

Edith Riske

## **FLIGHT FOR SURVIVAL**

A step ahead of the Russians in 1945

BY

**EDITH EDELGARD (KREBS) RISKE**

with Anne Pietz

### INTRODUCTION

I feel deeply that this story should be dedicated to my daughter Karin who as a baby survived the turmoil and hardships of our flight from the Russians in 1944-45. The sufferings she endured were so great I still can't believe she came through alive. In her own innocent way she forced me to struggle daily to continue to exist for her sake. Many times I feared that this precious one-year-old was in such jeopardy that I feared she would no longer be with me the next morning. But there she was: hungry, covered with sores, but still with a smile on her face. Only by the grace of God did she survive because I had

nothing to offer her but my love and constant prayers that we would be spared. For this I am most grateful and thank the Lord daily from the bottom of my heart.

I was fortunate to have kept a diary. I called it my "Little Black Book" and I had it in my possession that fateful day in October 1944 when I and thousands of others tried to escape the onslaught of Russian troops into the province of East Prussia, Germany.

In the frantic rush to beat our way to safety, I slipped that little black book into my pocket and carried it with me throughout our ordeal. I also had the presence of mind to grab the family pictures, certificates and other valuable records on that cold and tragic October morning.

In the course of our flight, I tried to take the time each evening to jot down the happenings of the day. As the daily sufferings unfolded, I had the intuition that by keeping a journal I could someday prove that our twelve-week journey through "hell" wasn't all a hideous dream.

But alas, after the war, my little black book was missing. I knew I had it with me to the end and could not imagine what happened to it. For 45 years I kept up a constant search for it and inquired about it every time I went to Germany.

Then about five years ago, on another trip to Germany, my cousin's daughter whom I had little contact with, heard me mention it. She admitted that she had the book somewhere in her possession. She claimed she was unaware that I had been searching for it, being under the misleading impression that I did not want it--this book which was my link to that horrendous time spent fleeing from the most life-threatening events of my life. Why would I part with something that held so much of what I went through? And yet

perhaps there was the desire to rid myself of events so painful, I wanted subconsciously to divest myself of every part of them.

Now, half a century later, I finally got up the courage to translate my diary from German into English. In doing so, I am reliving those tearful memories. There is constant amazement that we survived and no matter how long I live, those twelve weeks of terror are forever etched into my mind.

Before I begin my story about our flight, I will give you some background on how and why my parents, having lived in the province of West Prussia, Germany and then moving to the United States, ended up back in their homeland at the time when Hitler came to power. This complete circle resulted in the most tragic experiences of their lives.

