

CHAPTER 5

RETURN TO THE HOMELAND-THE REIGN OF HITLER

Nostalgia for their homeland had never completely left my parents. Returning to their native country, to be reunited with the rest of the family, became more and more appealing. In 1933, they made the decision to go back to Germany. The plan was that in a year or two when things improved in the United States they would return.

Adolf Hitler took over at the time when Germany's debt payments to England and France were draining the country. This was a time of great disillusionment for the German people. They claimed that the army had not been defeated at the front, but was forced to surrender because the Jews and socialists lacked patriotism and the will to fight.

By 1937, there was no unemployment in Germany. With Hitler in command, Germany blossomed and began to recover. He became a savior to the people. They began to believe he would save them from communism, from foreign enemies, and from insecurity by creating more jobs. He gave them back their country, he established the middle class. His fiery speeches filled the people with pent-up hope; his eyes with their

hypnotic effect sometimes even caused some to faint. The people yearned to believe that this was the beginning of a *Neues Deutschland*.

In the wake of all this, Hitler was welcomed with open arms. He hammered away at the Jews and at the unfairness of the peace treaties. The Storm Troopers, a party of roughnecks, was organized in 1933 and thereafter the Nazi party was formed.

Only by understanding these factors can Hitler's rise to power and dictatorship be explained. I'm thinking as I'm writing this, the Anti Christ might just appear like this, full of hope, brainwashing the people. That's surely what happened in Germany.

Since my memories began in Milwaukee, I felt that was my home and America was my country. I was 11 years old and I recall being very angry and hurt as I started school in Germany, not knowing how to read or write German. To make matters worse I went to four different schools as we visited our relatives. When we stayed with my Grandparents Krebs, the school was three km away. Never in Milwaukee did I have to walk that far. More and more, I wanted to return to Milwaukee.

Fortunately, the school teacher helped me to adjust. Knowing how to read and write only English, he had me come in a half hour early and also stay a half hour after school to tutor me in the German language. I remember one time the school teacher lost patience with me and punished me by rapping my knuckles with a ruler. Eventually, I caught on and in three years I was up with the rest of the class.

One of the teachers was very religious. He had us memorize daily Bible verses and we had Bible study once a week. No matter what the teacher was Catholic or Lutheran, the children of the same religion stayed with him, the others went to another village where they took classes in their religion.

I was determined to retain the good memories I had about the United-States but as time passed by the fact that we ever lived there became more of a myth than a reality. I promised myself many times that someday I would return to America—the Land of Opportunity.

My mother was expecting another child and in March 1934 my brother Winfried was born. We were visiting my father's sister at the time. I remember very well riding my bicycle to my father's brother's place, 20 km away, to bring the good news.



Baby Wini (Winfried) 1935

CHAPTER 6

CAUGHT IN THE GRIP OF NAZISM

In spite of the rosy outlook of life under Hitler, the call to return to the United States still gnawed at my parents' hearts, they missed life in America and the uncle who had so graciously sponsored them. Also, my Dad sensed that this regime would not benefit the people in the long run, and after only about a year the decision was made to leave Germany to return to America.

In 1933, Germany was in the grip of Nazism and there was no returning to America. My parents began to realize what an ill-fated decision they had made .

Hitler had ordered an embargo which prohibited people from leaving. After living in the United States for three years, my parents had applied for first citizenship papers, but constant residency in the States was required to receive final papers after five years. My parents had lived here only a little over five years and had not applied for citizenship, therefore, they were not entitled to any protection or privileges from the United States. I remember my Dad trying desperately to find a way to leave. We were in the province of East Prussia, a far distance from neutral Switzerland which might have been a source of escape. Having no other recourse, they discontinued their efforts to return to America. Their fate was sealed and they regretted many times leaving America.

However, when circumstances appeared darkest, an interval of relief came into sight. In Germany, the state owned many acres of land--over 1000 morgen (acre) farms. Hitler ordered these to be divided and given to the people who had a background in farming. They had to submit proof that they were pure Germans with no Jewish blood in the family or background: according to Nazi doctrine: a non-Jewish Caucasian.

My parents heard about the grant and made application to the government. They felt they were eligible as they had experience in farming. Also, one of the requirements was that the family have a son, girls did not count! So after my brother Wini was born in March 1934, in the fall we moved onto our farm.

The acquisition of land and a place to work and raise their family resulted in my parents abandoning their plan to return to America. The farm provided all the necessities of life: stability, a place to worship; schools we attended in the village; lakes and places of recreation within walking distance; friends and relatives nearby. What more could we want? Life on the farm was happy and tranquil for the next ten years.

Consequently, my parents reversed their opinion of Hitler and began to hold him in high esteem.