

## CHAPTER 17

### TRIBULATIONS BEYOND BELIEF!!

Upon our arrival at Hilde's farm we heard on the radio that the Russians were too far into Germany and we should not try to outrun them. In spite of that, we again made frantic preparations to flee. Hurriedly, we packed whatever provisions we could gather. It was still **January 23**, in the afternoon. All we could think of were the horrible killings in Nemmersdorf and the destruction of our village Konradshof just a few months before. We were reminded of the Russian soldiers and how they raped the women and girls. The reality of those atrocities would not allow us to be paralyzed by inaction. So, putting our fate in God's hands, we again started on a journey to "destination unknown."

The one consolation I had was this time I was with my parents and I felt a degree of safety under their protection. We had four wagons, one wagon for us, one loaded with feed for the horses, the third carried Ursel, my cousin, and her three small children, and in the fourth wagon were Hilde, her Polish maid Steffie, and the two English prisoners of war, Jim and Frank. Everyone called my parents "Uncle" and "Aunt," they were looked upon to lead the way. Steffie, as well as Jim and Frank, could have stayed behind and waited for the Russians, but they also were afraid and wanted to leave with us. Alongside this caravan, German soldiers were walking with us for many days; some said they were lost and trying to find their regiment, others just wanted to go home, which was no longer

possible. We gave civilian clothes to Jim and Frank so that the Germans would not take them away.

We drove to Buchenwalde where my father's sister Meta lived, but she had already left. We met some people from the next village who had escaped. They were on foot as the Russians had confiscated their horses. We realized how close the fighting was because we could hear the gunfire behind us. By then it was 7:30 p.m., so we changed direction and drove toward Marienburg (Malbork). We drove all night and had crossed the river Nogat (Nogard).

#### **January 24, 1945.**

We were stopped for two days just before the bridge over the Weichsel (Wilsa) river to allow the German army to cross ahead of us. It was a nerve-racking time. We were all so tired from lack of sleep, freezing from the bitter cold-- after four days all we wanted to do was cross the river. The crying of the children pierced the air with the most heartbreaking sounds. I know the children weren't the only ones crying—everyone of us was afraid of the unknown and what lay ahead. We wanted to desperately reach the American troops. Instead we were waiting for days to cross the river. In desperation, we asked my father to please do something, so we left the line and drove beside the road on frozen ground to get a little closer to the river.

#### **January 26, 1945.**

We still had not crossed the river. We found a barn and for the first time since January 21<sup>st</sup>, we were able to sleep under some shelter. However, after only a few hours

of sleep, we heard the sound of the alarm to get back on the road in the freezing cold. It was the start of another grueling day. Thank God, my Karin survived another night. The family was still intact and what the day would bring was in God's hands.

**January 28,1945.**

It took the German army days to cross the river. The waiting was so heartbreaking, that you could have filled a lake with all the tears that were shed by those scared to death, tired and hungry people. It seemed like we didn't have any tears left after only a week on the road and a few hours of sleep. Every time a new wave of fear came over me I had to run to the bushes. I was not alone- we didn't care who saw us-we were all in the same situation.

Finally it was our turn to cross the river. The horses had to give all the power they had, running across the bridge, so that all the many wagons could cross before the Germans blew up the bridge. The people who didn't make it across were devastated out of their minds to hear the explosion that blew up the bridge and they were left on the other side.

My grandparents on mother's side didn't make it across the bridge and had to drive over the frozen river further down. So many wagons were crossing the river that the ice became thin and brittle. The wagons broke through and many people with their horses were drowned.

At around this date my great-grandpa Friedrich Wilhelm Wiesner, who was 92 years old, perished on the road. The bitter cold and the harshness of the situation were too much for him. His grave was left unmarked as he wasn't even buried in his beloved German soil but in a snow bank by the side of the road. The expediency of the journey

would not allow a decent burial or time to grieve. To suffer a fate such as this after having lived a full and productive life was just so unbelievable.

**January 29, 1945.**

With saddened hearts we drove all day and night. Stayed over in Pr. Stargard (Starogard). The roads were filled with people so the driving was very slow.

**January 30, 1945.**

We stopped at a village 20 km from Berent (Kosciczyna). All the people from that village were gone. We took over a room in one of the houses, all fourteen of us stayed in it. We spent ten days there, sleeping on the floor. We met up with the people from Mosgau, my in-laws, and my aunt's family.

My cousin's little four-year-old son Klaus had two big boils on his neck and was screaming in pain. We were lucky to find a doctor among the refugees. He came and lanced the boils to allow them to drain. He told my cousin that little Klaus would probably have died without medical help. **Another prayer had been answered .**

My husband Herbert had given me two capsules containing poison. I was to take one and give one to Karin in the event that we were captured by the Russians. I'm not sure what I would have done if the need were to arise. The Lord had protected me thus far and I wished to believe that He would continue to watch over us.

**February 10, 1945.**

We hitched up our four wagons and left again. My in-laws, the Riskes, and my aunt and uncle, decided to stay behind as they felt they needed more rest. We begged

them to come but they refused to join us. This was a huge mistake, as they surely didn't make it, and shortly thereafter were captured by the Russians. We drove a total of sixty km throughout the day and night.

**February 11, 1945.**

It was very cold when we arrived in Buetow (Bytow). We stopped at a castle where German soldiers were stationed and were allowed to spend the night there. The soldiers also shared their food with us, which was the first meal we had eaten since we left this morning.

At one of the stops, Jim, the English soldier, was helping my mother boil water over an open fire. He fell as he was taking the kettle off and his face, hands and part of his body were scalded. We took him to the Red Cross where he had to stay, his burns were so serious. Sad to say, we never saw or heard from him again. We have no idea what happened to him. Frank, the other English soldier who traveled with us, later searched for him in England without success.

Frank wore civilian clothes to be safe from the Germans. He was such a great help to all of us, many times walking ahead and milking a cow so our children would have milk to drink. He loved Karin very much and would do just about anything for her-- for this I will never forget him. The feeling between him and Karin was mutual. When he was around she glowed in his presence.

Frank was infatuated with Steffie, the Polish girl, and wanted to marry her. When he got back to England he tried to find her but couldn't. Thinking back, they only communicated in German which both knew pretty well.

**February 16, 1945.**

We spent the night in a Baptist church in the city of Koeslin (Koszalin). Again it was a very cold night.

**February 20, 1945.**

After being on the road all day, we stayed in the city of Treptow (Trzebiatow).

**February 21, 1945.**

After leaving Treptow, we headed for Guelow, and spent the night there.

**February 22, 1945.**

We spent the night in Gullnow (Goleniow). The next day the officials of that town put bigger tracks together. My father became a track leader of fourteen wagons. Today is my mother's birthday a day she will never forget. Also was George Washington's birthday.

**February 23, 1945.**

We took the ferry over the Oder (Odra) river that day. Karin was so sick and had been for such a long time. I didn't know what to do anymore; she had diarrhea on and off. All I could do was cry with her. My poor little baby would eat anything she could get into her mouth, most of it unfit for babies. But instinctively she realized she would starve if she didn't put something into her stomach. On this day we only received bread and coffee which wasn't enough to satisfy our hunger or ward off the bitter cold.

**February 24, 1945.**

We stayed with some friendly people who were nice to us in the city of Hagen, about 6 km from Poelitz. The city was totally destroyed by the air raids and it really made

us wonder, “Were we being punished?” We could not understand what we had done wrong to deserve this. This made us view the war in a very different light. The people we stayed with felt all the pain as much as we did. Talking with them was helpful in lifting our own despair for at least a short time. The other good thing that happened, Karin finally got a bath, her first since we left.

**February 25, 1945.**

We made it to Stolzenberg by Neckermuede, and stayed on a 23,000 morgen ranch with some very nice people. They gave us two rooms and we ended up staying two nights because a couple of wagon wheels needed fixing.

While listening to a concert on the radio, I sat down to write to my husband. ( I only discovered later that he never received the letters I wrote to him, having been moved from place to place and finally being incarcerated as a prisoner of war). It had been such a long time since I had seen him, I wondered where he was and whether he was still alive. My heart ached for him, I missed him so terribly. Would we ever again find comfort in a bed or would we forever be homeless, robbed of family life together? I would not allow myself to think—numbness is what I aimed for—if you were able to shut out feelings, life would go on automatically and you wouldn’t be affected.

Since we were homeless, I had no way of receiving any mail, but I hoped that Herbert would write to his sister, Olly, in Berlin.

I found out later that on February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1945, Olly’s home was destroyed by air raids, the very same day she delivered a baby girl in her basement.

**February 26, 1945.**

We stayed over night in Loecknitz, 25 km from Prenzlau. The weather was so bad, raining and storming. No one would take us in. The people just locked their doors and wouldn't even give us any milk. We ended up sleeping in a cow's barn where it was warm. There were so many people crowded into that barn, some were very sick. Being exposed to catching an infection was weighed against freezing to death on the outside so we opted for the barn.

While we were there, Hilde's mare had a miscarriage, and so we had to stay another night. After the rain stopped, Hilde and I went by horseback to the closest town to find a drugstore and buy some medicine. Unfortunately we made the 7 km trip each way for nothing as we couldn't find any drugstores. The only good thing was that Hilde and I were able to get away for a little while.

**February 28, 1945.**

We stayed overnight in a school close to Strassburg. We were hoping there would be room in the castle but we were late, the castle was already filled. The people in this place were very unfriendly.

**March 1, 1945.** One day later we were given two rooms at the castle in Strassburg, which was very nice. The only problem was Karin, she was so very sick. There weren't any doctors around so all I could do was pray to the Lord for help. She had only one bath since January 24 when we were in Hagen. I didn't have any diapers and had to rip up bed sheets to use. Because a storm hit, we had stayed another day without any supplies or food. Whenever I could, I would write to Herbert, letters he never received.

**March 3, 1945.**

Our beautiful mare, Mitzi, who was beige with a cream colored mane, had her foal while we were staying at a ranch in Stolpe. All four of our Trakener thoroughbred mares were beautiful horses who carried us through this treacherous journey.

We stayed another night at the ranch, because of the ailing mare. Her foal did not survive.

**March 6, 1945.**

We made it to Neustrelitz, and spent the night there. My mother thought I needed a change so I went for a walk and came upon a movie theater. For a few moments I was relieved of the demands made upon me and settled into the darkness of the theater. But it wasn't long before the worry about Karin and how much more she could take overcame me and time for "make-believe" came to an end.

Both my parents helped me a lot, along with Frank, but no one could relieve the pain that Karin suffered. Frank was so very good to her, carrying her around and feeding her whatever nourishment he could find. I know in my heart that Frank loved her and worried about her as if she were his own.

**March 7, 1945.**

Another cold day faced us. We stopped to spend the night in Lehsten, by Warren. We shared the night with Polish people; so many of them were very sick.

Our mare Susi had a stillborn foal that night and she was very sick. Animals suffered as well as humans. We stopped at another Red Cross station and I was able to obtain treatments for Karin's frostbite. Thank you, Lord for coming to our aid

**March 8, 1945.**

We stayed in a camp in Warren along with many other people from different countries. Everywhere we turned, we met other civilians besides the Germans streaming westward in desperate hope of escaping the Red Army. It was so cold and we were so tired of being on the road for so long. We wore the same dirty clothes infested with lice. Washing and keeping the wagons clean was impossible. Water and soap were very scarce. Ice formed in the little water that we had. Why we didn't freeze to death is a miracle. Was it ever going to end? We traveled about 800-1000 miles so far.

**March 10-13, 1945.**

We stayed in Plau for two days because our horses were tired out and weren't able to pull the wagons. We feared for their safety and so we must allow them to rest. Another mare, Lora, had foaled but was having such a hard time, she needed help from a veterinarian. Susi just had her foal and was still very sick. So far, three foals were born but none stayed alive. The constant driving was just too hard on our horses.

**March 14, 1945.**

We could not get very far--both our mares, Lora and Susi, could barely stand up. My father tried to walk the two very slowly—it would have been disastrous to lose them. Because of the condition of the mares, we stayed at a ranch in Luebz for two days. Then **another miracle happened** --out of nowhere we found a horse just standing there on the road! We felt this was the Lord's way of providing for us again. For a few days, two horses had to pull our two wagons--we all walked except for Karin.

**March 16, 1945.**

When we arrived at Godunz, about 10 km past Parchim, our other mare, my favorite Luschi, had her foal, which was the only one born alive. It had been raining all day and slow to get ahead. My dad walked Luschi and her foal for a few days while we stayed there.

My poor baby was so very sick—she no longer cried as much and slept a lot, which was all the more alarming. Only in the morning would she have a smile on her face upon seeing the horses. Her life consisted of being on the wagon and going to sleep on an empty stomach.

The weather finally started to get a little better, but it still was very cold.

**March 19, 1945.**

When we arrived in Grabow, Kolboth, the people were very unfriendly towards us we just couldn't understand it. The feeling of rejection hurt us deeply. Didn't they realize what we were going through, being forced to flee our homes and everything we had accumulated? Too late, it dawned on us that through Hitler's unreasonable military policies, our country was going down in defeat. The victory Hitler preached was going down in ashes, as he and his mistress did a month later. We couldn't understand how we ever could have admired him. We mulled these tragic consequences in our minds over and over again.

Today was my brother Winfried's (Wini's) eleventh birthday, what a day to remember.

**March 20, 1945.**

We stayed in Malluess\ Ludwigslust, where it was comfortable, very nice. I even had a room all to myself with Karin.

**March 21, 1945.**

We crossed the Elbe river by Dannenberg, and stayed in a barn with a lot of unfriendly people. One of Hilde's horses died while we were there.

**March 23, 1945.**

We stayed in Oetzen/Uelzen. The people were much friendlier. The weather had taken a turn for the better which inspired me to write another letter to my Sweetheart.

**March 24, 1945.**

Conditions were pretty good at a Gasthouse in Uelzen where we spent the night. The only problem was when the alarm went off, we had to rush to a shelter because of the American air raids.

**March 25, 1945.**

We arrived in Bodenteich only two hours after a train had been destroyed by American air raids. There was a lot of damage: seventeen people were dead and thirty injured. It was not a pleasant sight and we couldn't wait to leave. We made it to Langenbrueck, where we stayed in a barn for the night.

**March 26, 1945.**

We drove through Wittingen where we were given our destination, GRASSEL, a village near the city of Braunschweig.

**WE'RE NEARING THE END OF OUR FLIGHT !**

**March 27, 1945.**

We were able to get food in Fallersleben. We then continued on and spent the night in a nearby village.

**March 28, 1945.**

**HURRAH! WE MADE IT! TODAY WE ARRIVED IN  
GRASSEL!**



**Our Big Journey**



Part of the group from our big Journey in 1945. Picture taken in May 1945 before Frank Butcher, the English Soldier, went back to England.

Standing starting from left: Steffie, the Polish girl, Frank with Karin, my Mom and Dad.

Front: Otilie and Hilde

Einige der Gruppe von 1945 mit Franz bevor Er zurück ging nach England.