe, a big dugout canoe they had gotten somewhere, and they would paddle all over the harbour. Jon often came home with rock cod and shiners, and crabs they'd caught somewhere in the harbour, often from the North Shore I think. Well, what are you going to do? That's where the Gainers played and if Jon was going to play with them, he would too. The only alternative was to stop him from seeing those kids and I didn't want to

do that because they were the best and first real friends his age he had had.

I tried setting certain limits. 'You have to promise me that you won't go out in the boat beyond the piers.' There was a pretty fair sized harbour within the bounds of two docks. Or, 'If you go fishing, you have to promise to stay off the log booms,' because they're treacherous. But it was like talking to the wind. 'Okay, I won't do that. Sure. I'll be careful. Don't worry, we don't do it.' Then a day or so later that was exactly what they did.

There was one thing I put my foot down about. There was no playing on the tracks or in the freight cars that the railway used to leave standing around down there. You had to cross the tracks to get to the Gainers' house. Those freight cars were shunted around quite often and kids playing on or under them could easily have been killed or had an arm or a leg cut off. One thing I really drilled into Jon was that if there was a string of freight cars standing there, he had to walk around them, with lots of leeway to spare, and not crawl under them. A couple of times I did see that whole bunch playing cops and robbers on the roofs of the freight cars, and once the whole lot of them were hitching a ride on them as they were being shunted around. I gave Jon a real good licking for that. Ali did once or twice too when he caught him playing on a log boom.

Actually, I don't really understand how they got away with some of the things they did. They were always playing on Terminal dock and going on the cargo ships. You'd think that the officers on those ships or the guards on the dock would kick them off. Occasionally they were chased off, but then the next day they were right back again. You wouldn't think that sailors would let kids play around their boats. Instead they filled the kids up with coffee and pastry and food. Oh well, sailors are pretty good hearted and pretty decent when it comes to kids. But there was a lot of dangerous equipment around just the same. Still, nothing ever happened to any of them - not a cut, not a broken bone. Not even any near scrapes I ever heard of.

## 10. Change of Life (1946-1950)

### *Restlessness and Work*

Ali had been pretty restless for most of the years after the war. I didn't know what he wanted and I don't think he did either. He had a whole string of jobs both in town and out of town. Well, that wasn't anything unusual, but now he constantly seemed restless.

I think he was working in the Weston Bakery the day the war ended in Europe. For a while he painted houses, but that didn't agree with him. After that he operated a small pie and pastry bakery for the owner. In early 1946 he decided he had to get to Europe to see what things were like. Somehow he managed to get a job on an American ship that was docked in Vancouver headed for England. Sometime in March they left, sailed down the west coast to Panama and over to England. They were loaded pretty heavily and it took them pretty close to two months to get there. Ali had it in his mind to jump ship in England and head over to Germany. For whatever reason, it didn't work out, so he came back with the ship.

He did have about a week's leave which he spent tramping around Scotland. That trip, working or not, was the first time that he had been away on the Wanderschaft since the early 1930's. The wages he mainly sent to us in Vancouver, but he did have more free time than other jobs and he was seeing the world again, like he always wanted to do. In fact, when he talked about his time in Scotland it was like when he used to talk about his wandering days as a young man.

He got back to Vancouver all full of enthusiasm but more restless than ever. During the next year he had at least a half dozen different jobs. For a while he ran a small bakery with two men making meat pies. Later he worked as a cook on the C.N.R. on a run out to Medicine Hat and back. The pay was lousy. He made a few runs on a tug boat along the coast which was okay, but for some reason it was laid up. Then for a few months he cooked on the Union Steamships and last of all on a C.P.R. ship. In between all of that he was painting houses again and out of work for various periods. All in a year or so.

He was always pretty lucky when it came to jobs. Except for two years in the worst of the depression, he always managed to get a job of some sort. Although most of them were pretty lousy jobs and usually he didn't keep them very long. Ali only stayed on most of those jobs four or five months, often less, some as little as a week. He only stuck it out on a few jobs in his life for over a year. In between, he was

continually running around searching and talking to people he knew about other jobs.

Finally, Ali landed a job cooking at the Elk Falls construction camp, near Campbell River. He liked that place, at least it wasn't too bad. It was beautiful country, there was a pretty good bunch to work with, he had some time to himself each day and he could usually get home to Vancouver for a few days every two weeks. Jon went up to visit him for part of the school vacations. Ali stuck it out until the project finished about a year later.

In 1948, it was very difficult to get a job either in Vancouver or anywhere in B.C. Ali managed to get work as a baker on the *Corsair*, a cruise ship that operated out of Seattle. In the summer she ran up to Alaska and in the winter to Acapulco. The passages were unbelievably expensive, a hundred dollars per day and more. Which at the time was phenomenally expensive. Ali didn't mind baking because he was pretty much on his own. But he got to hate the people who travelled on the boat. From the way he told it they were bored millionaires who could think of nothing better to do than play cards and booze it up from morning till night. The most damning thing about them in Ali's eyes was that many of them never even got off the ship to see the country when they got to the places they were cruising to.

The one redeeming feature of that job was that it led him to Mexico, and he fell in love with Mexico the first time he saw it. Whenever they were in port anywhere in Mexico he worked whatever schemes he could to get away for a couple of days. Because he baked at night he usually had the day to wander around and talk to people in the ports. He came back with endless stories about people he met in Mexico and also stacks of Mariachi records, which he just loved. Ali had been working on the *Corsair* for six months or so when she ran up on a reef in Acapulco harbour and sank. Miraculously nobody drowned, nobody was even seriously hurt.

After a few more odd jobs around Vancouver, he finally landed a job in a construction camp which was repairing the dikes along the Fraser River up near Hatzic. That was a fairly good deal, it paid well, he had some free time and he had the opportunity to make friends with farmers who lived nearby. Besides, he always managed to come home on the weekend at least, because it was only fifty miles from Vancouver and the camp didn't work weekends. That job lasted about six or seven months, until the very early spring of 1949.

We never spent money on ourselves, we only went on one trip with Ali. We went down to Seattle rather than on the trip to Mexico he was always promising. But even that was a penny ante deal. We drove down,

which didn't cost anything and then instead of staying in a decent hotel, just decent not fancy, he finds this flophouse. One room with two beds and he and I slept on this bed with a broken spring. We stayed there three days before we went home and most of the three days we ran around the city looking for bargains. I think we only went to one good place to eat there. That was a fish bar on the waterfront called *Ivor's Acres of Clams*. 50

Jesus, I was mad. But there was something about it that made me very sad too. I started to feel that all my life I was going to lead a drab existence. That was brought home to me. What made it even worse was that Ali's being so cheap was reasonable. If we spent the money in Seattle we would have to tighten our belts even more when we got home. Still, I think we should have enjoyed whatever money we had whenever we had it and worried about the bad times when they came. I never could realize that then, or come to that conclusion. But that's one of the things I've learned in my life, now that it's too late. As it was we never had any real fun.

Ali wanted so much to be a father to Jon, to have Jon confide in him and look up to him. Because he was always very proud of his son. But neither of them knew how to go about showing it. None of us were very demonstrative that way. But it really was somewhat sad, because what didn't come out in affection came out in quarrels. Nothing unusual mind you, but enough quarrels so that it was often pretty icy. And usually over nothing, about Jon refusing to do something or about him mocking me or Ali. I must say, for a kid, he could be really maddening that way.

During the war years Ali had been so busy he literally had no time for us. He was home for a few hours in the evening, that was all. That was all right for me because I saw quite a bit of him in the evening, but there wasn't much time for Jon except for weekend outings that we sometimes made together. After the war, during the late 1940's, whenever Ali was home he tried to get things going together with Jon. For instance, in 1948 Ali bought an old car, a 1928 Essex. Old, but it ran pretty reliably. We all used to go for drives up mountain roads that you could reach easily from Vancouver. And a couple of times Ali and Jon went on a short camping trip with the car; they even got a way up into the Cariboo and back with it.

The real *piece-de-resistance* was going to be a long hiking trip to a place called Fire Lake, up in the mountains behind Harrison Lake. They talked about that for the whole winter. Ali had once flown into the place with Ginger Coote during the nineteen thirties. It had made a big impression on him, an abandoned mine on a little plateau filled with grass growing as high as your head. Ali and Jon and two of his school



chums who liked hiking were all going to go into that place as soon as spring rolled around. Spring came, as it usually does, and they took off. But when they got to the end of the access road they found there was still deep snow up in the mountains. So they came back a few days later sort of dejected. There were a few other trips they made together too. That same year Jon went up to visit Ali for a week at the Hatzic camp. And the year after that he went out with Ali for a few days on a boat which was taking a coastal survey for a construction site. But all in all, Jon was now pretty well doing things on his own, with school chums and by himself. I remember he did an awful lot of hiking in the mountains and valleys on the North Shore.

During that time Jon went to school pretty regularly. But a few years later, starting in grade ten, he began to get bored again and by grade eleven he only went to school occasionally. Even at that he finished off most of the last year's subjects in grade eleven. I'm not sure how he did that because they had a strict grade system at that time. By the time Jon was in high school he knew better how to look out for himself than we did. He wouldn't have appreciated any interference in his life by that time, even if it had been for his own benefit.

Around 1948 or so, Ali and I decided we were going to try and build a new house. The old shack was literally falling down. The floor was laid right on the ground in some places and the floor boards were pretty well rotted through. So we started to scabble together whatever savings we could make. Over the course of the next six years we built the new house, a section at a time as we had the money. We tried to do it all with ready cash because we didn't want any big debts over our heads. Only once did we borrow three thousand dollars for the space of a year and a half. I hated to pay the interest.

Jobs were pretty hard to get, at least for women. But I finally managed to get one in Burns packing plant, working night shift, making sausages. We got about fifty cents an hour. There must have been about two hundred girls on that shift. We worked in a big hall, although that's not the correct term. Well, anybody who's worked in a big factory knows the sort of thing I mean. The smell was terrible. You could smell the ammonia and rotting offal from the fertilizer plant that was in the basement four floors below. Talk about pollution. Working in that plant was ten times as bad as any air pollution.

At first I thought I'd never be able to stand it, the hard work, the night shift, the cold. It was in the winter. You had to be pretty fast, as in any factory. Slowly I got used to it, to an extent anyway. But for the first couple of months I could hardly drag myself home after work. I wasn't that young anymore and I really began to feel my age.

We worked in that sausage room, making baloney, Polish sausage, wieners and pork sausages and various other things like that. I was a tyer - funny, that's what my job was called. We used long sharp knives that we were constantly sharpening and I was always afraid that I would cut off a finger. There were racks of meat and fat and hearts that went into the sausages; intestines and stomach lining and all sorts of things that you would never expect. Every time you looked around there was another load of ice being ground up and blended with the sausage mixture. They made a lot of effort to save a few cents of wages, like seeing you didn't take twelve minutes instead of a ten minute break for our coffee. But it was a pretty haphazard operation anyway. On the one hand there were government inspectors who would check the meat racks three or four times in a shift. If they found the slightest spot or other imperfection in any of the meat they condemned the whole load. Hundreds and hundreds of pounds of meat. That all went into the fertilizer plant then. On the other hand, there was all sorts of dirt around where we were working.

The meat and other material was ground up and then it was carried to the stuffers. That was done by building the casings onto the stuffing machines. What the inspectors never did see was that the stuffers would sometimes drop a batch of the mix and then they would just scoop it up, mix it back into the mass and carry on. Or at other times the racks of ready sausage would fall on to the floor. The woman who was handling them would quickly get them back up again and run them off to the curing room. I don't know if the sausages themselves were ever sampled but I know that for a long time after that I never ate wieners or baloney.

The casings were still made out of intestines then, they didn't have those plastic peelings. They were in barrels, pickled in a salty brine. We had to wash the casings out in ice cold water. You stood there soaking wet, your hands in cold water, hour after hour. Some of the work was pretty heavy, too, like lifting racks of baloney. I had intended to work at Burns for a couple of years if possible so that we could save up enough money to finish off the house. But I just couldn't stick it out that long. I had colds and coughs and aches and pains of one sort or another for the entire time that I worked there.

Usually I walked to work. I'd leave from our house about an hour before the shift was to start. We started at ten-thirty at night and worked through until seven in the morning, with a half hour break for lunch around three. We worked pretty steadily too. That was all right because it made the time pass more quickly. The really bad thing about it was the cold and water and drafts. You had to wear knee-high rubber

boots and a big rubber apron that covered your whole front, and then you still got wet. The pay was pretty poor, too. I think I cleared about twenty-two fifty a week. Just after I left that place was unionized and the women got about fifteen or twenty cents more an hour - still not very much.

Nevertheless, there were some compensating factors in getting out to meet people and feeling that you had a little extra money on hand. I could occasionally buy some things that I otherwise wouldn't. Nothing special, mind you, just some clothes or some pastry. Most of it went into the saving for the house. I made a few new friends at Burns and met an old acquaintance from Lillooet days, Kay Dahl who had grown up on a rancheria near Texas Creek, right in the heart of rattlesnake country. Boy, did she have some stories to tell ! Many mornings Kay and I and a few of the others who worked on the night shift would go across Powell Street, near Commercial Drive, have donuts and coffee and talk a while. Then I would take the No. 20 streetcar home. Sometimes Kay would come over to our place and have breakfast. Sometimes we would meet Ali just as he was going to work.

There were a few quarrels I had at work. I remember one woman there, we didn't get on right from the very beginning for some reason. We just rubbed each other the wrong way. I and a few of the other girls used to take some of the salami or Ukrainian sausage and eat it during our shift break. The supervisors didn't really care as long as you didn't eat it in front of them. The stuff wasn't worth more than a few dimes anyway. But this one woman told a supervisor that we were eating the sausage and I overheard her. So, after he was gone I walked over and stood in front of her and when she moved I gave her a good hard slap; open-handed but she felt it. I was boiling mad.'That's for sneaking around and telling on us.' At first she started to fight but the others that were around separated us. Later on she came and apologized and said it was a stupid thing for her to do. Actually, we became friends before I quit.

Finally I got so ill that I had to leave. Always wet and cold and drafty and with your hands covered in brine or walking in and out of cold lockers. Still, there were five women ready to take the job for anyone who who quit. Jobs were very scarce, especially for married women who didn't have a skill. Altogether, I worked there about eight or nine months.

*Friends, Old and New*

There were maybe a half dozen families and individuals that we knew who we stayed friends with year in and year out. Most of them we had known since the first ten years we were in Vancouver. Besides them I had a couple of good friends of my own; Grace Carter until she moved out of the city and a friend I met later, Beryl Shand. Ali, of course, had his own friends. He knew hundreds of people, literally hundreds.

Ali always sent friends of his to visit us when he was in the camps. When he was in town we went visiting his friends or they came around to see us. They might stay a few hours or a day; some friends stayed at our place for a week or so. There were a lot of people we knew for a little while, a year or so, and then hardly ever saw again. Dozens of them. They were people who Ali got to know in the camps or in looking for work. But there were only a few who we developed any lasting friendships with. I myself didn't make too many friends on my own, a couple of neighbours, that was about all. I had all the acquaintances I needed but there weren't any like the close friends I had when I was a young woman.

For a number of years, before and after I worked at Burns, I spent a lot of time around Angie Jensen's place. We knew them from gold washing in the Cariboo and Jon had stayed with them for a few months while Ali and I worked up in Allison's camp. Angie always did and still does dabble in the occult, although in most ways she is a very practical person. But at that time she was involved with some occult groups and with quacks and mediums of assorted stripes.

Angie did have some pretty strange experiences herself. Like seeing visions of things that she couldn't have known of but which did happen. And she believed she really saw ghosts a few times. But Angie was pretty matter of fact about it because she believed in that sort of thing. She talked about spirits like you might talk about radioactivity or astronomy or whatnot. Of course, none of those things are possible, but she was convinced that there were those occult forces. Even now, after forty years, she's still reading all that stuff.

For quite a few years Angie was part of a circle centered about this one fake healer, Doctor Buttsworth. He appeared from nowhere and after a checkered career here disappeared the same way. When I met him he was at the height of his influence. That only meant thirty or forty people but that was enough to support him. They treated him as a latter-day Jesus returned. He was peddling some wonder cures that relieved everything from corns to cancer. Well, that's an exaggeration, but not much.

It was all fake. He had various machines in an office in his home but naturally he didn't have a license to dispense treatment of any sort. Those machines were supposed to relieve you of electrical forces that were causing a disturbance in your body and making you ill. It was all a matter of relieving different sorts of tensions and there was a whole complicated philosophy that was peddled along with it. I never was personally involved and only heard about it through Angie and her friends. But from the descriptions I got, those machines sounded like crude vibrators with a little electrical charge thrown in for effect. He was part of some school in the States that was pushing that. After a few years Buttsworth's following started drifting away. Then he borrowed quite a bit of money from some of his closest adherents and started a small plastics factory. That went broke almost immediately and he disappeared into the States. Angie and a few other people lost a lot of their savings on that.

Angie was very good friends with a family who lived next door to her and I got to know them pretty well too. There was Moira, a woman in her late thirties who was a recent widow then, her son, and her brother-in-law, Jacob. Jacob was a really fine person, although too shy and much too easily taken advantage of - from some sort of a Mennonite background. But he was firm on some things because during the Second World War he refused to be drafted and served as a conscientious objector in a special labor gang. It took quite a bit of determination to do that. Jacob could have gotten a job in one of the war industries and avoided all that but he refused to work in any job connected with making the material to kill people. I always respected him for that.

That whole family was involved in one of those numerology cults. There was a guy around by the name of Parks with his special brand of numerology. His adherents generally changed their names in accordance with the correct combination of letters and numbers. That was supposed to create the right vibrations in the universe and in yourself. They showed me a couple of examples once and it was pretty complicated. There was this one numerologist friend of theirs, a young man. He asked me my full name and then he figured things out. Finally, when he was all finished figuring, he said, 'No wonder you're fat. Your name is all wrong.' I had to laugh out loud. I wasn't fat anyway.

I can't see how otherwise down-to-earth people can fall for that sort of thing. I thought all that nonsense had finally died out but it seems like a lot of people are doing the same thing today. In fact, what reminded me of that incident was a nurse I met just recently when I was in the hospital. Here was this intelligent young woman, who must

have been well educated, wearing this charm. It turned out that it was part of some numerology rigmarole she and her husband subscribed to. I had to bite my tongue not to say anything.

The Nicks had finally moved into Vancouver after 1944 or so. They had lived at French Bar for almost ten years, mainly living off the country. In all the years they washed gold and prospected they never made more than enough to barely scrape by on. And he was a pretty experienced prospector. But they liked that kind of life. It was healthy and in some ways they didn't have any worries. He put in a big irrigated garden and planted some fruit trees. They got all the game and fish they wanted so there was very little they needed to buy. But it must have been awfully lonely. The nearest neighbours were more than ten miles away and that was by horse trail. They had to be pretty self reliant. They made quite an adjustment because they were from Berlin and both of them older than Ali and I.

Despite all of their stamina and willingness to put up with being alone and never having money, as the Nicks got older they weren't able to stick it out anymore. One summer Mimi broke her leg while Anton was away somewhere. She lay around the cabin for three days, unable to get around, until he returned. They must have been close to fifty then and it was that that finally decided them to get out of that kind of life. So they came down to Vancouver too.

For a while Anton worked in the shipyards and did contract painting and various odd jobs around the city. They still went back up to the Cariboo area every summer, either to prospect or just to get out of the city. Every trip he'd bring back very plain looking rocks. You'd think, 'What useless junk. There were mountains of that stuff around.' But from those rocks Anton made the most beautiful jewelry, mounted rock slices cut and polished. There was one that I remember that was like a scene in the forest which seemed to have a dim half light coming from the stone. Other slices looked like the ocean at sunset with clouds over the water. At least that was the impression they gave me. I suppose other people saw other things in them.

Nicks had a small house in North Vancouver, which was still a small peaceful town then, just a five cent ferry ride from downtown Vancouver. Anton had his stone working equipment in the basement. Lapidary jewelry was just coming into vogue then and not many people appreciated it. He also gave some classes in silver and gold and stone work for people who wanted to learn the craft.

There were some arty-arty people we knew about that time. Quite a few of them came together around a communal farm that the Koeppens got involved in during the late 1940's. It must have been

before 1951 because that's when the farm went broke and Ebe Koeppen started working in the camps again, often with Ali and a couple of times with Jon.

Five or six families had pooled their money and put a down payment on a farm in the Serpentine Valley, not far from Cloverdale. They were going to build the world they wanted to live in right there. All right, good enough. The farm was supposed to produce specialty crops, like high quality grass seed and things like that. Koeppens sold their Columbia Valley homestead for what little they could get for it and sank the money into that communal farm. So did a few others. There were about a dozen adults and maybe a half dozen kids who lived on the farm.

Each family had a primitive apartment in the concrete block sheds they built. There was a big mess hall which doubled as a meeting place. That was quite nice and very roomy - they could have seated a hundred people in that easily. There was a larger bunch of I don't know how many people who didn't live on the farm but who were connected in some way. Some contributed money to keep it going, others just visited all the time. One university professor sold his house and put all his salary into the communal farm for a few years. The farm was supposed to support itself once it got on its feet, but it never did. Later on they sold some land and lived on that but I don't think they ever made anything on farming.

There were only two people on that whole farm who knew anything about farming - Koeppen and one guy who was a retired farmer from Saskatchewan. Most of the people hanging around there were more interested in talking than anything else. For instance, there was Gundar Bright. He should have known how to farm because for years he had a homestead in the Peace River country. By this time he had some job in Vancouver but was always around that farm. He and his wife and many of the other people visiting the farm were pretty high and mighty. There were never ending, high flown discussions of politics and art and child rearing - whatever the fashion was at the time. And everybody was more than a little superior about living on the farm, or even being connected to it.

Lots of high faluting talk, but nobody did any work. I suppose it gave them a good feeling. That's about all you could say for it. It was ten hours discussion of what was happening in the world and what decisions they should make on the farm, and one hour work. Well, I'm no farmer but I know that crops don't get produced on talk. One had a bad heart, one had a bad leg, and none of them worked. Oh yes, they all pitched in

sometimes, but not in any sustained or organized way. The farm lasted for less than three years, from start of finish.

Actually, the idea behind it was quite good. But this communal farming never seems to work out here. Now, with the hippies, it may work sometimes. Because they can come and go as they please and there are always enough people to take up the slack. And besides, nobody puts their life's work or savings in so there is less chance for quarrelling. But then that's not really farming, it's more like an extended outing in the country. Bright's oldest boy - actually he must be a middle aged man now with a wife and kids - was living up in the mountains in one of the hippie communes. But that's a different story and not at all what those people on the communal farm had in mind.

During that time Ali went to night school to learn Spanish. Before that he had been taking some night school classes in Russian. That was just for fun because he always liked languages. He didn't intend to put it to any practical use but as it turned out he did get plenty of opportunities to use Spanish. Going to night school he made a whole passel of new friends. Ali was a fabulous story teller, with all the dramatic pauses and suspense and little details. People would sit and listen to him by the hour. And he in turn just ate up that kind of attention.

Later on Ali went to a creative writing course because he hoped to be able to produce some articles. But when it came to putting stories down on paper his whole storytelling ability vanished. To make it worse, he didn't realize that. I never said anything but I tried in as subtle a way as possible to prepare him for the rejection slips I knew would follow, so he wouldn't build his hopes too high. But whenever I did that he would say I was always pessimistic, that I never thought he could do anything, that I didn't care that he was trying to do something he always dreamed of. So I stopped saying anything.

But those articles were just terrible. The same set of incidents he could tell you about and you would almost see the surroundings of some Mexican port or the way things were in some place he'd been in Canada or in Germany many years before. He could paint people going about their business and the tensions and humor and everything. Yet when he wrote about them it would come out like the worst, most tawdry travelogue. And the rejection notices did come back, after each story. He kept at it for a few years but he didn't have anybody to talk to about it and after a while he got discouraged. If Ali had kept on with it and had had people around him who were interested, maybe he might have developed a skill in writing. But he never had the opportunity, not while working in those camps anyway.



*A Sort of Ending*

Actually, I've gotten ahead of myself in the story. Because to understand what happened next [in 1949 and 1950] you've got to know some things that developed in the years just after the Second World War. By early 1946 we got pretty regular letters from my mother and from Ali's sister. Our relatives started sending long, long letters. And each one was like a hammer blow. Although I was prepared for the worst, when I got the news it was always a shock. I dreaded reading those first letters.

My mother was still alive and unhurt, old as she was. But all the men were missing, except Fritz who returned to Berlin in 1946 sometime. Peter, his first son, who was my favorite, had been killed in a bombing raid in 1944 and Hadel, Fritz' wife, was dying. A strange thing, they wrote me later about the day Peter was killed. It was about the same time I had had a bout of pneumonia. I had a dream in my fever. I was in the cemetery near Stacken, where Fritz and the family used to live. There were gravestones falling over and fire, everything was aflame, and I knew that somebody was dead. Now I don't believe in premonitions and those sorts of things but it was awfully strange.

My mother wrote me a letter on how Hadel died. She was a close childhood friend of mine. Hadel had been in the cellar bomb shelter with Peter when it was hit. Peter was killed outright and she was badly crushed. She lived for another two years sort of hobbling around. My mother wrote me that just before Hadel died she was talking in a semi-conscious state and describing that she was in a beautiful sunny meadow, filled with wild flowers, and Peter was there and many of the family were all around and everybody was happy. Fifteen minutes later she died. They must have given her morphine and that was a morphine dream.

Fritz made it back to Berlin six months after the end of the war. He was incredibly lucky. He had been conscripted into a special [German] army unit, made up mainly of people who were on the blacklist for one reason or another, but who the army still wanted to use. So they gave them the jobs with the highest death rates. It meant that they were given the worst jobs like clearing mine fields. How he managed to survive all those years is a miracle. Near the end of the war Fritz and some of the men who were with him managed to desert and make it over to the American lines in Italy. Most of his comrades died long before, either in concentration camps or on the front.

Kurt and Werner were lucky in a way, too, because they were both captured alive by the Russians. But both were listed as missing at first. Kurt returned a year and a half after the war was over. Werner was in Russia for almost five years and we thought he was dead. Supposedly, he was doing volunteer labor involved in reconstruction but in all those years he was never able to write. All that we found out later. There were so many friends and acquaintances we had known either dead or crippled or missing that no matter how much I wanted news of them I had to steel myself to read each new letter. Sometimes I would put them aside for a day or longer, getting up the nerve to open them. Then if I found out if something terrible had happened to people I knew I'd try to work up the nerve to reread that passage again in the hope that I'd misunderstood it. Ali's sister had been badly hurt in a bombing raid too. And Werner's wife had cancer. The one bright letter I got was from Sophie. She and her son had come through the war unscathed.

All our relatives were bombed out and starving, or so they said. So Ali and I scraped together every penny we could and started sending food parcels. We remembered what it was like during the First World War and we thought they were actually starving. It's true, for the first year or so things were pretty bad in the big cities in Germany. But after that it wasn't as desperate as we thought. Still, for almost three years we sent food parcels that took up everything we could save. What with the cost of the food and the postage and everything else, it came to seventy-five dollars or more a month. Less during the last year. That was about a third of everything Ali earned in those years. We were sending parcels to six families.

The parcels were mainly food and some clothing. You weren't allowed to send any tobacco or alcohol. But I sent cigarettes anyway. I got quite adept at sending them. For instance, I would pack cigarettes in cans of butter, butter all around the side and on the top and seal it up again in a canning machine that Angie Jensen had. And we put cigarettes in cans of meat, tightly wrapped in cellophane and with a small lead weight, with the meat and jelly on top and sides. My family did use those cigarettes for trading. They rarely smoked any we sent, although they were all heavy smokers before. There were too many other necessities. My mother managed to get window glass and bedding with those cigarettes and have her bombed out apartment repaired so it was liveable.

The customs people opened a number of the parcels I sent for inspection. Of course, if they had really taken everything apart and poked around in all the cans they would have found the stuff. But they

were too busy to do that. Packing those parcels was a job in itself. Everything had to be in watertight, unbreakable containers and packed tightly together. But it still had to be light because all the packing was included in the total weight. Then the whole thing had to be wrapped in a canvas cover and sewn up with strong linen thread. If those parcels broke open in transit then goodbye contents.

I used to send three or four parcels a month; twenty pounds per parcel. that's eighty pounds of expensive food. It didn't make sense to send cheap commodities like flour or most canned vegetables. So it was mainly high quality and expensive foods like canned hams, butter, powdered milk and eggs, some special enriched cereals, cheese and sugar and oils. Of course, at today's prices nobody could afford do to that.

Every month I sent my mother and Ali's stepmother a parcel. Then in rotation we would send another two parcels to the other families, a little more to Fritz and Ali's sister than to the others. But we overdid it. Ali's stepmother sent me a letter saying, 'Please send me shoes. I have no shoes.' Well, I had only one pair of shoes myself. Later I found out that she traded that pair of shoes for a chair she liked, even though she already had enough chairs to sit on.

They thought we were living in the lap of luxury over here from the way they wrote. We sent those food parcels because we thought it was a matter of life or death. I'm sorry I didn't send Sophie a few more parcels and forget about some of my relatives. Harry, Fritz's remaining son, wrote and said that his wife had no stockings, could I send him a half dozen pair of silk stockings. That was the last straw. I used to like Harry very much as a child, when I took care of him. But he had become so greedy I said, 'No more.' Harry later became a speculator or businessman of some sort in West Germany. It's too bad I sent him anything because he became a real stinker.

We sent parcels from 1946 until 1948. Then it became clear that things weren't as bad as we thought. Then I only sent my mother parcels and Ali's stepmother we sent a little money each month or so.

It must have been in early 1949 when the Hatzic dike project closed down and Ali decided he was going to Germany. Nothing else mattered, he had to go. He said he wanted to go to the Leipzig trade fair and get into import trade. That was just talk because he didn't get to a single trade fair. And he couldn't have swung anything even if he had gone, with no money or connections. But he was fed up with working at jobs he hated. He was fed up with never having anything to show for all his work and he just wanted to get away. There were all sorts of reasons involved. I think he was becoming desperate. And then there was

somewhere in the back of his mind, the feeling that he could recapture his youth in some way by going back for a while. I don't know what all was involved exactly. Anyway, he had to go.

He sold the car and took some of our savings. With that he barely had the fare plus a few hundred dollars. I was stuck in Vancouver with barely enough money to scratch by on. But at that time it was like a sickness, he had to go. If I would have prevented him from going I would never have heard the last of it.

What Ali really wanted, I think, was to see what had happened to the people we used to know. He did see many people; his stepmother and his sister, most of my relatives and some of his old friends. But naturally, it was all so different and they were so changed, or at least different from what he remembered, that it was quite a blow. I think that shook him more than he let on. And the total devastation and ruin were the real shock.

Ali got into Berlin easily enough. The trouble was that it was pretty sticky getting a visa to get into East Germany, outside of East Berlin. He ran around to various offices and kommandaturas. Whether they thought he as a spy or not I don't know, but he never got a visa. So he snuck in under the wire. That was a pretty foolish thing to do actually, because he really didn't have any pressing business there and if they would have caught him he probably would have wound up with a good long jail sentence. That really would have been something. Him in jail in East Germany and us sitting in Vancouver. And he did have a couple of close calls in the months he was floating around there.

Well, like I said, he was just possessed to see the people and places he had known as a young man and nothing would stop him. He actually did visit a lot of places he'd spent time in as a young man; they mainly were in Berlin and East Germany. And he did meet some of the people he used to know, or their families. Don't ask me how, with all those topsy-turvy conditions. But in a way he didn't meet anybody or see anything that he wanted to. Because I think he really wanted to see things going on like he remembered as a young man. That's not the same as thinking you can go back to being young again, but it's something similar. But there was no place to go back to because that Germany, the Germany as we knew it, didn't exist anymore. It wouldn't have existed probably even if there hadn't been a Hitler and a war.

West Germany was in the process of being Americanized. It was like some of the worst features of the twenties, except that there wasn't all the killing. All sorts of parvenus and schemers and blackmarket operators were on top. Oh, Ali met quite a few persons who he really liked. But in general the country was in the grip of the most narrow

mind materialism. Of course, that's only what I got through Ali's reports. But it seems to have been true. You saw the results of that in many immigrants who came to Canada from Germany in the 1950's and after. Most were self centered, and infinitely more provincial than any of us were thirty years before. They're like my grandparent's generation, or worse. When you think of it, it was only a period of fifteen years from the time I left Germany until the end of the second war. And yet a whole world disappeared in that time without a trace.

At that time East Germany was much poorer and less built up than the West. It wasn't the sort of police regime that you always see pictured in movies. Still, there was a lot of heavy handed propaganda and the laws were pretty stiff. Maybe it was better after Stalin died. But then how do you account for the millions of people who fled from there in the years following that and the wall the G.D.R. [German Democratic Republic] had to build later on? For some people who left you would say good riddance to, but not to millions. That can't be communism that they've got if they have to wall people in to keep them there.

With all of that, Fritz still kept his belief in communism. Now, communism as an idea, what it says should be the case, is all right with me. But not the system that the Russians have or the sort of system that Fritz helped to institute in East Germany. That's not communism. It's still arranged so that some have the power and the dachas, and even have servants in some cases. The leaders go shooting pheasants on large estates and the great mass of the people are still ordinary workers with no say in what goes on.

Right after the war ended, Fritz was entered into a program studying to be a judge. For ten or twelve years after that he was a magistrate in East Berlin. That's what he was doing when Ali was there. I often thought of those people who had to come up in front of him as a judge. They wouldn't have a chance at all. That bothered me so many times - what Fritz might have done there. After all his suffering he became full of vengeance. He was pretty dogmatic even as a young man. Then, after the war, he wrote letters that were full of slogans. He expected me to answer in the same style. Fritz converted my mother, too, and she would write in the same way. I could always say something to her, but I was not going to get involved in political diatribes with my brother. All he wanted was a sounding board and an echo anyway.

For a number of years I continued to write to some people in Germany pretty regularly, but we finally lost contact. There were just too many years and too much distance in between. For quite a while I thought I would like to go over for a visit myself, maybe along with Ali,

when we could afford it. But it would have been like visiting a strange country. After my mother died in 1955 there really wasn't anything to draw me back. That was all pretty well finished for me.

Ali didn't find whatever he was looking for. He had an exciting time and probably would have stayed longer if his money hadn't run out. Even then I don't think it would have made any difference. In any case, he didn't have passage money left to get back on. He figured that he would always find some way back to Canada. And he did. There was a Canadian freighter tied up in Hamburg. He told them that he had missed his ship and they took him back as a distressed seaman. Whether that was a mere formality or whether they actually believe him I don't know, but they brought him back home anyway. In fact, the men on the ship took up a collection to send him back to Vancouver. Ali said that was the best trip he ever made. He didn't have to work and he had the run of the ship and could talk to everybody. Just great. But he didn't settle down or come to any decision. In fact, if anything, he was even more restless than before he left.

## 11. Grass Widow (1950-1964)

### *Grass Widow*

Ali had barely gotten home from Germany, he wasn't home for even a week, when he got a call from the union hall asking if he wanted to take a job cooking on *The Restorer*, a cable laying ship that worked out of Victoria. It was leaving for a six month tour of the Pacific. The wages they paid were tops; Ali would make more money than he ever made in the camps and three times what he earned in the city. So he decided to take the job. They were away a long time, from February to August 1950, repairing underwater telegraph cables. *The Restorer* was a small, ancient ship, but the crew according to Ali, was pretty good and he enjoyed himself. They stopped over in Hawaii, in Guam and in Samoa and even in the Philippines. So Ali finally got to see that part of the world.

I was becoming more and more a grass widow. I wanted him to get a steady job here in Vancouver. But I thought it's no use to nag him about it. He had to come to that feeling himself, there was no use pressuring him into something he didn't want to do. But after he left I was terribly sad, and would sometimes cry to myself when I was alone. I was beginning to realize that this sort of life wasn't just a temporary phase.

When Ali got back from the South Pacific he landed a job cooking on a boat that tied up in Vancouver, the *Friendship*. She was an old seine boat which had been fixed up as a yacht. The owner, a guy by the name of Boyd who used to own a construction company in B.C., kept the boat as a floating home. But he wasn't around for months at a stretch and the boat would be docked in Coal Harbor. That was a pretty good deal. Not long after that Boyd bought himself a converted sub chaser which he had decked out pretty luxuriously. He called her the *Cardeas*.

The crew, while Ali worked there, was pretty steady. They were a great bunch of people and that was how Ali stood it for as long as he did. The mate was an older man who had been working on deep sea ships for forty years or more. In fact, he had been a mate on a sailing freighter when he was younger. The skipper of the *Cardeas* and the engineer were former towboat men from the B.C. coast. The deckhand was a fairly young guy from the east somewhere - carefree, happy and unattached. The guy who was the steward Ali had known in one of the camps, and they got on very well.

During the winter Boyd took the *Cardeas* down to Mexico and in the spring and summer they would cruise around B.C. and Alaska. In between all of these trips they were tied up in Coal Harbor and Ali could come home every night. They made two trips from Vancouver down to Mexico. They'd stop in little ports for a while, like Mazatlan, but mainly in Acapulco. All in all, Ali saw a lot of Mexico. He always managed to get a good deal of time off during to explore the countryside and became pretty fluent in Spanish.

A few times I helped out on the ship when they had a big load of passengers and were just going out of Vancouver for a few days. The steward had some family troubles so I took over his job occasionally. Jon was already fourteen and old enough to look after himself at home when need be. He enjoyed being on his own anyway, as most kids that age do. In fact, the next year he was working on a coastal freighter himself. I only went out on one longer trip with the *Cardeas*, for a two week cruise up the B.C. coast in the summer. That was the last job I ever had.

Old Boyd always liked to have a lot of company around. I guess most of them had a good deal of money. But they seemed to live a pretty boring sort of existence, strange as that sounds, at least when they were on that ship. Very unexceptional conversation, apart from the times they talked about their business deals. A constant round of fishing, drinking, card playing and more drinking. Most of them were semi-retired and were fishing addicts. Ali stayed pretty well in the galley and didn't have much contact with the guests on the ship. That was the steward's job. Once or twice while I worked as relief for the steward I heard swearing drifting up from the galley. 'God damn stupid drunk buggers,' and so on and so forth. But Boyd took it in his stride, he was the best of that lot of big shots and, personally, acted pretty decently.

Not many months later Ali had enough of working on that yacht, too. Regardless of the trips to Mexico and the fact that it was a pretty good crew to work with and fairly decent pay, he couldn't stand cooking for a bunch of rich bums. It was different than cooking in a camp or on a tugboat, where nobody could really tell you what to do. So he quit. Ali was on those two yachts for over a year and a half. I never expected him to stick it as long as he did.

During those years that Ali worked on the boats and in the camps again, I started to feel like a grass widow. At first I liked to think it was only temporary. Just one more trip. But I began to feel that the rest of our lives would be that way; Ali a few months out in camp and a month in town. It really began to weigh on me. You're less resilient as



you get older. Then Jon started to live pretty much his own life. Oh, he was home in the evening alright, but we hardly said anything or did anything together anymore. There were a lot of fights over nothing too, so I sort of left him alone. When he started working himself, when he was fifteen, it got a bit better.

For a few years there I really felt completely cast off, like there was nobody who needed me. Jon was more or less on his own. Ali would have been just as happy on his own, although he never said anything like that. I knew he still cared; thirty years living together can't be changed. But I was completely at loose ends. It was too late for me to start anything new in my life. You don't think so? What was there for me to do? Dabbling around with painting or other arty stuff or getting involved in busy-work groups is as bad as doing nothing. Oh, I filled my days with the same things I'd done for years - reading, taking care of the garden and the house, visiting a few people. But none of it seemed worth anything anymore.

I don't know how to describe it, but I think most people know what I mean. Certainly all older people must know the feeling. Apart from real physical pain there is nothing worse than that feeling. You still want to do something, but nothing that seems possible seems worth doing. In fact, nothing seems worthwhile. Oh, you hear of a few things that some people do which occasionally gives you a feeling that the world is still alive and good things are going on. But it's all removed from you and even from every day reality.

Well, that's very ordinary too. You get through it like everything else. For me it passed after I had a series of strokes when I and everyone else thought I was going to die. After that I knew that I was getting old and that most things were now out of the question for me. I had to concentrate my strength on getting better and taking care of myself. And I began to appreciate a lot of the little things that one gets in day to day living. Of course it wasn't a change that I noticed overnight. That period of just feeling terribly lonely yet uninterested in most things, yet desperate in a way. It seemed to go on and on. Now I can look back at it and it was only a few years I felt that way. But at the time it seemed to go on forever.

By the time Ali started working on the ships again Grace Carter had already left the city. Her kids were all grown up and were on their own. 'To hell with this rainy city. I'm going to the sun belt,' she said. So Grace packed up and moved to the Okanagan where she made a living for quite a few years by working in the fruit cannery in the summer and selling her knitting in the winter. For a number of years after that I had no really close friend. Then two sisters moved on to the street;

one was about my age and the other about ten years younger, one a widow and the younger one never married. At first I thought they were pretty stuck up, but after a while the older one, Beryl, became my best friend.

Beryl Shand and I spoke the same language. That is, we felt the same way generally about things. One of us would start a line of thought and the other one could go on and add to it. We could consider things. With so many people you just sit and listen or say something meaningless because you really don't operate on the same wave length. And there are quite a few people who don't really listen to anybody but themselves anyway. Or others are so high flown that you can't say anything unless it's the fashion of the time. But with Beryl, like with Grace and Sophie and a few others, it was a real conversation. If you're really looking for a person you can talk to like that you'd never find them. It's only through luck that you ever meet.

Beryl was born in Wales and could still speak the Welsh language. But she'd been in Vancouver since she was a young woman, from before the first war. Her husband had been a stoker in the British Navy but had contacted some sort of lung ailment, which finally killed him. He couldn't manage any sustained work and they had a pretty rough time of it during most of their lives. From the time I got to know Beryl until the time I moved away from Wall Street, for over ten years, we used to visit each other four and five times a week, sometimes almost every day. Sometimes just for a few minutes, sometimes for a whole evening.

Every week we packed books home from the library. I read more than ever, until late at night. We didn't have exactly the same taste in books but it was close enough to make it interesting. But we read many of the same books so we would spend hours discussing them. A long time ago I decided I wasn't going to tackle super serious literature. I was going to read for pleasure and if I could learn something along with it, fine.

The Vancouver Public Library was pretty good. Even their small district libraries had a wide selection of books which were constantly rotated. I read all of Upton Sinclair's books. I really enjoyed them. Some I read two to three times over the course of years, like *The Jungle* and *I, Governor* and *Merchants of Death*. That man must have written with both hands and with his feet on Sundays. I re-read Jack London's books and Aldous Huxley's and many of Remarque's books too.

A book that sticks in my mind is *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* [Betty Smith]. That came out somewhat earlier, during the war years, and I must have read it at least two or three times. About a girl, almost

exactly my age, growing up in a very poor family, in the tenements of Brooklyn. In places it was too sentimental and a lot of things she had varnished over. In some ways it's like a children's story, but that's okay. I could fill in a lot of things that she left unsaid. The tenement life in all the big cities must have been really pretty similar. I don't know if the woman who wrote that book actually lived in tenements, but if not she was a pretty good novelist.

I read whatever came into my reach. Most I can't remember, either the author or what they said. I found out later that some were by quite famous authors, although they were pretty asinine I thought. I read a few of Thomas Mann's books. He's always touted as one of the great German writers. But we already laughed at him as a smug *Spiesburger* [Philistine], a throwback, even when I was young. He really is one of the worst glorifiers of emperors and exploiters and haters of working people. I mean Thomas Mann now; Heinrich Mann, his older brother, is totally different. I think you could read him today and he would still be modern.

But there was so much I read. For years I read at least four or five books a week, often more. Who can keep track of them all? I always talked about the books I read with Beryl. For a while we were pretty much given over to historical novels, anywhere from history to highly varnished tawdry romances and adventure stories. Novels about the Roman Empire, the intrigues and struggles and general goings on. The series about *Claudius, the Emperor* [Robert Graves] are the only ones I remember. There were others about the Plantagenets, or about Louis the Sun King or set in Renaissance Italy. That sort of thing.

Many are pretty childish. Others looked very stilted and unpromising but turned out to be fascinating. But you only read with one eye and one part of your brain, and you're reading between the lines and constructing a separate story for yourself as you go. You just cancel out what you consider is nonsense or you take it as a fairy story. Then for a couple of years Beryl and I were on a science fiction kick and we cleared out both the district and the main library of every science fiction book they had.

Every Saturday Beryl and I went shopping up on Hastings and Nanaimo. It was a neighbourhood shopping area with a lot of small stores. We always went into the same stores and the same cafe. We went there for almost fifteen years so they all knew us.

I never was much of a bug for housekeeping, for keeping everything polished and tidied up. But even keeping a minimum order in a house takes time. And then cooking and washing. You wind up frittering away a good part of the day away. Besides, I got up fairly late because I

often read until three or four in the morning. I listened to the radio sometimes, but not much. Television we didn't get until 1958 or 1959, and in the first years there wasn't much on worth watching anyway. I spent a great deal of time in the garden. That's where I spent half my day.

I mainly planted flowers. Tiger lilies, tulips of every imaginable sort, poppies and daffodils, sweet peas and, over the years, almost every imaginable flower that would grow in Vancouver. And some that wouldn't. There were rosebushes all around the house and half a dozen kinds of flowering shrubs. I found out that scarlet runners attract humming birds and I planted a whole side of the house, two sides, with it. and sure enough, we had humming birds around there next year. I even made a little honey feeder for them. They came for a number of years and then they disappeared. Maybe the air was getting too poisonous for them because there continued to be plenty in North Vancouver.

I must say it was beautiful. In one corner of the yard was a huge bush of Chinese lanterns, and a hedge of loganberries. In another corner I had a couple of lilac bushes. You name it, I had it - from forget-me-nots to rare rhododendron bushes. But work I did. Let me tell you, having a good garden takes a lot of work. I should have just planted shrubs and perennials and trees that don't need much care. They're beautiful too. Things like broom and forsythia and irises, they grow no matter what. That's what I finally did.

### *Camp Workers*

The Kitimat project was just starting then [1951]; camps all over the place, thousands of men and very high wages for the time.<sup>52</sup> So after the stretch of work on different boats, Ali got a job cooking again at one of the camps at Kemano. That was where they were tunnelling through a mountain and building the power house for Kitimat. Ali went up there twice, three or four months each time. It was strictly for the money because he just hated it, it was like being in prison for him. After a couple of stints at Kemano Ali went up to Kitimat itself. His jobs at Kemano and Kitimat, maybe five or six stints all together, lasted a little more than two years all together. In between he tried other work in town but he returned to Kitimat because the money was very good. At the end he made almost nine hundred dollars in a month, which was phenomenal money for those days.

Now Ali didn't even like most of the logging and mining camps he'd worked in before. But that was mainly because they were so isolated

and he had to work from morning to night. But there at least you had some ordinary guys working. Actually there was quite a mixture of people in them. Some of the small mining towns, half camps and half towns, weren't bad. But the big construction camps really seemed to attract the worst characters.

Ali just hated working in the camps. Of course, it's somewhat different now. Now they just work eight hours and they have some life of their own. But Ali put in twelve and fourteen hours a day, seven days a week in many of those camps. That was the way it was, take it or leave it. Of course fairly good pay, but it meant selling your life away. You could say that Ali had almost no life because he was over half the time in those camps. As time went on he became more and more bitter. Not only did he hate cooking and hate having to be in the camps, and the isolation, but he even got to hate most of the people in them. Somehow he never felt that way about the ships he worked on, either the deep sea or the coastal ones. But during the years he worked around that Kitimat project and for a while after he just about hated everything connected with them.

Ali had a very short temper and when he got angry he could just go blind with rage. Luckily he was very strong and even among construction workers he could usually more than hold his own. So nobody tackled him too often. He was like that until he was well over fifty. But it got him into trouble a couple of times. One time he got into a fight where he was working and threw a guy through the mess hall door. Something like that happened a number of times. But this one guy was hurt badly enough to take to the hospital. Ali must really have been worried because he phoned down and told me to take all the money out of our account and to take the house and all the possessions we had and change them over to my name alone. He was afraid that there would be a lawsuit, but in the end nothing came of it.

Finally, Ali couldn't get a job at Kitimat because he told everybody off there; he got into fights with all the bosses around. I think in the back of his mind he wanted to make sure that he couldn't go back.

After Kitimat he couldn't or didn't want to find any work at all for a while. Finally he took a job on the Kildala Transmission line, way back in the Coast Mountains. That was the last straw. The job was so isolated that you could only get in and out by helicopter. He wrote me a letter from that camp that really hurt me. In this letter he accused me of always forcing him to go out into the camps and that his whole life was being spent in those prisons just to get the money I frittered away. But that's not true. On the contrary, I always told him to stay in town. I didn't like him being gone all the time, away for months and months. I

always said, 'Never mind the money. We'll manage somehow, just find something in town. Even if we make just enough to eat. Stay in town and have a decent life.' But no, he always went back. The good wages that he made in those camps were just used up when he was in town without a job.

Ali wasn't at that Kildala camp long when one day he just dropped everything, walked out and pushed his way onto one of the freight helicopters, and headed down to the beach where he could catch a boat. Actually he didn't even have the money for fare but there was so much coming and going when those ships docked that he was able to march right on board. By chance he found somebody he knew on the ship and was able to get back to Vancouver that way. He stowed away in his friend's cabin.

Whenever Ali worked in a camp, a few months or so at a time, I always saved some money which I put aside for the time he would be home and no money would be coming in. I tried never to be in debt because if the money stopped and you couldn't meet the bills the creditors might repossess whatever you had bought but couldn't make payments on. We always had to have some savings for when Ali wasn't working. That saving became so ingrained in me that I did it even when I shouldn't have. That's why we were never able to get away on a trip or do anything. I should have said, 'Come on, we're going on a trip with the money we've saved and the devil take the hindmost.'

Oh, Ali said often enough, 'Let's go here, or let's do this or that.' We were always talking about taking a real pleasure trip to Mexico but we never followed through. There were always reasons, one reason or another, why we didn't do something like that. You can always find reasons, and they were real enough. We had to pay off the house, or a car, or Ali couldn't go because another job came up.

There was just no chance for any family life. When Ali was back in Vancouver, instead of enjoying himself and resting and going out with his family, he was constantly running around for the next job. He was never home. Sometimes in the evening he brought home people that he knew from the camps. Then he went out to the camps again and always complained. I myself always tried to convince him to find something in town no matter how little he earned; we'd make a go of it. Many times I brought him down to the C.P.R. or Union docks when he was on the way back to a job and almost every time he had to force himself to leave.

Ali usually was able to get a job. Apart from the depression years and a few times later he was never out of a job when he wanted one. But that was because when he was in town he was constantly running around meeting people and going to offices where he might get the

next job. So even when he wasn't in camp he was always too busy looking for a job to do very much else. He tried often enough to get out of camp work, but just couldn't find anything he could stand. There was either too many bosses, he never wanted any boss to stand over him and tell him what to do, and he didn't have that in the camps. Also he wanted a fairly decent wage, and he never got that outside the camps. Besides, he kind of liked to have a month or two off when he could do what he wanted. That grind of going to the same job, every day, year in year out, with nothing new and maybe two weeks off a year would have been no good for him either. That would have suited me fine but he could never have stood it. But we should have used the free time he had more wisely to enjoy ourselves, to do something with that time.

After leaving Kildala Ali tried to get work in town. He tried everywhere to get a half decent paying job in town. He had a job painting for three days I think. He worked in bakeries for a while and even tried being a cook in some of the hotels in town, but the conditions were just impossible. You worked for almost nothing. And then he was always getting into fights with the managers.

After trying his damndest to get any kind of decent job out of the camps that he could around Vancouver, Ali slowly sort of resigned himself to working and living in the camps. Well, he never resigned himself to that, but he talked less about what else he might do and in point of fact when he was in town he didn't run around as much for different jobs outside of the camps. What he started to look for was camp jobs where the pay was good, where he might like the camp a bit, and where he could get into town every month or so while he was working. What he looked for was another camp like the Hatzic one where he could make friends outside of the camp and also come home on weekends. But that was pretty rare, because under those conditions there wouldn't be much need to have a camp in the first place. Almost all of those camps were in pretty isolated places where men couldn't live at home and travel to work. Finally, he did find a couple of better camps to work in and he went back for quite a few years.

Beginning in 1951 Jon started to work in the camps, too. He started pretty young, I don't think it would even be possible today. Even then it was fairly rare. Of course he lied about his age at first. The first real job he had was on a small coastal freighter, the *Gulf Wing*, that ran into the logging camps along the coast. He always wanted to go to sea, naturally, with his father and all. It's a pretty exciting prospect for any boy. The outfit that ran the *Gulf Wing* was pretty haywire, scratching along from one month to the next. Jon was a combination deckhnad,

steward and cook's helper. Interesting as it was it didn't pay anything and they had to work fairly long hours. So he was at that for only a couple of months. Then he rounded up a job with a forestry trail crew somewhere in the interior. I went down to the Army and Navy store to help him buy the clothes he needed for that, and the day he left on the train I went down to see him off. He was a little embarrassed about that. And when I saw the train leaving I felt, 'Well, there he goes not too.'

That started a whole series of jobs in the bush for him and after they were over he started travelling all over the place. Of course, at that time he was still going to school. The first few jobs were summer jobs, but he left very early in the spring and came back late in the fall. From early May until late September. In 1952 he went up to work in Kitimat himself and came back with a pile of money. He could be pretty stingy when he wanted to be but would also blow the money when it suited his purpose. He got the idea he wanted to see Mexico that winter. So sometime in early December he just left school, got down to Mexico but finally wound up in Los Angeles where a friend he knew from Kitimat was staying. Back he came for a couple of months in school and then out to Kitimat again in the early spring a couple of months before school was out. It's strange they didn't toss him out of that school.

The last few years before that there had been more and more quarrels between us. Almost continually, every second day, and then we would hardly speak to each other. It was even worse when Ali was home because then there were real set-to's. It would start with some trivial thing. Both would get their backs up, some yelling, a pushing match and it might end up in blows. But after Jon started working and had money to do what he liked, that settled down. There still were fireworks, but it became comparatively rare.

It got so that he wasn't around much anyway and didn't say anything about what he really wanted or felt or did. That hurt me, but that's the way it often is even if people are close. Something of what they are feeling and thinking you can feel, but you can never really talk about things.

In his own way Jon was pretty stubborn too. He really went to extremes not to let us know what he was doing. For instance, when he came back from Mexico he still had some money left from the last camp job. Then for a few months we hardly saw him at all, just at night. In the spring, in April sometime, he went back up to Kitimat to work and a few weeks after he'd gone a package arrives, addressed to him. I would have sent it on but Ali was home and he said, 'Oh, it may be



something important that has to be fixed up here in the city. We'd better open it and see what it is in case it's urgent.' So he did. And what was it but a pilot's license.

At first I didn't believe it; Jon didn't even have a driver's license yet and he was barely seventeen. How could he have gotten a pilot's license? Well, as it turned out, he had been taking flying lessons that spring and had completed the whole shebang without even telling us a thing about it. Both Ali and I were kind of flabbergasted. But we said to ourselves, 'Who can figure out kids at that age? Think of all the crazy things we did ourselves.' Ali was pretty proud about it too and he kept showing that license to every soul who came within his reach, whether they were interested or not.

At that time Ali had a job on the P.G.E. construction and he got home every weekend and some days in between. But now Jon was on the go. When he came back from Kitimat the second time he had over two thousand dollars cash in his pocket. Literally. He was showing off and took all his money out of the bank and was walking around town with over two thousand dollars in cash, in a bank roll, in his pocket. At that I really blew my stack. I said, 'If you're so free and easy with money and don't mind having somebody pinch it, then you'd better give me some, because we can use it and you haven't contributed anything to this household in all the time you've had money to burn on trips and planes and what not.' I didn't really mean it, if he could enjoy his money, fine. But the idea of his walking around with that money like a logger, and the thought of all the years when we didn't have twenty dollars, let alone two thousand, really burned me up. He was both embarrassed and insulted, but he did give me the money to put in the bank for him.

Jon had been considering going to university that year and Ali and I were, unobtrusively, trying to talk him into it.

Jon didn't know what he wanted and we couldn't really help him along except to see that he had a chance to go to school. I always hoped that he would learn a good trade or skill so that he wouldn't have to put up with what we did. Ali wanted Jon to go on to university to take up geology or civil engineering or something like that. In a way that was sort of crazy. Because then, if he made it, Jon likely would have to spend much of his life in camps, too. In any case, university had long since started and I could see with all that money burning a hole in his pocket Jon wasn't going to go to school. Sure enough, within two weeks he says he's going to Europe. And off he went.

He wasn't in Europe long. He saw a bit of London and about four months in Germany. Then he was broke. Part of the time he was in Germany, East and West, he stayed with different relatives of mine,

and his too. But he got into arguments with most of them and wound up staying with Sophie much of the time he was in Berlin. Strange how things turn out.

A while before Jon had left for Europe Ali had gotten a job on the La Joie Dam project. They were building a hydro dam up in the Bridge River area, up near Goldbridge. Ali knew that country like the back of his hand from the thirties. That place turned out to be fairly good for him and he worked there pretty constantly till the camp closed down in early 1955. At first he was on the night shift and had the day to travel around in. It's beautiful country up there, especially in the summer. He used to swim in the lake nearby, and went to visit people in the region who he knew from before. All sorts of people that he knew in other places turned up there. The camp superintendent was the same guy who ran Musketeer Mine. One day Ali met the same priest he used to argue with in Lillooet twenty years before. Here was this guy, almost in his seventies, still doing the rounds. There were people Ali knew from Vancouver or worked with in other places. And most important of all, there were a couple of mining towns, Bralorne and Pioneer, you could drive to in half an hour where he visited old friends and made new ones. That was always supremely important to Ali, and he always had the knack of making friends at the drop of a hat when he was in the mood.

About two weeks after Jon was back in Canada, Ali got him a job up near Goldbridge. He left in early March (1954), just a couple of days after his eighteenth birthday, and he stayed there until October of that year. At the time I thought it was foolish. I was also more than a little scared that he would get trapped in the camp life. That can happen easily; big money, big times for a few years and the rest of your life stuck away in the bush.

So, Ali and Jon were working in the same camp together. Surprisingly they got on very well together, better than they ever did at home. They each had their own jobs. But even when Jon first worked in the cookhouse they got on pretty well. After Jon started working on some outside gangs they both worked different shifts and in different places. But they went around quite a bit together. During that time Ali's fiftieth birthday was coming up. Jon got the baker to make a big cake and he got candles and a card and made a bunch of pine boughs in a kind of bouquet. He bought Ali a violin which I sent up on the sly. That's one of the instruments Ali used to play when he was on the Wanderschaft. I made Ali a fancy jacket, all embroidered with designs, like they used to wear when we were young. It was all a surprise because Ali had thought that nobody had remembered. When he came on shift in the morning of his birthday there was this stuff on his

table. He wrote me a long letter, saying 'It's impossible. Can I really be fifty? I feel like I did when I was twenty-five.' Now that could sound very sad, but he was getting to be full of life again. and he did look pretty young too, not twenty-five but he could easily have passed for his late thirties.

After he had been up in Goldbridge for a while Ali got to know the Himmelschtoss family. They were working in the Pioneer mine and had just come over from Germany. There were all sorts of abandoned small mines and mining towns around there then, some of them inhabited by people who were working in the two mines still operating. This family was living in a building of the abandoned Pacific Eastern mine where Ali had worked during the late thirties. Ali met them while going around to visit his former haunts.

The Himmelschtosses turned out to be a godsent to Ali. A man and his wife, a few years younger than us, their children and a couple of relatives of theirs who had followed them to Pioneer mine from Germany. The wife was in some ways still like a girl in the Wandervoegel movement, although she must have been in her late forties then. Quakers, but not too heavy on the pie-in-the-sky stuff. I think Ali fell a bit in love with her, and actually with the whole family. They all played instruments of one sort or another, recorders and cellos and lutes. Often, in the summer, they would make hiking trips through the mountains with food and wine and their instruments and sing songs.

The boys were something else. They were from a different generation and regardless of what their parents were like they didn't escape from the effect of the war years, and Hitler, and the years after World War II. They were very status and fashion conscious. Conservative, gullible, and smug. That's really something terrible to see in boys who are barely out of their teens. You saw that hunger for money and respectability in so many of the younger people who immigrated to Canada after the Second World War.

Anyway, Ali spent a lot of his free time with that family. He also visited loads of other people he knew around the area. It was probably the best time he ever had while working in the camps. It wasn't like working in the bush. He'd get into Vancouver pretty often. The camp also closed down for about two months in the dead of winter. I went up there twice to visit him during the second year he was there. It was beautiful; the mountains and Gun Lake and all the scenery. And even I met a few people I'd known in past years.

Finally, sometime in 1955 the La Joie project was completed and the camp was shut down. Ali was fairly lucky because shortly after the Goldbridge job finished he got a job in a camp on the P.G.E. line they

were starting to drive through from Horseshoe Bay to Squamish. That was quite good, because he could get home every weekend and sometimes in between. He got to keep up his acquaintances in Vancouver. There was a pretty good bunch of guys living in those two camps, Lions Beach and Brunswick Beach. Besides, they were fairly small camps and Ali didn't have to work that hard. It was more like a regular job in town. Many husbands, even if they're in town, aren't really around much except on weekends.

We did a lot of visiting and went on a lot of drives. And there were scads of Ali's friends from camps and various other places always coming around to visit. It was more like an ordinary life for me during the two, almost three, years Ali worked on that project. Later on, Ali and I drove over the Squamish highway quite a few times, and it was just breath-taking. What with looking down on the sea and the islands, with the mountains across the inlet. I don't think there can be a more beautiful drive anywhere in the world.

Jon only worked in Goldbridge for eight or nine months. When he came back to town he had had it with camps. Although he did a few more short stints of camp work over the next few years, it was just an occasional month here and there. He started university and this time he stuck to it. He started to live a more normal life, go to parties, have some friends, go out with girls. He got jobs in town, although it was hard at first because all his contacts were with the camps. Jon worked in factories or for the city in the summer. Sometimes he did part-time work in the winter. After a few years, he started to drive a taxi. Some of the time he lived at home and some of the time he had a place of his own, until his money ran out. That's the way it went for about three years.

After all his years of travelling and working and studying, I thought, 'By this time he should really know what he wants to do.' I tried to pin him down on that, but I couldn't because he didn't know. One year he ups and says he has a chance to go to Africa, to Nigeria. Ali and I didn't say anything, but I thought he should have learned some way to make a living before traipsing around the world. But there wasn't much we could say. It wouldn't have made any difference anyway.

Shortly after Jon got to Nigeria there was a riot at the university and his scholarship fell through. I really don't know how he managed to get by because he only had enough money to get there and nothing to live on. In fact, he had to borrow money to get back. But he stuck it out a year and in the fall of 1958 he came back to Canada, pretty down in the mouth.

I didn't see too much of him even though he was in Vancouver, even when he was living at home. He was back at driving taxi and left early in the morning, before five a.m. After that he went to school and returned around eleven at night or later and flopped right into bed. It was just on weekends that I saw him. That went on for a little more than a year. Then he started wandering around all over again. While he was enrolled at the University of British Columbia he'd take off and visit a friend of his down in the States. All that was mixed up with working and going to different universities. It was just insane. At one point he already had a degree from the University and he went out to work in an oil rig camp in the middle of the winter. 'You don't have to go to university to push a shovel in some god forsaken camp,' I told him. 'Surely all this wandering around can't be part of your studies.' It was like talking to the wind.

### *Illness and Getting Old*

It was during the time that Ali worked on the P.G.E. line that I began to get one illness after another. Instead of growing old gracefully, it came all at once, with a shock. I didn't feel old in mind and spirit but my body just broke down. It let me down. I couldn't heal myself no matter how much rest I got and how much I took care of myself. That really made me feel pretty helpless and frightened. Before that, when I was sick I always managed to pull through on my own.

The first really serious thing was a combination of gall stones and a general infection. Besides being very painful, it just slowly poisoned me. I got to look like those people who used to work with sulfur or explosives; my skin was a greenish yellow, stretched thin and bloated. For the first six months I didn't even know what it was and thought it might be cancer. I had been going to this one doctor for almost six months for tests and he had given me some pills which weren't doing any good. It became worse and worse and finally got so serious that Ali took me to the hospital emergency in an ambulance.

They were going to operate right away but they found that I had a virus and that my blood count was way down. They tried to build me up in the hospital with antibiotics and pills, and what not. Finally, they had to operate because it was becoming touch and go. Then for about two weeks I was in a half coma while they pumped food and medicines into me intravenously. I was in the hospital for close to six weeks and another couple of months I spent recuperating at home.

That's how I got hooked on doctors and medicines. That's the real test of getting old, when you say to yourself, 'Oh, I better not do this

or that because I might not be able to stand it.' One doctor, well-meaningly, told me, 'Look, it's just a fact of life. The body is like a machine. As it gets older you have to spend more time and care in keeping it in repair. Otherwise it's going to break down. But as long as you're careful and make sure you get the repairs done before it breaks down, it can last a long time.' Well, all very nice. But when you can't rely on your body anymore, and have to constantly think about what you can and can't do, and remember that you never thought that way before, then you know that you're old. Regardless of how you feel inside.

I more or less got over that gall stone trouble but the second major illness I never fully recovered from. It was the first of a whole series of strokes and heart troubles I've had since then. One evening at home in March of 1960 I had a terrible stroke. It hit me right out of the blue because there was no hint of trouble leading up to it. Ali was away but fortunately Jon was home. He got an ambulance and they rushed me to the hospital. At first they thought I was going to die, it looked pretty bad. Of course I only learned that later. At the time I was too out of it to know anything.

Ali had gone to Mexico. He wanted to travel throughout the country swagman style and I had encouraged him to go. I didn't want to traipse around Mexico with no money, living in fifth rate hotels. I was past the stage of adventuring, although Ali still enjoyed it. Bill Young, the guy who Ali was working for at the time, phoned down to the Canadian consulate in Mexico City. Apparently they put messages on local radio stations and by chance Ali heard one of them. He was back in Vancouver in less than a day after he got the message. When he first came in to see me he tried to put a good face on but I could see he thought I was going to die, and a bit later he started to cry like a child. That was the only time I ever saw him do that. I was glad he was there, even if I was out of it much of the time. For almost a week either Jon or Ali was sitting in the waiting room both day and night, although they only told me that later. The doctors figured I wouldn't make it. In a little over a week I had three strokes. I was under an oxygen tent continually, very weak and often unconscious.

After a month I came home. Jon stayed around home for a while but then went back to some camp he was working in at the time. At first I couldn't walk, in fact I could hardly move one side of my body at all. After I got out of the hospital, Grey, my family doctor so-called, dropped me. He said that there was nothing he could do for me, that I'd never be able to walk again and that physical therapy was of no use. For the first couple of weeks I was half afraid he was right. But I was

determined to try and kept on trying. I just laid in bed for a week or so exercising the paralyzed part of my body as best I could, trying to move the foot, trying move the leg, twisting the body, trying to move the arm. All very slowly. After a while it got so I could sit up myself in bed and stand if I had something to hang on to.

Ali and Bill Young rearranged everything in the bedroom. They took out all the things with sharp corners and arranged the furniture so that even if I should fall I would fall on something soft. They strung rope walkways around the house so that I could practice walking on my own. I tried that for a while but I felt too unsafe with it so they built me a heavy walker which couldn't be easily tipped but still rolled smoothly.

After I could get around a bit on my own Ali had to go back to work. By then he was working in Fort St. John but he tried to get in every week. It was a long drive for him. I tried hiring someone to help with the house, but it didn't work out. Beryl came over every day. A few other friends came over at times to clean and tidy up and apart from that I just let everything go. I usually ate cold meals because when I was alone I didn't feel safe around the stove. But that was all right, I was glad to be alive. I could see I was slowly recovering, which gave me a lot of courage.

After about three months I could hobble along the streets with a cane. Of course it took me ten times as long to get to the corner store as it used to. That was the limit I could walk, about a block and a half. But still, with lots of rest and exercise I managed to help myself. When I was strong enough to get downtown I started taking H-3 injections. There was a good deal of talk about it at the time. That was a drug which a Russian woman scientist had developed which was supposed to be a recuperative for people who were aging. It was some form of vitamin that was good for circulation and nerve degeneration. and that really helped me. It was amazing. Finally I was good enough to proceed on my own steam, although never again like before.

Every time Ali was in town, every weekend, he went to the farm the Himmelschtosses had bought in the Fraser Valley. Ali still would have liked to have had a piece of land out in the country to live on. Of course he never would have been there. He would have been out working and I would have been trapped on the farm. No thanks. I could have screamed. We could have gone around the countryside or taken trips somewhere for a day or two. But no, it had to be to that farm.

This whole country is full of beautiful spots everywhere. For instance, Mount Baker, which I always wanted to visit. We did get there once. That was a year after my stroke and I still wasn't too steady on

my feet. Walking on city streets was all right but I couldn't hike on mountain trails too well. Nevertheless, I did walk around a bit. We went in August and walked beyond the end of the road, along a narrow trail, very steep on one side. I thought, 'If I fall down there, it's all over.' Oh, but it was breathtaking, the beautiful wild flowers. I walked along with my cane for twenty minutes at a time and then rested, then twenty minutes again, for a couple of hours. All my youth and all the things I felt and remembered as beautiful -- all came back to me. It was like a wonderful dream but it was also a little sad because it reminded me of all the things that I'd missed and that were possible. Now it's too late, I couldn't walk along a trail like that even if it were the steps to heaven. So it was good that I got there at least once. But Ali and I could have gone there before, and many other places. The whole of B.C. is wonderful. Even right near Vancouver, dozens of trails, all with their own beauty.

There was one man, Leo Paulcer, who Ali had gotten to know during the early forties when they worked together somewhere for a while. Paulcer was about fifteen years older than Ali and I and he became almost like a relative, something like an uncle, to Jon when he was younger. Paulcer was one of the millions of people who came to America during the years before the First World War. Before 1905 in Paulcer's case. He'd tried his luck at a hundred odd things, miner, prospector, shoemaker, cook. You name it, he'd done it. Finally he wound up in B.C. Even in his sixties Paulcer was a pretty vigorous man, full of vim and vitality. He managed to lie about his age to get jobs; in lumber and sawmill camps for a while and on tug boats. Whenever Paulcer was in town he lived in one of those fifth rate hotels on Pender Street. He worked wherever he found a job. For a while, he worked on deep sea ships, once with Ali. But finally, down in South America somewhere, he came back to his ship drunk, fell off the gang plank and hurt himself so that he couldn't work again.

Like all the other former prospectors who we knew, Paulcer had a suitcase of old mining stock certificates which he stored in our basement. All worthless. Every half year or so he would go rummaging through them because he had heard that a certain stock he once had was being reconverted and he hoped that he might get some money back. But he never did. Oh, once he did get a few hundred dollars for some old stock, but there were thousands and thousands of dollars of worthless stock certificates there. Years of work that wound up in some promoter's pocket.

During his last years Paulcer lived on his savings, counting every penny. He had been able to put some money in the bank and he could



scrape by on thirty or forty dollars a month. The last few years of his life he got old age pension. He came to the house three or four times a month. And he would sit in the garden and read or just think. When he was drunk he would re-tell all his old stories and sing Hungarian songs. Paulcer was a good hearted guy. He would always help people out whether he knew them well or not.

We would take Paulcer along to friends we would visit on weekends. We sort of felt sorry for him because he was such a good person and so alone. But it was a little condescending since we would have often preferred to go alone. I remember how Ali and I talked about how we could gracefully get out of it, and then wound up taking him along. That's why now, when I'm in the same position as Paulcer, I'd rather be by myself than be patronized. I don't want anybody doing that to me.

I was recuperated from the first series of strokes I had and could already get around fairly well. In about 1961 Paulcer was living in a room in one of those hotels on Pender Street when he had a massive stroke himself. It left him partly paralyzed and worst of all he lost control of his bowel and bladder movements. He was terribly ashamed about that although he tried to make a joke about it. 'Well, I'm really a dirty old man now,' he said. For a month or so he was in the General Hospital where they tried their best to patch him up but he never became well enough to look after himself again. He was still alert, but pretty helpless. Finally they shipped him off to one of those nursing homes, so-called, for the aged and terminally ill. I went to see him every week for many months but it just made me feel terrible, so terrible I can't describe it. Still, each week I screwed up my courage and went.

The conditions of that home were abysmal - hardly any light in the rooms, packed so full of beds you could barely walk, not a trace of privacy. And to see the patients slowly withering away and see and hear them dying. It was just terrible. Seeing helpless people being treated like lumps of meat by the staff. They took everything away from the patients, all their little belongings. Most of those old men in there were partly on welfare. The old age checks they got were taken immediately by the woman in charge. Paulcer got seventy-five dollars old age pension and seventy dollars from his life insurance, and the hospital took every last cent from him before he even saw it. He had to sign a form turning all his money over to them, and didn't even have money to buy a pack of cigarettes. They even took the little spending money I gave him. And he told me about the way they treated them in there. Of course, nobody listens to or believes old people in homes like that, just like they never believe people in insane asylums, so the

persons who run those places have a completely free hand. It was just criminal.

The woman who ran that place was a monster. When persons like that have the power of life and death over other people, when they can decide who gets a pain killer or whether somebody gets a magazine or a bedpan, it's living hell. They become the worst sort of little tyrants, many of them anyway. That Mrs. Worthy should really have been shot.

I went to the welfare office to try to get Paulcer transferred out of that home and I told them how that place was run. Of course, what is true often can't be proven. The young girl working at the welfare office said they'd try to get him to another hospital. After a few weeks she arranged a transfer but then she told me, 'We've arranged to have Mr. Paulcer admitted to the so and so hospital, but that will be a hundred and twenty dollars extra per month which we don't cover.' Ali and I might have managed it, and we should have. But it would have taken most of what we could save. So we didn't, I'm ashamed to say.

Towards the end Paulcer lost control of his speech and it was almost impossible to understand what he was saying. I always kissed him on the cheek when I went to make him feel a little better. But the last time he pulled away from me and said, 'Go home now. I don't want to see you anymore. You can't understand me anyway. The whole shooting match is finished now anyway.' Not long after that Paulcer died way up in an attic room where they never got the sun.

I've seen a few of those so-called nursing homes and they are all the same, unless you can pay through the nose. They write about them in the newspapers. Exposés about fire traps, about negligence, about the lack of any sort of decency, and downright brutality. But nothing ever happens. Now those places get a lot of money from the government as well and they are still the same. Ever since Paulcer's death I have such a dread of those nursing homes that I'll never allow myself to be thrown on their tender mercy. I'm not going to see the inside of one of those pest houses. Well, I usually don't talk about those sorts of things. But those are things that you think about when you're old and in my condition.

## **12. Ashes and Embers (1964-1972)**

Ali finally became determined to have his own small business. Enough to make a living on. He thought he would be able to stay in town then and he wouldn't have to be constantly looking for a job. Besides, he didn't want any boss over him. There weren't many lines of work open to him at his age where he could do that. When he finally did set up his own catering business he was sixty years old. He managed to get contracts to provide the room and board for men in three small camps. It lasted a little over a year and a half.

These small businesses are really terrible deals, always in hock up to your ears, never knowing if by some minor accident you will lose everything. Constantly running around trying to get supplies into places. And the endless paperwork that has to be done. I kept the books and looked after the various bills and paperwork. It was close to a full time job. Most of the time we just broke even, without paying back any of the debts we had gotten into in order to start out. But it looked great to Ali. One day he comes home and says, 'Look, we made five thousand dollars clear in the last three months. Didn't I tell you we'd make it.' He was sure of that. But he didn't consider that we had already paid out that five thousand dollars in wages and bills, and that there was still more outstanding. But there was no use arguing with him, he wanted to make it so much that he saw what he wanted to. He was sure we were making money when we were actually going into the hole. He tried his very best but by that time it was too late.

The last year he was having continual accidents on the bush roads with his truck. He started to do the most outlandish things. And the way he drove -- like a crazy man, not even aware of what he was doing. Once he drove through town at seventy miles an hour. I wouldn't ride with him anymore. It was as if he were high on some drug. He did all sorts of things in a disconnected way, forgot about the most simple things but remembered stories about his youth which he repeated time and again. At first I thought it was just the strain of the business, because he was literally on the go for sixteen hours a day. I thought maybe he's getting to the point of a nervous breakdown. Although that was completely out of character for Ali.

Then he started to get dizzy spells. That went on for about half a year. Finally, in January of 1965, one day when he was home, he just passed out on our driveway. After that he couldn't control his right leg properly, it would buckle under him. I thought he had had a stroke and didn't know it or didn't want to admit it. That was what it reminded me of, the whole buildup of all those symptoms. Anyway, passing out

finally scared him and he went in to see a doctor about it. They put him in the hospital for tests right away.

The original tests and diagnoses found nothing, nothing wrong at all. Ali had hit his head in falling and they thought maybe there was some damage done that way. But he was still strong as a horse. Even after he went to the hospital twice for batteries of tests, spinal taps and all, the doctors still found nothing. So they sent him home to rest. He was at home for about two months, but his illness progressed very quickly. You could almost see him getting worse day by day. By that time he was losing control of his eyes and his mind was rambling and he couldn't walk without somebody helping him anymore. The doctors had decided that Ali had had a series of small strokes leading to one big one and that the best thing for him was lots of bed rest and peace and quiet. They just sent him home. They never phoned or never checked. They just wanted to wash their hands of him. A public nurse came around a few times for rehabilitation treatment but that was all. It was supposed to be a stroke.

In the last couple of months I was constantly looking after Ali. Sometimes he was lucid and other times he wasn't. He started to talk in rhymes. Amazing. All sorts of witty puns and long monologues, all in rhymes. But he always wanted me or somebody else to be with him, almost twenty-four hours a day. He didn't want to be alone. I just couldn't take it by myself anymore. I wasn't well and with all those months of tension I felt like I was just about ready to collapse.

By that time Jon had been off in the U.S. for quite a few years. At first I didn't tell him anything about what was happening. But I couldn't manage any more so I phoned him up and told him what was what, although we still didn't know the worst of it. He dropped what he was doing and flew right back. Ali was tremendously relieved to see him. At first he thought that Jon was going to do something for him that the rest of us couldn't; I don't know what he thought Jon could do. Well, Jon ran around to all the doctors too but he also didn't get anywhere with them. He tried to straighten things out somewhat and helped me getting another company to take over Ali's contracts. That just broke Ali's heart. Still, he enjoyed having Jon around. They went out for drives sometimes and he sat and listened to Ali's talk. I was just worn to a frazzle by that time. It wouldn't have taken much to give me another stroke.

Finally, after about a month, Jon felt that there wasn't anything more he could do by staying around. He should have stayed, but we still didn't know that Ali was dying then. We thought that the best thing would be to get him into a good hospital where he could get treatment.

So we arranged to get Ali into a private hospital which specialized in rehabilitation of stroke patients. It was very highly recommended and very expensive but it was supposed to be one of the best in the city. When it came time to take Ali there, we had to almost physically lug him.

I think Ali felt he was dying and that he would never return from that hospital he went to. He didn't want to go but we forced him because that was what we thought he needed. He said, 'Forty years married and you treat me this way.' It cut me to the heart, but I thought I had to be strong and do what was best for him. Ali must have been in great pain through that illness, because he used to cry out and groan softly during the last month he was home. He had always been very stoical, even with some terrible injuries he never gave a peep.

What would have been best would have been to keep Ali at home with lots of painkillers and music, and able to look out at the mountains and the harbour and spend his last days with us around. How often I think of that, he we treated him when he finally needed us. He spent his life working for us and then when it was most important, we left him in the lurch. Those damn doctors never did anything for him. They never gave him painkillers. They never even let us know what condition he was in so we could make his last days more bearable. I could cheerfully kill them.

Jon left the day we brought Ali to the hospital. He hardly said anything that last day. That was the last time he saw Ali. He didn't even come back for the funeral because he was in South America somewhere.

At first I conned myself into believing that Ali was getting better in that hospital, that his condition was stabilizing. But after a month there was no fooling myself; he was getting worse and worse. He'd lost half his weight and couldn't control his bowels anymore. Sometimes he was coherent but often not. He'd been there six or seven weeks, then it happened, May 9, 1965.

I'll never forget that day if I live to be a hundred. Myrna Sinclair brought me out to the hospital and said, 'Shall I come in with you?' But I said, 'No, better not.' I didn't want people to see Ali the way he was. They knew him as a man, strong, always active, always joking and always on the go. I didn't want them to see the condition he was in. I wanted to save his pride and for them to remember him as he was. She knew what I meant.

When I came into Ali's room, it was a cold May day, the wind was blowing in the open windows and here the poor soul was lying on the bed naked. Ali was cold as ice. And he was rattling in his throat. There were no blankets around, no sheets. First I ran to a nun at the main desk but

she wouldn't even come in. None of the staff did anything. I was so shocked that I was half crazy. I tried to find a doctor but there was none around the hospital. And I kept racing back to Ali's room and searching the halls for a doctor who might be making rounds. The nun in charge had just vanished and the attendant, the male nurse, didn't know from anything. He said, 'Oh, he's like that. He's all right. I just gave him an enema this morning.' They actually finished Ali off there in that private hospital. Of course, you can't prove anything but I think that Ali got pneumonia there. How long he had lain there like that in the cold I never knew. Finally, I found a doctor who was making a hospital visit. I said, 'Come quick, I think my husband is dying.' As soon as the doctor saw Ali he got an ambulance and they rushed him to the emergency in St. Paul's Hospital.

I went down in the ambulance with Ali. I couldn't even bend down to him because the two sides of the bed were up. That hounds me to this day. Because now I think he tried to talk to me with his eyes. I could have bent down and asked him questions and he might have answered with his eyes. But I was in such a shock I didn't even think of that until much later. I wanted to stay with Ali in the emergency room but they chased me out. 'No, you can't stay here, you have to leave. He's under treatment now. Get out.' What they did I don't know. Ali's own 'doctor' appeared and brought with him a new neurologist that I hadn't seen before. He said, 'If he gets over this attack we'll give him another test on Tuesday.' That was Sunday.

I stayed around St. Paul's Hospital for a few hours but I was on the verge of fainting. I had to keep a strong hold on myself to keep from passing out. Herman, a friend of ours from Bralorne, came down and brought me home and I collapsed right on my bed. In the morning, about six o'clock, I was just ready to leave the house to go to the hospital, when Ali's doctor phoned and told me. The way he said it, I'll hate that guy till the end of my days. 'Hello, Mrs. Golm. This is Dr. Patersohn. Well, he didn't make it.' And the way he said it, like he was annoyed to have been bothered.

I didn't say anything, just hung up. But I took a taxi right down to the hospital and tried and tried and tried to see Ali, to see his body. But they wouldn't let me. They wouldn't even tell me where he was. I don't know why they don't let relatives see the body. In fact I think that was the worst of all. I have nightmares about it, it drives me crazy sometimes. Because I think that actually he wasn't dead yet. His face was so agonized when I saw him in the casket. I've never seen such terror and agony on any face. I've seen dead people before and they looked relatively peaceful. But Ali looked . . . it is indescribable. And

that idea, that he was still alive, that I could have done something, hounds me.

For a long time I tried to find out what the actual cause of death was, what illness he had and what he died from. But his doctors never told me. With very few exceptions, most doctors seem to think they're tin gods. There is no check on them, they just run rampant as they please. I never even got a death certificate. There was Ali's own doctor who treated him, or you should say who didn't treat him, and there were specialists that he brought in. But with all those tests they couldn't find anything. Nothing. And as Ali got worse and worse, they all diagnosed a series of strokes. That's what they were treating him for and that's why he was in that special private hospital. They diagnosed stroke from beginning to end, at least that's what they told me.

I only found out much later that Ali was supposed to have died of cancer of the brain. My own doctor looked into the records for me. She told me 'Even if they had found out that it was cancer and even if they would have located it and operated successfully, which was very unlikely, even then it would have been no use. If he had survived he would have been a vegetable. That would be terrible for him, it would be no life at all. So don't blame yourself or imagine that something different might have been done.' And I believed it, of course, because I wanted to believe it. But whether she just told me that to make me feel better, or because she didn't want to get that hospital into trouble, I don't know.

Everything was in a daze for me. Lots of people have gone through the same thing but I don't know if anybody can put it into words. I know I can't. You could say, 'It was like a part of me died.' But that doesn't describe it. I still think of Ali almost every day, but now it's more like he's away in a camp somewhere. But then all I could think was, 'He's dead. He's dead. I'll never see him again.' Well, what's the use, some people will understand it, but I can't describe it.

A few days after the funeral I went to the crematorium and got the urn which had Ali's ashes in it. I don't know what I was intending to do with it. I hadn't thought about that. In fact, I couldn't think about anything at all. For three weeks I had that urn with his ashes in the house. Of course, who knows what's in an urn, maybe it's the ashes and maybe not. But I felt they were and it was just driving me mad. I wasn't going to have that urn buried in some cemetery with thousands of other dead people. Finally I decided that I was going to put the ashes in some place that Ali loved.

In his last couple of years, Ali and I had often gone down to a stretch of shoreline near Deep Cove. It still had the feel of B.C. as it was, big

trees, tugboats coming by, not many people. Ali just loved that place. So that was where I decided I would scatter the ashes. I didn't know who to turn to, because I wanted to do it privately, by myself, and it was pretty hard for me to get there. Besides, at that time I wasn't thinking clearly at all. Sometimes I couldn't even dial a telephone number and get it right.

As it happened, Maryann, an old friend of Jon's, came by to see how I was doing. Although she could easily be my daughter, or even granddaughter, she was somebody I could talk to and somebody I could trust to respect my feelings. The next Sunday, very early, just after sunrise, Maryann came and drove me out to near Cates Park. I left her behind in the car because I wanted to say goodbye to Ali by myself. I walked around a bit where Ali and I had last walked and found a beautiful spot by a big tree and buried the urn there. Of course, scattering the ashes was just a Schnapps idea.<sup>53</sup> I could never have gotten myself to open that urn and see and touch Ali's ashes. When we got home I cried and cried and Maryann stayed and talked to me. I'll never forget her for that. Afterwards, although I was still in a sort of shock and often on the point of tears, the worst of it was over. To the extent that it can ever be over. But I began to accept that a chapter in my life had finished and that I had to pick up the pieces and live as best I could.

After Ali died I made up my mind that I wasn't going to leave our house or leave our district, no matter what. This was where Ali and I had lived and that was the house that he had struggled to build and pay for. I wasn't going to leave until they carried me out feet first. But a whole string of creditors of Ali's little business started sending dunning letters. Pay up or else. At first I wasn't going to pay any of those bills but they started to get pretty demanding. I should have arranged a bankruptcy like many firms do, but there was a lien on the house. At the time I was still pretty dazed and those phone calls and dunning letters were driving me half crazy.

I had a little money in the bank and money from the sale of the car. One bigger company bought out the title to Ali's company for tax purposes and they paid about fifteen hundred dollars. But the hospital expenses and funeral and living for six months had used most of that money up. I was nearly broke with almost two years to go before I got any pension at all. At that time you didn't get any old age pension until you were seventy. They were reducing that period to age sixty-five, one year at a time. But even then, you only got a very small amount, I think seventy or eighty dollars a month, unless you were destitute.



After about six months I decided to sell the house, despite my first decision to stay. The house was beginning to press in on me, beautiful as the view and garden were. Everything reminded me of Ali. Besides I was completely out of money. It takes a good deal to keep up a house; taxes and heat, and repairs. At first I had thought that I could get by with the old age pension and by renting out part of the house. But there was really nobody I wanted to share a house with. Especially as you get older you have to have privacy or somebody that you get along with very well. The only person I knew who I could comfortably live with day in and day out was Grace Carter. She was living in the interior then. I wrote her but she was settled in there and didn't want to come down. So I decided to sell the house and move into an apartment. I got what I thought was a pretty good price for it, fourteen thousand.<sup>54</sup>

I rented a small one bedroom apartment in a new high rise building overlooking English Bay. First I was a little leery of living on the eighteenth floor but it grew on me. It was wonderful in fact. It was quiet up there and the air smelled fresh. There was usually a little breeze and the view was really something. You could see twenty miles out into the Strait, you could see the mountains and Point Grey. Just tremendous. The apartment was small but plenty big enough for me and there were no repairs and flooded ditches, and water-filled basements or garden to worry about. Actually, it wasn't much more expensive than what I would have had to pay to maintain that house. Rents weren't as insane as they are now because I got a two and a half room suite for a hundred and five dollars a month. Everything was new with thick carpets.

There was a big swimming pool outside which was open from April till early December. I used to go swimming every day. It was heated and even in the winter you could swim there. I swam all year round, every day. First I swam five times around the pool, then I worked up to ten rounds. And finally I could swim forty times around the pool, and it was a fairly large pool too. People used to come by in the winter and look over the fence to see who was in the pool, but that didn't bother me. In the summer I used to go down with a middle-aged woman in the building and we would sit around the pool in the sun and read and talk. I usually swam in the early morning because when the kids came home it was too wild.

I used to go for a walk down to English Bay and to a small park nearby each day. At that time I could still walk fairly well, no great distances and I had to rest frequently, but I could still get around without too much trouble. It was beautiful in the summer. In fact, it was nice all year round. Ali and I should have done that ten years earlier and

enjoyed life a bit. While I was careful with my remaining money I said to myself, 'Better enjoy it while you're still alive. This is the first time and will probably be the last you'll ever be able to.' So I went to shows and bought the food I liked and an occasional bottle of wine. I wasn't a spendthrift but I lived in comfort according to my standards. I had it figured out that I should be able to live like that on what was left of the money for about four years. I would be seventy then and I thought, 'Do it now, and the devil take the hindmost.' And I'm glad I did, because a couple of years later, after another stroke, I couldn't have done what I did then.

One time, while walking down the street on my way home from shopping, I saw a vision of Burrard Inlet like it used to be when we lived on Wall Street. It lasted just for a moment but it was as real as can be. Then, at almost the same instant, I saw the inlet half filled in and built over with houses, like a new development. It was so real that for a second I thought, 'Now they've done it. What a rotten shame to spoil the inlet that way.' But then I realized it was a hallucination. I had had experiences like that before. For a couple of years I had some pretty frightening dreams and I couldn't shake off the feeling they left even when I was fully awake. And there would be times when just ordinary day to day things around the house didn't seem to fit together, something like when you're in shock. I was pretty desperate for a while but I thought I had to hang on. Sure enough, that became less and less frequent and finally went away.

But after Ali died, for about a year or more, I quite often had fairly regular hallucinations. But of a very different sort. I took them sort of as you would a TV show. Maybe it's what some people see when they take dope. They were half visions and half dreams, mainly pictures with no plot and with no particular rhyme or reason. But the colors and intensity of them were more than one ever sees in real life. There were panoramas of designs. The only thing I can compare them to is very intricate, three dimensional wall paper. Actually, that doesn't describe them at all. Pictures and patterns with such beauty that one could just look at them forever. They always had more in them to see and admire than there was time for, because they changed and disappeared. Some were geometric designs, others along the lines of a paisley print, or like the parts of plants. They just took your breath away. At other times, they were of forests and changing landscapes that weren't actual forests, but somehow looked even more real and beautiful. The hidden beauty of the earth. More than one ever sees, more than you could ever imagine if you wanted to.

For example, there were galleries of jade. All shapes and forms and colors and intensities with an inner light coming from them. Often there were patterns of photos of people, some who I'd known but usually not. Some weren't photos actually, just the turn of an elbow or a back or even lines like a profile. but they were more descriptive of the person than the finest photos. Sometimes I got the feeling they were moving and turning although they were still. And there were seascapes and underwater scenes, all in the same indescribable beautiful super-revealing way. There was nothing frightening about them and I thought, 'Hallucination or dreams or whatever, I don't care. I'm going to appreciate them and not worry.' They didn't interfere with my ordinary life anyway.

During that time I started to go blind with cataracts in both my eyes. That's really a terrible feeling to be blind. I don't think anything is worse. You're cut off from everything. My doctor arranged an operation. I had already decided that if that operation didn't help and I stayed blind I would take a dose of sleeping pills and go to sleep for good. I was quite calm and reasoned about it. Even before the operation I had saved up enough pills to do it if it became necessary. I still think that was the correct decision. I was in the hospital a long time, because I had a relapse with one eye. But finally both my eyes were fixed and healed. Now I wear special glasses with very thick lens and can't see anything, but nothing at all, without them. As far as I'm concerned if you're blind you might as well be dead.

I lived in that high rise about two years, a little more. I had a few acquaintances that I knew there but I was starting to get a little lonesome. Herman had asked me if I wanted to move to his house. He said he'd fix up a private room for me and I wouldn't have to pay any rent. I'd just sort of look after the place when he wasn't home. Well, I decided to do that. Herman fixed up a very nice room for me with my own small sun porch. He had really rebuilt that old house of his. It was just an old wreck when he bought it. Best of all was the garden he made. It was quite small, just a dump ground when he got it. But he put in a rock garden and shrubs and hedges and a fish pool. Each spring and summer he bought a mass of potted plants already blooming, hundreds of dollars worth. Instant beauty I called it. From an empty garden one day you had a flowering jungle of plants the next. The house was in Vancouver South, a pretty dreary area although the shopping was good for me. I had another bad stroke while I was living there and when I got out of the hospital I couldn't walk properly any more. I hoped that I would regain my strength and balance but I never did.

In the meantime Herman borrowed about two thousand dollars from me to gamble in the stock market, although that's not what he told me he needed it for. Well, he was a friend and he had always helped me and was making good money at his work, so I didn't have any qualms. A bit later he talked me into co-signing some stock for him and I also got the stock fever myself. Pretty small potatoes, a few hundred here, a few hundred on something else. Pure speculation. After about a year the stock I co-signed with him disappeared off the board and I lost fifteen hundred dollars that way. So I sold what remaining stock I had at whatever price I could get. All in all, I guess I lost about two thousand dollars and that was the end of my stock gambling.

Actually, I was stupid to get into it. In fact everybody that we ever knew that bought stocks got stuck with them. All those prospectors we knew, they made a few dollars on one stock and lost everything on another. But I thought, 'With the few thousand dollars I've got I'll end my days counting every penny. If I gamble I just might make enough to live comfortably for the last few years, and if I lose it won't make that much difference in the way I live anyway.' That's what I said to myself at the time I bought that stock. Now I wonder how I could have been so dumb.

If Herman hadn't talked me into it, I never would have been so foolish. He was already counting the fortune he was going to make. On paper, he did make quite a bit a few times. But in the end, Herman also lost everything that he had -- his house, his car, everything. All down the drain. But he's still not cured.

When Herman didn't have anybody living with him he came down to talk with me quite a bit and he was so down in the dumps it was pathetic. He just craved company. He brought home one guy after another for a meal and a place to stay. Some of them were just half starved kids who Herman picked up on the road. I don't know the details of what went on and I didn't want to know. As long as they left me alone. He had two, three guys staying with him at times, a constant rotation. Some, a few, were all right. But the great majority of them were just spongers, rats, and sneaks. I've never seen so many degenerate people in my life. They were both arrogant and subservient. When they were around somebody who they weren't afraid of or who they couldn't get anything out of they were arrogant and insulting. They were disgusting. A couple of them got picked up for selling drugs. They stole from Herman. They stole from each other. They stole some of the keepsakes I had stored in the basement. There would be quarrels. Some would take off in a huff and later come creeping back begging to be taken back. Who knows, maybe they even enjoyed that

game. I hate to use the word, but most of them were scum, pure and simple.

During 1969 I had a terrible heart attack. I was able to ring a large school bell that I had just for that purpose. Luckily Herman was home and he carted me right off to St. Paul's Hospital and into the intensive care unit. That time I really did think I was a goner. I was wired up to so many machines and had tubes and needles coming out of me in all directions that I looked like a creature from outer space. But I must say they gave me tremendous care there. There were more nurses and doctors in that ward than patients. It was a real eye opener to see what they can do in hospitals if they want to. Quite a few people died in that ward in the ten days or so I was in there. In fact, I thought I wasn't going to make it myself and I was half resigned to the fact. Although you never really become resigned to dying unless you're in great pain. I was so doped up that I was only half conscious anyway. I pulled through of course, and after another ten days or so I went home again. However much I disliked living in that house it was good to be back in my own room and with my own things around me. Over the next couple of months I recuperated. Of course, after each of these attacks you are damaged to some extent and though you come back again you never recover the strength that you had before.

Whenever I said anything against one of his friends, Herman and I would get into an argument. But finally Herman said, 'That's the end of this sort of life. From now on I'm going to have a few friends I know and can count on.' And I believed him because he had another one of his religious bouts. But after a few months the whole thing started again. It finally got to the point where Herman and I were hardly speaking to each other. There were all sorts of little set-to's that led to that pass. I hadn't bargained for those sorts of goings on. All those people swooping in and out was too much tension. I was just as lonely as when I had a place by myself, and in fact I wished I had my highrise apartment back again.

Finally I wrote Herman a letter, because I decided to get down exactly what I wanted to say without any extraneous words or emotions. I told him I was leaving and why and what I thought of him and his goings on. I was pretty mad then. Thinking back on it now, after a couple of years, I must admit that whatever his flaws Herman was a pretty loyal friend and was always there to give me a hand in a pinch. Anyway, I decided that I'd take the next apartment I could afford. regardless of anything. I still have some pride left. But I couldn't get around very well any more and for a few months there was nothing suitable that turned up. Then a friend of mine phoned that there was a good basement apartment

near to town, in a pleasant area, that wasn't too expensive. I went right down and grabbed it. So that's where you find me now.

### 13. Reflections (June 1973)

Now I really am old. Some days I'm okay but other days I feel like I'm just a step away from the glue factory. But I try to take every day as it comes. That's all you can do anyway. I live pretty much to myself these days. There are times when I don't speak to another person for three or four days at a stretch. Visiting people and going out for walks in the park are pretty well finished for me. What with having to wait for buses and climbing up hilly streets, I just can't manage it any more. Little things, like crossing a busy street, things that you don't even think about when you're well or a bit younger, become a major obstacle. You get to be house-bound. Especially in the winter. Even shopping and washing are an effort I can barely manage. I can't even carry a light shopping bag anymore and I have to depend on those little grocery stores that deliver.

I used to be pretty quick at most things but now I'm the king of slowpokes. A lot of the day I just putter around, straightening up the apartment, making something to eat. And the rest of the time I either read or I watch TV. Actually, it's only in the last couple of years that I've gotten this way. Climbing any sort of stairs is out. I can just walk at a snail's pace and a few minutes of the least exertion completely tires me out. If I try to hurry I get dizzy immediately. And there are those mild attacks that come quite often. I'm running down bit by bit and there's no getting away from it.

Just half a year ago I decided that I was going to go swimming again, come hell or high water. Actually, swimming should be easier than walking for me. There's a big community pool not far from here. I was going to put a water-tight container of nitroglycerine tablets around my neck, so that they'd be handy if I needed them, and plunge in. But in the few short months since then I've gotten so much worse that I can't even make it down to the pool anymore.

As for visiting people, there aren't many around I know now. They're either dead or I lost contact with them. Very occasionally I go to see Angie Jensen but she's always busy. That woman is really amazing, close to eighty and she still keeps up a rooming house on her own. I wish I had a third of her energy. She's about the only person I still see who we knew from the early years in Vancouver. There are two elderly ladies I got to know since Ali died and they drop over to see me, but pretty seldom. Herman comes over once in a blue moon and sometimes on holidays he takes me for a ride. I've thought about joining one of those senior citizens' groups, just for a little companionship. But most of them are connected with some church or lodge and I feel like a fish

out of water with them. Besides, I'm not interested in playing Bingo or Whist or having some local choir regale me with 'When You and I Were Young Maggie.' I may be pretty decrepit but my mind hasn't reached that stage yet.

With my brothers in Germany I haven't had any contact in years. Only once, just recently, Jon arranged a telephone call to Fritz for my seventy-second birthday. But after all those years of not having talked to each other Fritz and I got into a fight after a few minutes. So I wound up talking to his wife. In a way I'm kind of glad I talked to Fritz one last time but it bothers me too. Because he died from an attack of emphysema just two days later. I don't think that phone call could have had anything to do with it but now I don't want to talk to anybody over there. In fact, I'm hesitant about keeping in touch with most of the people I knew long ago. In one way I would love to. But it just comes as too big a shock when you hear they died if you've been in close touch with them. I'd rather remember them as they were. I think that's why I can't get myself to write to Sophie or Grace lately. Ali and Jon I think about every day, almost without fail. I think about quite a few of the people we knew, as we knew them. But I'm not morbid about it, it's not an obsession with me.

I've become a real recluse. So it's no wonder that I'm rusted in and can't express what I want to say. I can't concentrate on anything any more. When it comes to writing letters I'm just finished. There are a thousand and one thoughts floating around in my head but as soon as I try to get any of them down, even if I try to get them straight in my own mind, they just escape. The same goes for books. I think my days of serious reading are over. All I can read now are the most inane novels and romances. Right now I'm reading a batch of new science fiction novels I got through a book club. But they bore me too. I still look up words in a dictionary if I'm not sure what they mean. Because there are a lot of words in books that you never hear spoken. But now I forget more than I learn, so it's a losing proposition. That's the way it is and there's no use crying or complaining about it.

Thank god for TV is all I can say. Oh, I know, much of it, most of the programs, are pretty silly. Downright stupid, some of them. But it brings some human faces and voices into the room. It's about the only form of entertainment that you can get when you're in my shape. And there must be plenty of others like me in the same boat. I finally took my last savings and bought a colour television. That's the way I travel now. I watch all the travel shows and animal pictures. Colour is really good for that. You can see some wonderful sights. War pictures or westerns or shoot-em-up movies in general I just turn off. Sometimes I



watch comedies. And if my eyes are too tired to read or watch TV but I'm not sleepy, I just lay on the bed and let different scenes and incidents float around in my head.

Now and again I still run across something new and fascinating. Just lately I heard a record called *Wolf Concert*. It was taped up north somewhere by a naturalist who explained the different calls wolves have to speak to each other. Calls for different situations, the individual voices of different wolves, and in chorus. It was just like music, only better. If I knew where to get that record I certainly would buy it because those sorts of things I still appreciate. Just wonderful.

It would be nice to have some living thing in the place with me but it wouldn't work out. First of all, these apartments don't allow pets and if they did I wouldn't be in shape to take care of any animal. It's not fair to have animals cooped up just to keep you company. All the years we lived on Wall Street and in all the other places in B.C. our dogs could run around free. There was never any trouble. Now you have to keep them on a leash and constantly watch out for the pound. It's like when I was a girl in the Berlin tenements.

These recent restrictions about dogs in Vancouver are just part and parcel of the whole bureaucracy that's developed here. Of course, I know that things get more complicated, more people, bigger cities and everything, you have to have more regulations. But there should be some benefits coming out of them. A lot of the restrictions in force now seem to be bureaucracy for bureaucracy's sake. It's almost as bad in terms of official papers and official regulations and restrictions here now as it was in Germany when I was a kid. People in Canada used to make fun of the European countries with their stamps of approvals and endless permits and papers. But now, in only a little more than half a lifetime, it's the same here. And most people take it for granted.

Those open spaces and the free and easy way of things, the fact that there were pretty few regulations, were the most appealing things about Canada. I know, it was pretty wasteful and it also meant that you had little protection and security. But there was something worthwhile in it. I'm the last person in the world to say that those times were great. But tough times and everything, I'm glad I had a chance to be part of it.

Most of the time I don't get worked up about things anymore. I just let them pass by me. But there are some things that make me so mad I could scream. All those people being killed and maimed in Viet Nam by the Americans with their bombing. Sometimes when I see that I just hate the Americans. Although I know better than that, that it's not all the American people themselves who are to blame. Still, sometimes I

just hate them. But I think the days where they could stick their nose into every place in the world and do what they liked are just about over.

Of course, I never knew very much about politics and who you could rely on. Then as now there wasn't any party or group I could support one hundred percent. We always voted C.C.F. Here in B.C. they were pretty good, Ernie Winch and Angus McInnes and some of the others. Today there's the N.D.P. But all of their top brass are either lawyers or social workers or professors. If you listen to them talk there isn't a working stiff in the whole lot. I think for many of them 'Socialism' is a dirty word. Still, who else is there? In the last provincial election I decided I wasn't going to vote for anybody. But in the last minute I went down to the poll and voted N.D.P. Now they're finally in power and we'll see what they do. They sure can't be worse than the others.<sup>55</sup>

Actually, I could have a pretty decent life now if I wasn't in such rotten shape and had to pay out so much on medicines. With the two hundred dollar old age pension we just started getting and with the low rent I pay here I could have almost a hundred and forty dollars a month to live on. It may not sound exactly princely but it's enough for all the things I can use now. Unless prices keep going up. It's the first time in my life that I have enough and don't have to count every penny or worry how long it's going to last. Now I have to have a nurse come in every five days to give me injections. I've got a condition that they used to call dropsy, my lungs and limbs fill up with water unless I get these special injections.

Oh sure, I'm grateful enough for the pension and medicare, but then we earned it. So what's to be grateful about, really? The profiteers rake in the money by the hundreds of millions like always. Speculators get rich and the government tosses out money by the carload. There are millions and tens of millions of dollars spent on silly little projects. The money is poured out to fakers, rich fakers and poor fakers. Not that I begrudge unemployed people and young people some money. I know it can be pretty tough. But there should be some justice to it. I saw a TV interview with people on welfare who were boiling mad because they had to line up to get their money during the strike of city employees. Mad about standing in line rather than getting their cheques in the mail. Some of them get more welfare money than Ali earned by working his life away in the camps. And we never got a red cent, even when we were close to starving.

Welfare and social security and everything that goes along with it are fine, a step in the right direction. But it seems like those who are able to yell and complain the loudest get what they want and the rest get a kick in the backside. Many, most of us who helped to build B.C., who

created the wealth, are shunted aside. I and most older people sit here and can't even get the right time of day from the agencies that are supposed to help us. We're just dirt to them.

If you ask me how things have changed in my lifetime and what I think of it all and whether I think things are better or worse now than when I was young, that I can't answer. You can't sum that up so that it makes any sense, at least I can't. In some ways, in fact in many ways, life seems to be better for most people today, despite everything. Still, no matter what conditions are like, how they've changed or haven't changed, it's always better to be young than to be old. No matter what. So naturally, I'd rather be young again, at least younger, no matter how tough the times were. I'd like to be thirty-five and stay that way. You're still healthy and full of energy at that age and you don't have all the silly worries and hang-ups of really young people. But there's no fountain of youth I'm afraid, despite everybody wishing there was. Still, some day, some time in the future, who knows?

Reading through this whole manuscript and thinking about it, it now seems amazing that we could have sorted out all those pieces and put them together. But there is something I have to say about the whole thing. While it's all true, at least as far as I can remember, I can't say that it's my life. Because there was so much more that happened. There were thousands and thousands of things that happened that aren't in here, although they probably wouldn't change the main story any. I can't speak for others but I know I would enjoy reading this. In fact I did like most of it. It's a little too serious; there should have been more of the little humorous incidents that happened. And it's sort of strange to read about events in your own life in more or less your own words. Still, there's a world of difference between reading about something and having lived it. Not bad, pretty good in fact. But it's not the real thing.

## FOOTNOTES AND COMMENTARY

### A Fair Warning

1. Pedro Martinez is the main character in the life history of a Mexican peasant family (*Pedro Martinez*, by Oscar Lewis, 1968). Phyllis read that study before we began compiling her own story, in order that she could gauge what a completed life history might look like. She covered the margins of the book with a scroll-work of comments; some humorous, some querulous, and some angry.

### Chapter I

2. Weissenburger strasse (now Kathe Kollwitz street) was a main street which ran through a tenement area in eastern Berlin and was comparable to Delancey street in New York, North Halstead in Chicago, or East Queen in Toronto. Two books of incomparable value in providing a full and accurate picture of the Berlin working class from 1870-1914 are Annemarie Lange *Das Wilhelminische Berlin* (1967) and *Berlin Zur Zeit Bebel's und Bismark* (1969) Dietz, G.D.R.

3. Heinrich Zille, a popular lithographer whose prints and cartoons depicted life in the working class tenements, factories, pubs and slums in Berlin from the 1880's to the late 1920's. A style somewhat similar to Daumier, although somewhat more maudlin.

4. Karl May was a prolific author of incredibly hackneyed novelettes of the Zane Grey or Grey Owl variety. His 'work' was part of the pan-European romanticism about the Americas then current.

5. Phyllis read and provided an editorial comment for the manuscript of her life history. An example of a longer editorial comment by her may be of interest. I have translated two stanzas of the song she mentions singing.

'That was Unter'n Linden, which went:

Under the Linden, Under the Linden,  
That's where the girls walk up and down.  
If you've a desire to hook up with them  
Then march right down to town.  
Under the Linden, many like to go by there,  
'Though the 'Passage' is difficult to push through.  
With the thick throngs of crowd,  
You'll see masses of people, who'll see you.

To understand this song you have to know what those streets in Berlin were like. I don't think you can use it but 'Unter'n Linden' used to be a beautiful wide boulevarded street with great Linden trees. From the middle of the 'Linden' a big Passage led right to Fiedrickstrasse and there most of the time human traffic was so heavy that you couldn't even walk against the stream. That street (especially the passage) was also 'Prostitute Walkway.'

6. The music and presentational styles of these street singers were later used repeatedly in the poems, choruses and lyrics of Berthold Brecht. He viewed them, somewhat glamorously, as the musical form of the urban slums and elevated them into vehicles of bitter satire.

7. Free Thinkers were proponents of agnosticism and rationalism, and were in opposition to religion in general and state churches in particular. This ideological position was part of a residue of the radical petty bourgeoisie of the 19th century, and while a legitimate component of the party of humanity it was, by itself, anachronistic in 1910. Since most Free Thinkers were republican in sentiment, they continued to be viewed as somewhat subversive by the Imperial government.

8. Golm was a small town on the western edge of Berlin. Felicitas Golm might be interpreted as 'Happy Golm.'

## **Chapter II**

9. The spark which triggered World War I was the assassination of the Austrian crown prince Ferdinand in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914. In the following five weeks (war was declared on August 4, 1914) a train of escalating ultimatums, attempted negotiations, activation of military pacts and finally mobilization ensued. On the most abstract level World War I was a war of almost pristine Marxian causes, being primarily a struggle between competing British and German capitalism for markets and between German and Russian Imperial interests in the Balkans, with other countries entering as the conflict escalated.

Although confrontation between the major European powers had occurred in the previous decade, no war had been fought between them in two generations. The shock of war was heightened by the repeated resolution of European socialist parties to oppose war through the use of the general strike (if necessary). But on the eve of W.W.I, the German Social Democratic Party, as most other European socialist and Labour parties, broke with its international anti-war pledge and voted support for mobilization.

The impact of this turn-about was especially dramatic in Germany, where the Social Democratic Party had built the largest and seemingly most entrenched socialist movement in the world. It incorporated a highly unionized labour force, maintained its own co-ops, clinics, sports, cultural and recreational organizations, ran adult education classes, and had a national network of newspapers. The Social Democratic Party of Germany obtained a plurality of the vote in most of the country's industrial areas in 1912. Why then the surrender?

The very organizational, material and political success of the S.D.P. acted as a lure to compromise with the Imperial government. The founding leadership which had seen the S.D.P. through its earlier struggles (Bebel, Singer, William Liebknecht) had died in the years preceding 1914 and had been replaced by much more conservative elements who had risen to power in the bureaucracy of the party and its labour unions. During the mobilization a wave of nationalist sentiment infected masses of S.D.P. supporters who initially were deceived into believing that the war was a defensive one against Russian Czarism and its allies. Comparable reasons to support the war were found by the leadership of most Social Democratic and Labour parties in Europe, with some honorable exceptions.

Opposition to the war mounted in the German S.D.P. within the first year. Karl Liebknecht, son of the S.D.P.'s founder, broke with the party in early 1915 and began to organize a clandestine opposition called 'The International Group.' By January 1916 a large and growing section of former S.D.P. parliamentarians, unions, and rank and file members split off to form the left Independent Socialist Party on the issue of halting the war. From 1916 on the leadership of many unions, especially in heavy industry, began to come under the sway of the syndicalist Revolutionary Shop Stewards. On the other hand, the leadership of the official Majority Social Democrats became more and more intertwined with the Imperial government.

By early 1917 a substantial proto-revolutionary opposition had developed, committed to bringing an end to the war and transforming the political system by direct action. Above all by means of the general strike. (See footnotes 13 and 14.)

**10.** The multicultural composition of the Berlin working class (and that of other large European cities) and the process of assimilation through marriage and friendships and schooling may be a surprise to those who believe that the 'melting pot' is a unique feature of North American history.

**11.** Famine conditions developed among the German working class during the *Kohlruben Winter* (Turnip Winter) of 1916-1917 and became progressively worse. By mid-1917 the bulk of the rations allotted to adult male workers amounted to ten ounces of bread per day and two ounces of fat per week, when available. 'In early 1918 the average adult ration was reduced to one thousand calories a day' (Richard Watt, *The Kings Depart*, p. 142), or approximately one half the caloric intake required to sustain life. Child mortality increased an average of 50% over 1913 and more than doubled for the urban poor. As for epidemics, 'In one day, October 18, there were seventeen hundred influenza deaths in Berlin alone' (Watt, p. 150). While estimates vary, certainly hundreds of thousands of civilians, mainly the young, the old, the urban poor, died of famine and famine related diseases during the course of World War I in Germany. Conditions did not substantially improve until late 1919.

**12.** The first German Naval mutiny occurred in July 1917 and was part of the general war weariness which that year saw widespread mutinies in the French, British, and most importantly, in the Russian armies. A readable novel about the background and development of the 1917 German naval mutiny is Theodore Plievier's *The Kaiser's Coolies*, and his account of the 1918 Keil mutiny *The Kaiser Goes, the Generals Remain*.

The general strike described in the text occurred during the last week of January 1918 and centered in the armament and other heavy industry. It was organized by the Independent Socialist Party and the Revolutionary Shop Stewards. Similar strikes occurred in industrial centers throughout Germany and also in Vienna and Budapest. After its collapse military law was extended over vital industries. Thereafter, the Majority Social Democrats lost most of their remaining support among the industrial workers and a host of clandestine workers' and soldiers' councils began to prepare for the overthrow of the Imperial government and its supporters.

**13.** 'Bruder Zu Sonne Zu Freiheit' was one of the anthems of the International Socialist movement in the pre-1917 period. Along with the *International*, the *Warshaviaka*, and the *Marseillais* it was translated and sung in virtually every European language. A rough translation of the German version is as follows:

Brothers, forward to the sun, forward to freedom.  
 Brothers, rise up to the light.  
 Brightly through this dark past,  
 The future beckons us forward.

See how the van of millions,  
 Streams endlessly out of darkness.  
 Until our most passionate demands,  
 Overwhelm heaven and night.

Brothers, now stand hand in hand.  
 Brothers, disdain death.

Finally slavery takes an end.  
Holy this last battle.

**14.** The armed phase of the German revolution began on October 28, 1918, among the stokers of the German North Sea fleet. Within five days virtually the entire fleet had mutinied, its crews had organized soviets and (along with hastily organized workers-soldiers soviets) had seized the major sea ports of Kiel, Bremerhaven, Cuxhaven. During the next ten days local and provincial soviets of worker-soldier councils arose in every major city and garrison in Germany. These soviets were only loosely coordinated and counted on a largely spontaneous mass support. The initial disintegration of the power of the Imperial state is, by all accounts, somewhat amazing. This was due to the staggering military losses sustained in the four and a half years of war, to the state of famine and anger among the civilian population, and to the collapse of the German army on the Western Front. Focussing and directing this despair was a moment of revolutionary hope which briefly seized much of the working class.

In Berlin, the leadership of the Majority Social Democratic Party took over nominal control of the government and was forced to declare a republic on November 9, 1918. Semi-autonomous republics and soviets arose throughout the country, the largest being the Bavarian Socialist Republic, initially under Independent Socialist leadership. The Armistice was signed on November 11, 1918.

By mid December 1918 the collapse of the former Imperial Army, the backstop of reaction, appeared complete when troops returning from the front demobilized themselves and when the last army units remaining under command of 'their' officers were disarmed by unarmed crowds in Berlin. The Spartacists and elements of the Independent Socialists, along with the revolutionary People's Naval Division, prepared to seize definite power and establish a socialist state.

Three Majority Social Democratic leaders - Ebert (Chancellor), Scheidemann (President), Noske (Minister of Defense) - constituted a triumvirate which in effect was the civilian government of Germany during the crucial first year. By late December 1918 they were committed to opposing a socialist revolution by whatever means necessary. Their strategy revolved about deactivating Social Democratic organizations still under their control, similarly using the remaining influence of the national government and, most importantly, the rapid mobilization of volunteer Freikorps units (see footnote 15). Drawn from the most reactionary and battle tested of the front line troops, the Freikorps proved to be both an effective and murderous counter-revolutionary army.

The first major armed clash occurred in Berlin between January 6 and January 12, 1919, as Spartacist and allied forces attempted to seize the government. Precipitous, badly organized, poorly armed, the rising was crushed in brief but heavy fighting by the first Freikorps units. The two Spartacist leaders, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, were captured and beaten to death by Freikorps officers.

A second, even larger, rising by the combined left in Berlin occurred between March 3 to 17, 1919. But in the two months since January a massive recruitment of Freikorps and the assembly of 'loyal' elements in the regular army had shifted the balance of power in favour of the counter revolution. The second Berlin rising was put down with massive military force (30,000 Freikorps troops arriving in a single day) using flame throwers, artillery, tanks, bombers, and infantry weapons in sustained house to house fighting. During the fighting Gustav Noske issued the order that persons apprehended with weapons in their possession were to be immediately shot, a policy carried out in full at the discretion of the Freikorps. The official estimates listed 2,000 dead and 10,000 wounded after the rising was crushed. The real figures were undoubtedly many times higher.

History has bestowed upon Noske, Ebert, Scheidemann and the leadership of the Majority Social Democratic Party of Germany the richly deserved opprobrium of the 'hand maidens of fascism.' This, however, is not applicable to rank and file Social Democratic supporters whose confusion and horror is caught to some extent in the text.

A more complicated and drawn out series of coups and battles developed in April and May of 1919 as Freikorps units invaded and slowly drove back the defenders of the Bavarian Socialist Republic, leading to the virtual liquidation of left wing forces in Munich when that city fell to the Freikorps on May 2, 1919.

During 1919 and 1920 almost every major city and industrial area saw the establishment of some sort of local or regional socialist regime, saw the arrival of Freikorps and army units, saw battles and saw the defeat of the left. In some cities, as in Halle and Bremen, this pattern was repeated two and three times in the course of two years. The two zones of sustained armed resistance were Saxony-Thuringia and the Ruhr. At the height of its military strength, the left was able to mobilize a 50,000 man 'Ruhr Red Army' to oppose the (1920) Kapp putsch (see footnote 17). While initially successful in expelling the Freikorps from the region, the Ruhr militia was finally defeated by troops rushed in from around the country by a government which itself had just survived a right wing military putsch. In Saxony-Thuringia a partisan war uniting all elements of the left (including the regional leadership of the Majority Social Democrats - a not uncommon situation) was carried out against the army and Freikorps throughout 1920 and 1921. The last rising by the left again centered in Thuringia in 1923 with some support in Hamburg. It was quickly broken.

A number of putsches by elements of the ultra right (the best known being the Nazi Putsch in Munich in 1923) also failed. They were 'successfully' opposed because the military and civilian leaders of the reaction were in the process of consolidating their power. Large numbers of those involved in the risings of the left were executed or shot on the spot. No single participant in the ultra right putsches was executed and no more than a handful were even arrested.

One official estimate is that 20,000 persons (mainly of the left) were killed in the actual battles of 1919-1921. In all probability, the actual figure was many times higher.

**15.** The Freikorps were semi-independent military units composed of right wing officers and veterans of World War I. Freikorps volunteers were selected for their anti-socialist sentiments as well as their fighting ability and were heavily armed with the best equipment the army could offer. The Freikorps units in effect rapidly became the army of the right fighting a civil war against revolutionary forces. By late 1919 they numbered approximately 200,000 men in dozens of separate units. The repeated victories of the Freikorps over poorly armed and hastily organized red militia crushed armed resistance in most parts of Germany after 1920. In some regions, such as Bavaria, the Freikorps and its successors largely eliminated the effective authority of the central government. The incorporation of large numbers of former Freikorps members into the Nazi party during the mid and late 1920's gave that movement much of its paramilitary base. See Robert Waite's *Vanguard of Nazism: the Free Corps Movement in Post War Germany, 1918-1923* (1952).

**16.** While never achieving a majority in the Weimar parliament, the Majority Social Democrats were the 'dominant party' of the first and crucial Weimar government. After 1920 the Majority Social Democrats became merely one of a number of parties in the endlessly shifting coalition governments which existed between 1920 and 1930. Despite the fact that the Majority Social Democrats held the Presidency (until 1925) and certain ministries, these Weimar coalitions were in no way socialist governments. They



were dominated by the center and right of center parties which were able to install conservative Chancellors, such as Gustav Stresemann.

Hindenburg, the monarchist field marshal of World War I, was elected as President of the Weimar Republic in 1925. A period of relative political and economic stability existed between 1924 and 1930, with coalition governments effectively under the control of center-conservative parties. In 1930 these parties shifted to the right and a series of Chancellors began to rule largely by decree, using enabling legislation similar to 'orders-in-council' and the 'emergency measures act.'

### **Chapter III**

**17.** The Kapp Putsch. For five days in mid March 1920, troops of the Ehrhardt and Baltic Freikorps, with the connivance of the army high command, seized control of the governmental district and many suburbs of Berlin. This attempt to establish an autocratic military government was defeated by the effectiveness of a national general strike and by the complete ineptitude of the putschists. Kapp was a middle echelon civil servant who for a week served as a civilian figurehead president. The opposition to the Kapp putsch saw unprecedented solidarity among the socialist left and democratic forces and mobilized the most powerful military force they ever had. It was also the last time such anti-fascist consolidation was achieved.

The Weimar coalition government, re-established after the collapse of the putsch, merely divested itself of Noske (Minister of Defense) and a few other Majority Social Democrats. But it continued to rely upon the Freikorps for its defense and, incredibly, actually paid a 'front line duty' bonus to the two Freikorps units for the period they had occupied Berlin.

**18.** The comparison of events in Germany in 1920-1923 to the Irish struggles refers to the Irish Civil War[1921] after the establishment of the Irish Free State, and not to current developments in Northern Ireland.

**19.** The S.A. (Sturm Abteilung) was the paramilitary arm of the Nazi party. The described incident involving the S.A. presumably occurred after 1923, since before that time the Nazi party was a very minor element in Berlin.

**20.** The Workers Councils (*Arbeiter Rate*) were an outgrowth of traditional union organization greatly modified by the revolutionary period.. Many of the Workers Councils were allied with the Independent Socialist Party (1916-1920) and the Revolutionary Shop Stewards movement or were later incorporated into the Communist Party. Many however often appear to have had a syndicalist bent. The militancy of the Workers Councils were major factors in forcing industries and vacillating governments of the Weimar period to extend social security programs.

**21.** There were numerous contending explanations of the German inflation. One is that the various Weimar governments met their national and international debts mainly by creating more money and credit, thereby generating the inflation which resulted. Another version has it that the dislocation created by World War I and the civil war generated massive speculation against the Mark, which collapsed with the French occupation of the Ruhr in 1923. Stabilization was achieved in November 1923 through international loans to meet reparation payments, through the elimination of credit for speculation against the Mark, and through the establishment of new currency.

If the causes of the inflation are not clear its effects were obvious enough. During early 1919 the official value of the Mark was four to one U.S. dollar; in January 1922, 200 to the dollar, in January 1923, 18,000 to the dollar, and in November 1923 one U.S. dollar bought four billion Mark. Most of the middle class lost their savings, many their

possessions. German workers, with few savings or possessions to start with, lost their livelihood through the payment of worthless wages. 'By October 1923 the weekly wages of a skilled worker was barely enough to buy a hundred weight sack of potatoes. A pound of margarine cost the wages for nine to ten hours of work, a pound of butter those for two days, an ordinary pair of boots cost six weeks' wages, and a suit of clothes the wages of twenty weeks' work.' (Sefton Demler, *Weimar Germany*, p.14) A readable, if dramatized, account of this period is found in Eric M. Remarque's *The Road Back*, *Three Comrades*, and *The Black Obelisk*.

**22.** The description of the *Wandervoegel* (Wandering Bird) movement is a composite of experiences occurring between 1916 and 1923, but dealing mainly with the 1920-1922 period. The Wandervoegel movement began in 1901 as a reaction to 'Edwardian' formality and coalesced around the themes of 'back to nature' and the value of spontaneity. While never truly political, the movement developed strong pacifist and anti-militarist attitudes during and immediately after World War I. The self identified Wandervoegel probably never numbered more than 50,000 to 60,000 persons. By the mid-1920's the Wandervoegel movement was largely displaced by resurgent nationalist youth movements.

Some authors have held that the apolitical and romantic nature of the Wandervoegel was a significant element in the rise of fascism in Germany (see Walter Lacquer, *Young Germany*, 1956). This is comparable to holding that U.S. imperialism in the 1960's was sustained by the development of the 'Youth Counter Culture'. Such claims only serve, as probably intended, to distract attention from the real locus of reactionary power - the ruling classes, the army-police, and a threatened middle class.

**23.** The mention of insane murderers in Germany during the early 1920's is somewhat misleading. There was indeed an upsurge of murders by deranged individuals comparable to Charles Manson and similar U.S. cases in the late 1960's. In Germany, however, there was the additional and ultimately much more dangerous phenomenon of mass assassinations carried out by right wing forces. A widely cited report prepared in Germany in 1922 (J. Gumbel, *Four Years of Political Murder*) documented the assassination of 356 leading supporters of the Weimar government by various right wing groups. Those assassinated included prominent union leaders, lawyers, civil servants, editors, mayors, and party leaders of the left (and even of the center-right parties). Some of the most prominent victims were Hasse, leader of the Independent Socialists, Herzberger, leader of the Catholic Center Party, Walter Rathenau, the conservative Foreign Minister, Eisner, President of the Bavarian republic and many of the leaders of the Communist Party. This does not include the rank and file victims of these assassination squads.

Political murder on the part of the right was virtually unchecked since it counted with the active support of the army supreme command, on the Freikorps, and on the sympathy of the courts and police in many cases. For instance, the chief of police in Munich was a prime conspirator in assassinations and the army-controlled *Femesmord* assassination squads, struck down those whom the army command deemed to be 'traitors.'

**24.** The comparison of the Wandervoegel to hippies refers to the 'flower children' period of the mid-1960's.

**25.** The titles of these two songs suggest the nature of the repertoire - romanticism in the folk theme.

## Chapter IV

**26.** The Wedding district of Berlin was somewhat comparable to the Lower East Side in New York during the Edwardian period. It was a relatively small but densely packed area lying off the northwest core of Berlin. Already established as a working class district by 1880, it was a bastion of socialist strength throughout the next fifty years. It was sometimes referred to as 'Red Wedding' and during the later 1920's and early 1930's it saw recurrent street battles between communists and Nazi storm troops. Wedding is now situated in West Berlin.

**27.** The Bauhaus was a wide ranging and changing group of artists and designers stemming from the pre World War I period but coming to prominence during the 1920s. It centered around a design school of modern architecture and city planning but grouped around itself painters, printers, and designers of fabrics, clothing, furniture, utensils and other mass produced items. The ethos of the Bauhaus was the development of new materials, designs and production techniques which would allow mass production of housing and consumer goods which were to be functional, beautiful and cheap, and thereby available to large numbers of people.

Perhaps the most influential features of Bauhaus designs were an architecture which used glass, moulded concrete, plastics and other materials to provide open spaces, natural light, and colour. This was in contrast to the stone-monumental, factory brick and gingerbread Gothic which dominated most of the Victorian and Edwardian architecture. Walter Gropius was the leading figure of the Bauhaus. The Bauhaus was viewed by many conservatives as symbolic of subversive cosmopolitanism. Its work was banned in Germany after 1934.

**28.** It is my guess that 'Tom the Rhymer' was a German version of the Jack Straw myth, a modified Pan and primitive rebel.

**29.** Rural Pomerania and most of the eastern German provinces were formerly dominated by large Junker estates. By 1914 these already had become thoroughly involved in commodity farming. By 1920 they had lost much of their juridical and political control of their respective regions. While Junkers continued to have considerable influence over the resident labourers and families settled on the Junker estates, the bulk of the population of the rural areas (by 1925) consisted of 'peasants.' These 'peasant' farms were at various stages of incorporation into capitalist farming, ranging from almost landless families, through small self-sustaining farms to larger farms partially dependent upon hired labour.

The attitude toward the peasantry found in the body of the text requires some historical comment. For at least a century previously, a touchstone of both liberal and socialist thought was that city (or the city based proletariat) was the locus of liberating forces and that the countryside in general and the peasantry in particular was the bastion of reaction. During the nineteenth century, and later, this view had considerable validity in Germany and other parts of Western Europe.

## Chapter V

**30.** 'Landing money' was the minimal sum which the Canadian Department of Immigration required each prospective immigrant to have on arrival. It was intended to provide for the initial period of search for a job. The comparatively open immigration policy of Canada at the time swung shut in the early 1930s, excluding most working class immigrants. During later decades the Canadian Immigration Department took on the role of watchdog for the conservative elements in Canada.

I strongly recommend two Swedish films, *The Emigrants* and *The New Land*, which better than anything else evoke and intertwine the mythology and reality behind so much of immigration to North America during the previous century.

**31.** The reference here is to a 'popular' radio show of the late 1940s and early 1950s called *Luigi Basco, the Little Immigrant*. This program managed to collect the most smug, self congratulatory and provincial views about the superiority of the American Way of Life. The program reveled in such episodes as Luigi Basco's first discoveries of subways, functional plumbing, free elections and Equality and of his realization that government in America was really his servant as opposed to being his master in Italy (read Europe). The program proceeded from the proposition that America was the locus of all significant material, intellectual, and social progress.

**33.** Another song which they sang was *Hallelujah, I'm a Bum*, two stanzas of which may be of interest.

Why don't you work  
Like other men do?  
How the hell can I work  
When there's no work to do?  
and  
I love my boss,  
My boss loves me.  
That is the reason  
I am so hungry.

The first two lines of this song were used as the title for my Ph.D. dissertation at Columiba Univeristy in 1968. No one recognized it.

**34.** While an outline of the major events and features of the Great Depression in Western Canada would be desirable, it is impossible to provide here. Most readers will probably already have such an overview. A tabulation of rates of unemployed by region or year, or of indices of production, or the listing of changing electoral balances or other such quantifiable phenomena would not substantially clarify that decade. It should, however, be understood that the 1930s in Canada were not merely 'lost,' 'dirty,' 'winter' years but also years when the bases for significant social and political advances were laid.

A few suggested books on the depression in Canada are: James Gray, *The Winter Years* (1966); Barry Broadfoot, *Ten Lost Years* (1973); Ronald Liversedge, *Recollections of the On to Ottawa Trek* (1973); Michael Horn, *The Dirty Thirties* (1972); Stuart Jamieson, *Times of Trouble* (1968); Task Force on Labour Relations No. 22, Queen's Printer.

## **Chapter VI**

**35.** Tranquille was a large TB sanatorium near Kamloops, British Columbia. Before the development of antibiotics during the late 1940s, tuberculosis cures involved little more in the way of treatment than bed rest for one or more years in salubrious climates. Only a small minority contracting the disease ever received treatment. Tranquille was closed as a TB sanatorium in the late 1950's but later partially reopened as an 'asylum' for severely retarded children.

## Chapter VII

**36.** Grizzly - A simple gold washing device. Essentially a set of gratings set above the sluices in a portable 'rocker' box.

**37.** For many decades the electoral district containing Lillooet was a 'rotten borough' - grossly over-represented and with a large portion of its small population not on the electoral rolls (Indians, Orientals and transient workers and their families). Between the 1920s and the mid 1950s it was a Liberal party fief. The Murray family ran the Liberal party machine in the riding and were allied to the McGeer faction of the Provincial Liberal party. The *Bridge River and Lillooet News* later provided clout for regional road work politics, touted gold mine ventures in the Bridge River area and generally served as a vehicle of local boosterism. After the organization of the C.C.F. (in 1933) the B.R. and L. News devoted a substantial part of its efforts to crusades against the socialist hordes. The newspaper and its editor can most generously be described as committed to an illiterate rearguard action against the spread of the twentieth century.

During the early 1950's Margaret Murray attempted to gain nomination for the Social Credit party in the Peace River riding. When rebuffed, she ran as an Independent Social Credit candidate and lost, despite the backing of her Fort St. John newspaper *The Alaska Highway News*. The masthead of *The Alaska Highway News* at the time consisted of the Stars and Stripes crossed with the Red Ensign, rampant over the photos of President Eisenhower and Prime Minister St. Laurent, graced with the caption 'Defenders of our Northern Heritage.'

**38.** A reminder that the meaning of words like 'bums' depends upon the persons using them and upon the context. In this case, 'bum' has the denotation of 'hobo' or 'migrant unemployed' and is in no way intended to be derogatory.

**39.** The installation of Hitler to power was preceded by increasingly autocratic and reactionary 'Weimar' governments under Chancellors who largely ruled through cabinet decree between 1930 and 1933. The first two years of the depression saw widespread bank failures, general industrial collapse and produced over six million unemployed in Germany. The strength of the Communist Party increased substantially but the bulk of the 'center' party supporters shifted to the Nazis, whose voting strength rose from 800,000 to 6.5 million between 1929 and 1933. The Social Democratic Party stagnated as the remaining 'center' party, with a constantly shrinking support by sections of the older working class.

By 1931 many influential German industrialists and financiers had swung behind the Nazi party with massive financial and mass media support. The Nazi party won approximately 40% of the vote in the January 1933 elections and Hitler was proclaimed Chancellor. In the following month, the Reichstag (parliament building) was set afire and this served as a pretext for the proclamation of an emergency measures act which banned the Communist Party and voided all civil liberties. Six months later all remaining parties were declared illegal. Ad hoc concentration camps for political opponents sprang up during mid-1933 and were extended and formalized under the newly created Gestapo (Secret Service Police) in early 1934. During 1934, trade unions, newspapers, youth groups, local police forces, and in general all organizations which were seen as sources of possible resistance to Nazi policies were either eliminated or placed under Nazi control.

The view here is that German fascism was primarily a mode of capitalist reorganization involving the mass organization and mobilization of an impoverished middle class and elements of the lumpen-proletariat. It was primarily a response to the threat of internal collapse and to the threat of a revolutionary socialist solution. It was also, but not primarily, a form of anti-semitism gone mad. Fascism in various national

and historical forms, has arisen and can arise in any capitalist society under conditions of internal collapse and under substantial threat from the left.

## **Chapter VIII**

**40.** Sachsenhausen - a large prison near Berlin converted to a high security concentration camp for political prisoners by the Nazis. Many of the leaders and activists of the left (and of other anti-fascist forces) were murdered in Sachsenhausen between 1934 and 1945.

**41.** The triumph of fascism in Germany and the catastrophic setbacks involved were a mind boggling experience which many could not emotionally accept. Three generations of socialists and the horrors of World War I had taught the lesson that wars were the outgrowth of capitalist competition and of national chauvinism and that they were invariably paid for by the sufferings and sacrifice of ordinary people. This made it difficult to accept that a fascist state can normally only be eliminated by force.

**42.** I have never seen published reference to a 'Union of the Unemployed' although two persons who were former supporters have referred to the organization by that name. It was presumably the Relief Project Workers Union, first active in British Columbia during 1934-1935. Two recently published accounts of the occupation of the Vancouver Post Office in 1938 are Stuart Jamieson's *Times of Trouble* (Task Force on Labour Relations No. 22, Queen's Printer, Appendix I) and Steve Brodie's *Bloody Sunday - Vancouver 1938*.

**43.** The local mythology about the type of structure referred to as 'coolie cabins' is essentially correct. They were standard barrack-like structures built by sawmills and other large primary processing industries in southern British Columbia, mainly between 1880's and the first decade of the twentieth century, and used to house resident labour. The buildings were originally segregated for East Indian, White, Chinese or Japanese crews. The Beach Avenue building is one of the last such structures still standing in Vancouver. In 1974 it mainly housed old age pensioners at a rent of \$45 per month.

**44.** Four Season's Park refers to the occupation of a two acre shore site at the entrance to Stanley Park by 'hippies' during the summer of 1969. The site had been purchased by a multi-national corporation which intended to build a luxury hotel complex there, with the connivance of the city council and other real estate interests. Vancouverites of all ages and walks of life joined or supported the camp-in, thereby preventing their eviction and ultimately saving a portion of the site for park land.

## **Chapter IX**

**45.** The fact that working class families could purchase a house with the savings of a few years' work raises the question of 'To what extent living standards have advanced for working people in the last two generations?' Impressionistically, those who were employed enjoyed standards of housing, food, open space and freedom from interest payments more fully than do many working people today. This is not to deny in any way the scourge of unemployment, the virtual lack of any social and medical security and the unbridled rapacity of employers which prevailed thirty and more years ago.

The numbers and real incomes of the Canadian middle class have generally flourished in the interval, however.

**46.** The Watkins and Raleigh companies were two competing household merchandise firms which for sixty years employed door to door salesmen whose districts covered

many regions in Canada. They were the ubiquitous example of the travelling salesman, the last of the 'pack pedlars.' Their visits are probably remembered by all who grew up in that period.

**47.** *A Child in a Prison Camp*, by Shizuye Takashima (Tundra Books, Montreal, 1971) -a memoir of a Canadian girl of Japanese ancestry, and of her family, during their deportation to and life in an internment camp in the interior of British Columbia between 1942 and 1946. A remarkably gentle and moving reflection well worth reading, especially by children.

**48.** Ernest E. Winch was a leading B.C. labour unionist in the World War I period and a founding member of the One Big Union, a leader of the Socialist Party of Canada in the 1920's, and the C.C.F. member from Burnaby from 1933 until his death in 1957. He had the earned trust of the great majority of working people in eastern Vancouver. His son, Harold Winch, was leader of the C.C.F. opposition in the Provincial Legislature from 1933 until 1953 and maintained a fundamental socialist position until a combination of difficulties and defeats led him to depart for the Federal scene. Angus McInnis, a younger contemporary of E.E. Winch, was long a socialist member of parliament from Vancouver East and from Vancouver-Kingsway. Grace McInnis is J.S. Woodsworth's daughter and was until recently the N.D.P. member from Vancouver-Kingsway.

The degeneracy and racism which issued from Vancouver City Council and other municipal councils, from the Liberal and Conservative party leadership, from the plethora of citizens' groups, and from the newspaper media during the period of Japanese-Canadian internment is difficult to convey today. It is possible to read it (and about it) in the back issues of the *Sun* and the *Province* of that time. A minor example occurred during the 1945 Provincial election when a Liberal-Conservative Coalition flyer was circulated throughout Vancouver East, entitled 'A Vote for the C.C.F. is a Vote for the Japs.' Some of the story can be found in Dorothy Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel* (1960); Martin Robin, *Pillars of Profit* (1974); Forrest LaViolette, *The Japanese-Canadians During World War Two* (1956).

**49.** No disclaimer is needed for this reminiscence of one of the more innocuous consequences of Stalinism, nor does it constitute a defamation of those communists and others of the left who continued to adhere to the traditions of international socialism. While the Communist Party largely superseded this phase of retrogressive nationalism after the death of Stalin, the type of 'progressive racism' alluded to in the text appears to have taken root in wide sections of the New Left, where, in my own estimation, it remains a visible and vocal element.

## Chapter X

**50.** 'Acres of Clams' is the title of a once popular West Coast song. A few stanzas might be of interest.

Oh, when I came to this country  
I found it all covered with fog.  
Growing all over with timber  
Thick as hair on the back of a dog.

I tried to get out of that country,  
But poverty forced me to stay.  
Until I became an old settler,  
Then nothing could drive me away.

**51.** A partial disclaimer is required here. While the history of the G.D.R. leaves much to be desired, it did not, once established, engage in any of the bloody repression of Stalinism. And it did establish the basis of a socialist state through the complete nationalization of industry and resources and the utilization of those resources largely for the benefit of working people. It does seem true that these programs were and continue to be implemented with relatively little involvement by the mass of the citizenry. But it is difficult to believe that any 'democratic' transition to socialism could, in reality, have taken place in the area of the G.D.R. (or in other East European socialist states) had the indigenous political forces in evidence at the end of World War Two been given free play.

## **Chapter XI**

**52.** The Kitimat construction project involved the damming and diverting of river systems (Nechako), the construction of tunnels and power plants (Kemano), transmission lines (Kildala), and the creation of the aluminum smelter, port and town of Kitimat. The project operated in high gear between 1951 and 1954, with roughly a dozen major camps employing as many as 5,000 workers at peak periods. Probably more than 25,000 persons worked on this project at one time or another. Because of its scale and the fact that it epitomized a boom social pattern, the project left a lasting mark on the memories of many British Columbians.

The Kitimat project marked the beginning of a period of intensified resource exploitation on an unparalleled scale. Begun under the Liberal-Conservative Coalition government (in 1950-51), the period saw Social Credit governments forward the liquidation of the primary resources of the province at give away prices. Foreign and Canadian corporate giants were given the wealth of the province in return for providing (often temporary) jobs.

## **Chapter XII**

**53.** A 'schnapps idea' is a plan like those conceived in a booze fogged state of mind.

**54.** Houses in Vancouver East which in 1966 sold for \$10,000 to \$20,000 now (1974) command prices of \$40,000 to over \$80,000. As a result, working people are now largely frozen out of purchasing houses in the convenient, attractive and formerly solidly working class areas of Vancouver East and North Burnaby. Increased taxes, assessments and repair costs progressively force out older families with reduced incomes who have had homes there. These houses are now rapidly being acquired by rising young professionals and other middle class buyers.

**55.** These qualms about the N.D.P. took a different tack during the spring and summer of 1974, when a concerted campaign of propaganda and economic sabotage of unprecedented intensity was mounted against the Barrett government. To paraphrase my mother's sentiments:

'When I hear that sort of malarkey and hysteria being drummed up by those robbers who ruled the roost here so long, then I can guess Barrett is doing something right. Their newspapers are up to their old tricks again. If I'm still around next time, I'm going to vote for the N.D.P. no matter what.'