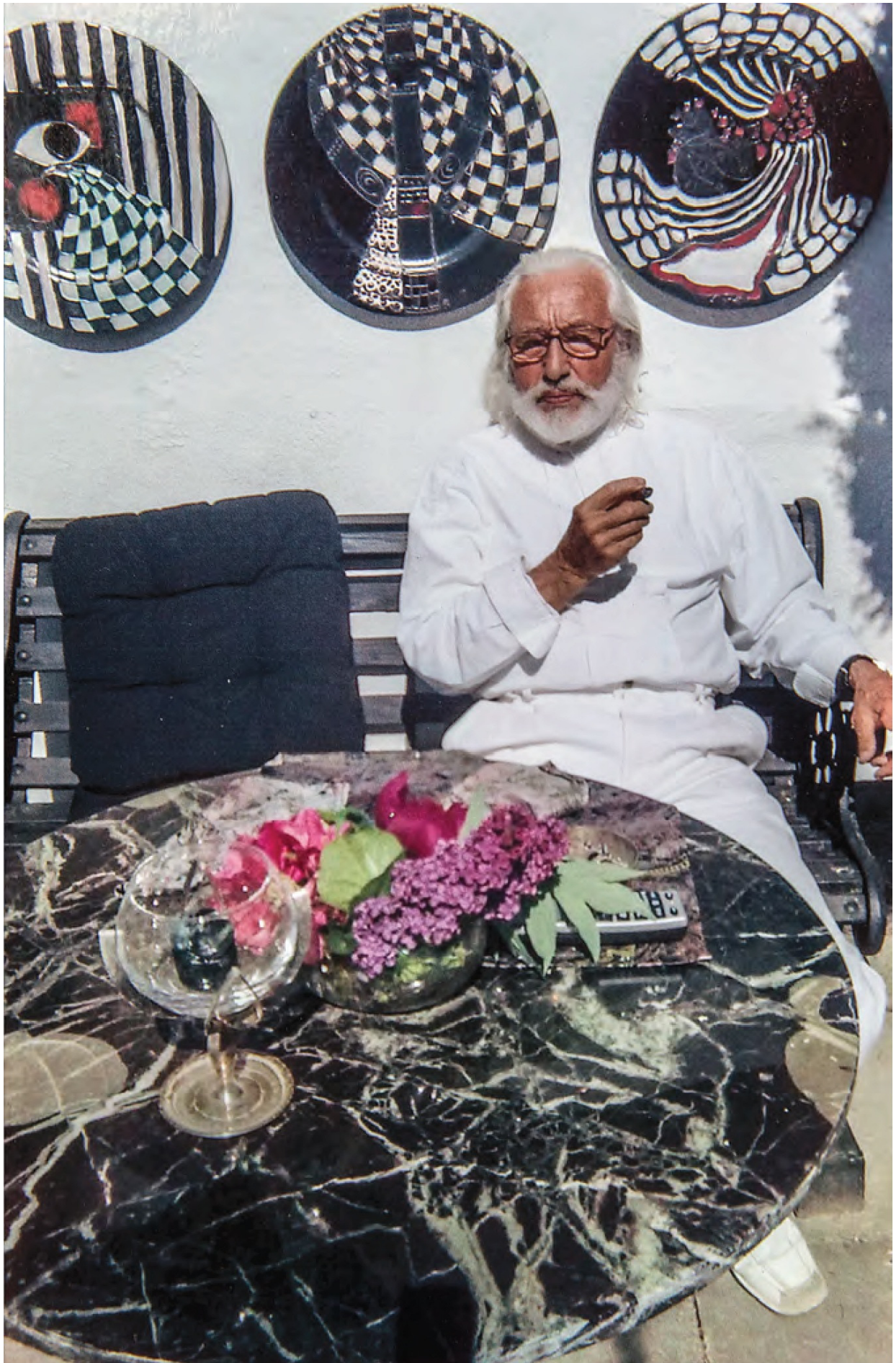


Heinz Siery



*Life Is Much Too Short For
All It Has To Offer*

"You can do much more
than you think you can"



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Authorised translation 2018

by

Elke Meixner

Pauline de Weijer

Ralf J. Schumann

Proofreading by Elli Thyer

Layout by Ralf J. Schumann based on the original publication.

Please note:

Translation was undertaken as voluntary and unpaid work to make this exciting biography accessible to English-speaking fans and all interested people.

The translations style varies and is often very close to the original writing style of Heinz Siery. Some passages may be "German-English" than "correct English" but that is due to the fact that as non-professional translators we wanted to retain the character of the lively writing style. We hope you enjoy this book as much as we do.

Ralf J. Schumann

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1927 - You can do much more than you think you can

What must have lived before in order for us to be as we are? It's fascinating what you find out when you do genealogy and find out who you were related to, and how the branches of the pedigree go farther and farther, into unexplored distances, even to the first cell divisions.

My life already started in an old half-timbered house, even when I was not in this world, yet! But that would change soon, because the semen was already distributed precisely and the growth process in full swing. If it was not disturbed, a miracle would happen and a perfect likeness of the sperm donor would look in amazement at the new surroundings and into eyes that beamed with joy.

The first foreign encounter with my environment was the pastor, who registered the day of my birth in the church book, a privilege that was reserved only to the church since centuries. Then he showered me with cold water and I protested loudly against that, for the first time in my life. But that did not help, because from now on I was, by virtue of baptism, a member of the Catholic Church as Karl-Heinz-Michael Siery. As a birthday there was now the 21st of January, 1927, listed, but as it soon turned out, this date was on unsound footing. A first special feature in my life became apparent.

Because there was a second book of state-run-official character, that was recorded by a representative of the registry office in the kitchen of a respectable citizen of the village. The entry was not taken very seriously, and the official document

was placed in the kitchen cupboard of the good people next to plates, cups and bowls. After a while, my father had to be asked to register the offspring also with the state. The visit happened in a very friendly way. First of all, they drank to my arrival, and when the actual official act began, they were in the best of spirits. To the question "Wann ess dann dä Jung gebore" (when was the boy born), my father said in dialect: "am einenzwanzichste Janewa" (on the twenty-first of January, but in German, you speak "one and twenty", not "twentyfirst"), what the somewhat tipsy official believed to have heard as the "Neinenzwanzigsten" (twenty-ninth, or in German saying: nine and twenty) since both words sounded very similar in that German dialect. Since some months had already passed since my birth, he wrote in the official book "January 29, 1927". And it stayed that way.

My mother did not notice until after three years when she enrolled me in Baumbach, her home. But her protest did not help, my birth had been officially sealed, and that was all that mattered. Incidentally, the birthday had no significance anyway with the Catholics. It was completely ignored because we celebrated our name day instead. For that, we were given a saint, because there were enough of those. And so, my simple "Heinz", the other names were left unnoticed, turned out to be the Holy Emperor Heinrich II. Birthdays were celebrated only by Protestants, but they were all going to hell anyway, according to our Catholic doctrine. They did not have any saints either who could put in a good word for them in heaven.

My upcoming life obviously had something special in store for me, for no one else had an emperor as a saint. With my very early effort at creativity, I added my own third birthday to the already existing two. Because later then, at school, none of us

knew our own birthday. So we were told to ask at home. When my parents were arguing about which of the two dates I should use to register with at school - my mother still saw a chance for a correction - I silently decided on a third option. On one that was easiest to remember. It was: January 27, 1927! Up to the time of leaving school I could well and easily live with that, also with the realization that you do not have to believe everything that is written, as now on my three birthdays. This scepticism was my companion for life. As well as the need to form my own opinion about anything and everything and to adopt nothing that I myself could not accept. I have never been in any club and also couldn't stand any pub babble. Of course my reputation suffered in certain circles. Who does not howl with the wolves, must be strong.

My father lived in a small farming village in Nauort, which was famous for its good beans, and so I was born as "Nauerder Bun" (boy from Nauort) as it was called in the dialect. My grandfather Siery did not live anymore, nor my grandmother, who had died very early. So my father lived alone and without a wife in the house. My grandmother came from Ransbach, my mother from Baumbach, the two villages bordered on each other and had been enemies for generations - that was often the case at the time. So my father had relatives in Ransbach, like my mother in Baumbach. Both were markedly ceramic villages.

One met at a compulsory village fair, which was always also a marriage market, liked each other as it seems and as life goes, soon after that my mother found herself, as a housekeeper in the small-farmer's nest among modest but cheerful people. She felt fine there at first. But then the cozy and solely being together (but certainly not the unconditional need for

preservation of the species), took its toll, and the result was me. So I came too early and forced my producers to marry, as was usual in a raven-black Catholic community. Although the final connection was not even intended, because the cause of the mishap could not be eliminated. At that time you did not have the medical possibilities of today, otherwise I would not exist now. Thus, albeit unintentionally, a family emerged, which was almost the rule and no exception during this time. When the product of a mishap first presented itself in full splendor, the annoyance and bad conscience turned to joy.

1930 - Baumbach

After she unintentionally became a mother, my mother saw bad prospects for the progress for my future. And so, at the age of three, I found myself in my mother's hometown, in a whole new world. Namely, in one where everywhere, inside and outside, smaller and larger fires burned, occasionally causing a smoky stink. Then it was said: one or the other is salting. What that meant, I learned later. It was all fascinating and new to me in this world where everything is about ceramics, in the most varied ways. The best thing was, you could look at everything everywhere and as a child of my mother, I was welcome everywhere. Also, I immediately got a new name, namely the one of my grandfather with the surname Riedel. He was the father of my mother, and he also had died early. I liked the name so well, so that on the obligatory question: "What's your name?" I promptly answered: "Riedel, Michel", because I also have a Michel (short for Michael) in the row of my forenames and as such I then spent my childhood and youth. My Riedel grandmother died eight days before my birth, so I never knew my grandparents, which I always regretted because all the other children had grandparents.

Unlike my mother and me, my dad was not happy in this new environment. Because here everyone was very ambitious and diligent, which led to different social prestige. My father did not know that from his home area. There were no such differences there, but they lived in cheerful and humorous modesty. But there was one gleam of hope: My father had dragged four more boys from Nauort on to the fairground in Ransbach, who were as impressed by four Baumbach girls - as my father was by my mother. And so they promptly suffered

the same fate. So one was no longer alone in this strange world and could mutually encourage each other to fight homesickness.

My father knew no envy and therefore had no ambition to arouse such. Unlike my mother, who was very ambitious and from the start decided which way to go. She already had set off the most important thing, namely the move to Baumbach. After everything had been sold in Nauort and we first lived in Baumbach for rent, she then purposefully began to realize the desire for an own house. But it should be something special, not like the simple square houses in Baumbach, but with a semicircular bay window and a porch in front of the entrance. The cost of course exceeded the granted mortgage and so only the lower floor was completed inside, but we could move in at once. The malice of kinship was tolerable, for one lived in one's own house, and the inner blemish was more than made up for by the external beauty. A second mortgage enabled the completion of the upper house, which was rented out immediately. My father never blamed her for the extra cost of the beauty of the house and admired the energy of my mother, although we had to make economies everywhere.

Baumbach was an arch-Catholic village and the church determined the religious course of the year from New Year to New Year's Eve according to well-defined rules that were binding for everyone - from the six-year-old to the great-grandparents. Every day of the week was determined by the church. Even on weekdays there was a mass every morning, but it was not compulsory. Friday was a so-called abstinence day, on which no meat was allowed to be eaten, but fish. Saturday was the housecleaning and bathing day, in a zinc bath for children, women and men, all in the same water.

Because on Sunday everything had to shine clean for the holy day, on which all had to appear in church, in the best thread. Exceptions were only for the seriously ill and infants. Since my mother had taught me to speak, I had no difficulties in terms of speaking dialect as a result of the change of location. But we had big problems in school with the so-called High German. That was a completely new language for us, which led to cheerful curiosities, especially when writing essays, because at home everyone spoke only dialect. Some of my relatives had smaller or larger ceramics factories, so I literally grew up with clay under my feet because the clay was omnipresent. There I also got to know and love the kindergarten, which was run by very nice Catholic nuns. Here I also found my first great love, namely in the sewing and hospital sister, and although I had constant arguments with the girls, I was her favorite.

We lived at the very bottom of the village, in the last house, right on the border to the hated Ransbach. As neighbour's child, I was greeted immediately curious and friendly by two boys of the same age, whose parents ran a small pipe factory. It should become an ambivalent friendship for life. I was already announced as an eager kindergarten student, and there was hope for the parents of the boys, that, with my help, they would also be able to access this pious children's storage place. I felt honored and promised to gratefully take on this task. For me it was a much further way to go than before the move, which did not cause me any grief, because I really enjoyed going to my beloved kindergarten. Now came the day that I was allowed to take along my new friends, who had already announced themselves. I happily endeavored to fulfill this mission, but not without first solemnly pledging to take good care of them, which I sincerely vowed.

The boys, accustomed to only taking small walks with their parents, were now to march to a place that was alien to them with this new, still foreign boy. Knowing about the long way ahead, I had set my usual pace. That was my first mistake, because my exhortation to go faster made the last remnant of pleasure in this company disappear for them. They stopped stubbornly. My requests to follow me got them moving, but in the wrong direction - home. Reminding myself of my mission, I caught them angrily again, not without giving them a slap in the face in a tried and tested kindergarten manner, which did not fail, just like I knew it. They ran screaming back home. Once there, they answered bitterly weeping to the question "Why?": "He beat us!" Since I was not considered as one of the most well-behaved in kindergarten, this fact was confirmed now in my new environment and corroborated by a ban on contact with the two boys. It left me cold, because I had my kindergarten, and I was fully absorbed in it. And I even enjoyed the satisfaction that these odd boys would never see the kindergarten from the inside. The ban worked only conditionally, because I had impressed the younger brother so much, that he slowly and cunningly was looking for my nearness. It was easy to amaze him with the games I had learned in kindergarten, which he proudly demonstrated to his big brother, who was almost my age. But the brother wavered for a while between curiosity and compliance.

It was not long before we were inseparable friends. However, it was not avoidable that the prohibition of contact had to be pronounced again and again. That also continued when we got to the real school and I got some injuries as a battle-tested lad. But with those I rewarded myself because I could trot to my beloved nurse to get bandaged. She then told me a saying that changed my groaning fuss abruptly. It went: "A big boy does

not cry". That became the maxim for me. I never cried anymore, even though there were always brutal opportunities. So, for the first time I experienced the power of love - it should not be the last one!

At that time, there was still a sophisticated and well-recognized spanking-system with many variants, which was not only painful, but also hurtful. We boys had to have our little buttocks beaten in humble bent posture with well-aimed stick strokes for the purpose of better awareness. But what I found even worse than the pain was the humiliation, which then put me in such a rage that did not allow a subsequent crying and which defrauded the teacher of the enjoyment of humiliation, but put me in a state of revenge. I became vicious and stubborn, and my resistance was as simple as it was effective. Spanking I was not used to at home, as I was always treated like a little prince! And the next time I was called up with a question after such an execution, I stayed seated and gave no answer. This implied spanking. But in order to punish me, the teacher had to pull me out of my school desk and lead me to the front. And since I refused to stoop, I was bent over the front bank to enforce the educational procedure on me. At that time, I already had a sense for unjust treatment, especially when it was carried out on me, which sparked an unruly anger in me. Back at my school desk, he made the mistake of a third attempt, with the same result. No whimpering, no tears, just anger, rage and contempt. It always made me tougher.

He had only the last satisfaction, which I felt too, even if somehow differently, namely an entry in the class book, which amounted to an eternal damnation, where it can be read that I am a very hard-to-educate, stubborn lad - and as it turned out later, the verdict was perfectly fine. Because, this procedure

has shaped me for my whole life. I had the subliminal admiration of my class and the hate of my teacher, to whom I owe the privilege of being addressed, if at all, only with "Siery" for the rest of my schooldays, and not like the others by the first name. I had felt my strength and I was not afraid anymore of anything or anyone. Therefore, I have spared no risk, which should turn out to be very important, but not completely harmless.

Since then I hated the name Siery. But not only because of that, but also because we were called as syrup-eaters (cheap sugar beet juice) by the neighboring children from Ransbach ("Siery" is pronounced like "Seery" in German and "Syrup" sounds like "seerup"). I almost succeeded later, to change the hated name against that of my French ancestors, who had fled to Germany as Huguenots with the name Syrè. Fortunately for my wife and me, the Siery remained and mutated for me to an undeserved worldwide reputation. A little satisfaction I have then allowed myself with the name "Studio Syrè" for our small workshop as a company name. Most customers used it then because it was mentioned on our letterhead and they did not know the other name.

One episode confirms the judgment in the class book, what I was capable of very early: to take revenge for an action that exposed me to ridicule. In the elementary schools of the time, so-called slates were used in the first two classes for learning to write, with one attached to a cord damp sponge, which was used to erase the writing. Then there was a stylus made of a similar material to the tablet, but it broke very easily, which is why we mostly wrote with the stubs. From the third grade on, it was solemn, instead of the harmless tablet and the stylus, we now, as it turned out, had to deal with sneaky objects, namely

a nice clean paper booklet with white, lined pages, a wooden pen on which a pointed steel spring was plugged, and ink. Things that I should hate for the school years that follow and not only because they made a dirty and bloody start for me.

The reason for the announced episode was the ink, it remained my worst enemy and the sneaky blobs were my constant companions in all notebooks. The ink was in the upper part of our desk, in a small ceramic container. Now it was common practice to persuade one of the innocent newcomers of this class to blow once into the ink container, which we didn't know before. It turned out that most of my class had been forewarned, and it didn't work on anyone else but me, as I seldom avoided a risk. The attempt succeeded, and I looked like accordingly. Anger and cravings for revenge, which I had to satisfy without hesitation, came at once. In front of me lay a new object at that moment, which I trusted to be more useful than only for the intended purpose: the dip pen with the steel spring. Next to me on the desk lay - unsuspecting - the hand of the one who had done this shame on me and laughed loudest. But that laugh was stifled by a scream as the steel spring and my anger nailed his hand to the desk. I rushed out of class blazing fast, down to a faucet to clean myself, which did not work very well. And so as not to expose myself to new laughter later on, I did not go back to class, but went to where I preferred to be when there were any problems: to the nearby forest.

The episode had happened in the teacher's absence. Obviously he had downplayed it because he had left a whole new school class unattended, because when I returned the next day, the desk was cleaned and except the bandaged hand at my side, nothing reminded me of the incident. But this gave me a

privilege that I would not have achieved so quickly without this event. For a while, I enjoyed a mixture of a little respect and more careful treatment with unavoidable assaults, as I did not leave any of my weapons unused in defending myself, neither feet, teeth or fingernails, like a cat, as tested in the kindergarten.

In class, I was one of the smallest, who often felt the strength of the bigger ones. That was so and will probably still be like that. Some time later, I visited my godmother and there happened to be a neighbour boy, one of our big schoolmates. I complained to my aunt about the unfair treatment that we small ones were exposed to, because a complaint at the teacher not only did not do anything, but the revenge of the blamed was even worse. My aunt, whose darling I was, became angry and let the big boy promise to take care of me in the future, otherwise he should not enter her house any more. I did not really trust in this and decided to test the instruction, which was pretty easy. I boldly provoked another boy from a higher class, and when he tried to grab me, I quickly ran to my protector and stood behind him. When the provoked arrived and thought he could grab me, he was intercepted and informed that I was under protection, which the other accepted! I could hardly believe it, but it got around and I was left alone. It worked, so back then I already had something what they call a bodyguard today, and that was until I was a big boy myself. But nobody could protect me from the teacher.



1933 - Heil Hitler!

In 1933 my school days started on the dot with Adolf Hitler, who completely monopolised us as a constant companion like our Lord had done before: the first until 1945, the second a bit longer. To us children it was a fascinating time. Suddenly everything was completely different and especially much brighter with all the red flags, with the white round dots and the cross with hooks on them, that had to be hung from the window of every house on special days. Then there were the men in brown uniforms, men we had formerly only known in their – to us - usual blue work outfits. But our astonishment grew even more when one of our teachers came to school in that uniform and greeted us with 'Heil Hitler' instead of 'Good morning'. When they started founding unions that were labelled 'Jungvolk' (young people – red) and 'Hitlerjugend', to make us take part in that new world, the first problems arose.

In those days the balance of power in Baumbach was completely determined by the Church and people were extremely conservative to begin with. Most families were, in one way or another, smaller or larger independent business owners and hard to persuade to this kind of innovation. Actually, nearly the only people to be won over for the union were the poorer classes, more so because these events of the 'browns' took place on the holy Sunday. Whenever one was planned at all, brown leaders from neighbouring places had to help out, because in our community no one was willing to take the part. The name of the union alone was enough to raise concerns: Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP). There were the ones dressed in brown, the SA (Sturmabteilung, Storm Troopers – red.) who were also designated to storm the halls of the communist opponents.

That's why they had a chin strap attached to their cap that they would pull over their chins when storming, which in itself looked frightening enough. The opponents of this party were the communists, who called themselves KPD (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands). In our village they kept themselves hidden as far as possible, and when the browns gained force, they disappeared altogether. Then there were the ones uniformed in black. They called themselves the SS (Schutzstaffel, protection squadron – red). As tried goon squads they were best qualified to protect the party principals, and later these Elite Einheiten (elite units – red) would come to sad glory as KZ (Konzentrationslager, concentration camps – red) guards.

Those who identified with these unions were to be pitied, because in order not to compromise their salvation, they had to appear in church on a Sunday. When they nevertheless would decide themselves for this NSDAP, then they would have problems with their wives, who would suffer the blasphemies of the neighbours. And those blasphemies can have a special quality in that kind of hegemony. In the neighbouring villages most boys would wear these uniforms. We were the only ones walking around in our shabby, worn and uncomfortable clothes until the end of the war, because in our village we had the Jungvolk and the Hitlerjugend only at the start. They did not last long, our parents made sure of that. But on a Sunday we were in uniform as well: in a sailors suit, with a cap that had the name of a battleship on a ribbon (with the ends hanging down the back). Every catholic boy got this uniform for his first holy communion. This custom for dressing dated from the time of the Kaiserreich (German empire – red) when Germany tried to become a sea power like the English. We would have almost made it, had not our unfortunate emperor

started the dreadful first World War, and then lost it at that. And we Germans were paying the price for it, for the Empire was lost to us and we became a republic that was cobbled together in Wismar and took its name from the place. The new republic made it to 12 chancellors in 14 years (1919 to 1933). This disaster was used by Adolf Hitler, who in the meantime had founded a powerful party that grew ever stronger, and with the help of Göring, was already eagerly involved in the Reichstag – and with resounding success.

1934 - After seven years: a sister

The first major change in my younger life was the arrival of my first sister, who supposedly had been brought by a stork, one that I missed because they had brought me to relatives beforehand, so I would not be aware of the actual way of arrival. So far for years I had been the only, and as such also the cherished, child. That was over now forever, then all attention and attachment went past me in the direction of this new arrival, that also happened to be a girl. I knew them only too well from kindergarten and their scratch marks had often enough disfigured my face. As a result, the good and worthy scholar turned into a rebellious and lazy boy. Nevertheless, this changed when they threatened that I would have to repeat class, which meant no more or less than that I would be humiliatingly shoved from my own class into a lower one, and I did not want to sink as far as that. But after this behaviour I was no good to be a model student any more. So, in the last three years of school I worked myself up again to the golden middle: a '3' that signified satisfactory at the time, with the exception of the note for behaviour. I got a '5' for that, meaning inadequate. I managed to keep this level up to my 'leaving certificate', and with that I was able to trek into the reality of life.

With their own home heavily mortgaged both my parents had to work in different potteries to pay their debts, which meant for me: going to school in the day and taking care of my sister was a regular duty, which was quite common at the time. But it was going to get worse over time, because after two years the second sister arrived, which meant that my regular obligation was prolonged for another two years. As a

babysitter I was responsible and obliged to stay at home. Whenever I was allowed to get out for once, I enjoyed my freedom twice as much. I have never lost this need for freedom, in whatever situation or position I have been in. But the feeling that I have to take responsibility has never left me either.



1942 - Proud to be a professional student

After ending school, I was sent, without being asked for my own career wishes, to the pottery of my uncle Eduard Bay - as a trainee, as one did not know any other way. This was how things were done at the time. But I liked this much better anyway than that hated school. And this trainee distinction made it possible for me to be admitted into the Staatliche-Keramische-Fachschule in Höhr-Grenzhausen. This to me was the start of endless new, pleasant and also beautiful things: a completely different life. It was just absolutely fabulous. It started off with better clothes on working days, which at the time was a privilege mostly reserved for the higher ranks like priest, teacher and doctor. Secondly, I got a monthly pass for the railway trip, the kind of trip I usually only made as a highlight once a year to Koblenz for Christmas shopping, and now as a return trip on every working day, which was and stayed a special experience. And then there was this amazing school with the most diverse training spaces. I was especially happy with the white smock we all had to wear. On top of that came the status of being a professional student, which was not insignificant, because in our area it meant you belonged to the privileged. I am almost sure, no other classmate enjoyed it as much as I did. I could hardly take in my luck to be able to experience all of this, and during all of my stay there I perceived my luck with gratitude. This was in the war years 1943-1945, until the school was closed towards the end of the war in 1945.

Towards the end of 1944 I had to complete a pre-military education for four weeks, together with other classmates. It was an interesting time for young people like us. We were

kitted out with grey uniform like suits and everything that was conveyed was new to me and I joined in excitedly. First, they checked how we managed to handle a gun without a manual, this way we were classified for march setup. This was also based on length. My length together with my miserable shooting performance meant I was pushed to the end of the group, where as the smallest of them all I obviously belonged. Inspired by frustration I now wanted to be able to do everything a good soldier needed to do, as (nearly) all of us were destined to become one.

What I enjoyed most was path finding in unknown territory with the use of compass and map. Things that bring joy usually succeed best and fastest. With this new knowledge I was now appointed reconnaissance patrol leader. I got a group of ten people, an unknown place was mentioned that we had to find through the woods, and we had to get a note stamped by the mayor to prove we had been there. The only one who was excited about this project was I. As soon as I noticed that the whole case was going to fail as a result of the listlessness of my men, I proposed that the ones who couldn't or wouldn't get along should stay put until we returned. It did not take long before I trotted along on my own at a moderate pace, found the village without any problems with the compass and map, had the note stamped collected my men on the way back, not without triumphantly waving the stamped note. As we had returned first, we had the joy to be able to wait for the other groups. When the last ones arrived, the first three groups were distinguished, and we were first. Nothing is so successful as being a success. I even learned to shoot, not as the best, but I did not shoot "tickets" any more. You got a ticket when you failed to hit the target even once, something I managed three

times during the first exercise as I had no idea of notch and bead sights.

Later on, we had only just arrived back home, the Hitlerjugend were ordered to the Saarland to defend the fatherland, by completing the so-called West wall, that had been build in peace time as a protection against the French. We had to dig large trenches that were used as armour locks. But I was frustrated and angry, because the other guys from my year were already allowed to defend the fatherland as real soldiers. In hindsight, what a lucky fate! At the setting examination it appeared I did not have the right length nor weight and I was set back one year. Out of frustration I volunteered for the navy, especially for the submarines, and this happened to turn out to my advantage as well. Because in the army exercise camp we were recruited by the SS (like Günther Grass before us), but at that time I was able to proudly present my registration with the navy. But I was protected from a seaman's grave by the deferral in the exercise camp. And so, I ended up still a Hitlerjunge, at the shabby trenches, which probably saved my life, as a lot of my classmates never came back. All this made me realise something that in later life I have found being confirmed time and time again: Everything in life is good for something.

1945 - Now it got serious

Three months before the end of the war I was at last taken into military service, for a quick course to make me ready for front action. We were housed in a former labour service barrack camp, in a wood because of enemy planes. I then got diphtheria, which at the time mostly ended with death. I was already in a coma when a very clever paramedic got hold of a completely new antibiotic called Prontosin. This was not yet a proven medicine and it had so many side effects that it was retracted after the war very quickly. Later on, I was diagnosed with a heart valve defect. But at least it saved me at the time. When I woke up from my coma we were in Mainz central station and I was being friendly greeted by the paramedic and my mates. The barrack camp had to be cleared because the Americans were getting closer. So all our digging had been completely useless.

With the luggage, sadly not mine, and with the paramedic, who took great care of me, I had been put on a truck and brought here, as they told me later on. From Mainz we were transported into a camp to the northeast. I was brought straight into the sickbay with several others who were not as ill as I was, as I had a very high fever for weeks on end, a fever that just would not go away. Bit by bit they were all released from sickbay, but I had to stay, though I did not like it one bit. After I had been able to bring my thermometer down below 37 degrees by shaking it, several days in a row, I was allowed to get out, it was just at the time that the Americans made us get back on the road again.

So we had to get back further east, but this time without a truck, so this meant marching. Before we started we had to take a stand to determine if we were all still there and that no one had gone back home secretly. At the count they determined not only that all were still there, but also that I did not have any luggage. It had been left behind at the sickbay in the barrack camp in the woods. At that point an officer called me to him and showed me two objects that were held together with leather straps so they could go over your shoulders and be carried like that. They were a radio receiver and a speaker, that he had robbed from some empty house. Both of them were loaded onto my weak shoulders, the receiver, that was very heavy, on my back. As I had boasted to my mates beforehand that I would be able to march without any luggage, I was of course gloatingly laughed at when I appeared like a luggage donkey. I was certain I was not going to walk three days with these hated things.

An occasion to change things came sooner than expected. For the first rest a spot was chosen in the woods, where I was able to unload not only the luggage, but also my own heap, unnoticed, and I left both to their own fate. I did not worry about the consequences, because in the mean time I had gotten a completely different problem. My feet, in my hard boots in woollen socks, burned like fire. Because I had been ill for weeks, they did not survive this kind of tormenting procedure without damage. A vanguard on stolen bikes had been sent ahead to find quarters for the night. They had found two sheds where we felt we were luxuriously housed. As I suspected that things were really bad, I first went to my beloved paramedic, who had not only saved me, but also cared for me for weeks on end. I took off my socks and boots and as he did not believe what he saw. He called out in dialect: "I have never

seen anything like this in all my life!” He counted twelve blisters on my feet, some already open and bleeding. He took care of everything as best as he could, and then made me a present that at this moment and in this situation could not have been better.

He placed me with the vanguard on bicycles, a favour that cannot be rated high enough. So we rattled through the villages, mostly empty, in front of us, first to find anything to eat, and later on to find housing for the infantry. From the first trip I had specialised myself in finding and inspecting hen houses, and I nearly always found eggs, that I would pierce on both sides and suck empty with pleasure, whether they were fresh or old. If I could get hold of them, I would also catch the hens that were very popular for evening soup. And so we blithely went east. In Bleckede we crossed the Elbe and went on in the direction of Schwerin. It was the beginning of May, when we had just blissfully snuggled ourselves in hay and straw in some barn, when a shrill whistle scared us and someone called: “The Russians are coming!” Outside marching columns were being formed in a hurry and we marched back in the direction we had come from before, west, to the Americans we had been marching away from, to the east, for weeks.

1945 - Everything is good for something

Our army then surrendered to the Americans without combat, and so we were not prisoners of war, but internees. To thank for the surrender without fight, the Americans granted our officers furthermore the command of our army, and so it stayed for the duration. We kept our formations: company, battalion, regiment, division, army, till we were released.

We handed over our arms and after that they took our wristwatches, the Americans were very keen on them and they had them strapped to their arms up to the elbows. Apparently the Gods were with me again and my motto “Everything is good for something” was confirmed again. It does not sound very convincing, but it has been confirmed every time. Because every time something goes wrong, it opens the way to something that has not even been considered in advance.

Before we go on, I do have to revert a bit. When we were nine years old, in our third year in school, we were held to be ready for the first holy communion, the first really big celebration in our lives. We were being spiritually prepared a long time in advance and we had to go to confession for the first time – I will tell you something appropriate about this procedure later on. Part of the celebration were clothes especially for communion. For boys this was the obligatory sailor suit and a wristwatch! Baptism had given us two godparents, a godfather and a godmother, and one of them was responsible for giving the wristwatch. As they could not agree upon whom the responsibility would fall, and both depended on the other, this resulted in me being the only communion child without a

wristwatch. This status remained until I was able to barter and cunningly get a pocket watch for myself.

And now back to my adage, that everything is good for something. With my unbeloved pocket watch I suddenly had an invaluable special status. When all former wristwatch wearers had to live on with naked wrists I became a very valued and beloved comrade and was called 'lord of time' which came with completely undeserved special benefits. The first privilege I needed without delay. I happened to be the only one with a watch, but I also happened to be the only one without a triangular tarpaulin, a bare necessity you needed to have to find shelter in a four men tent. The tarpaulin had been left behind in the barrack, as you know. The problem had been solved without my knowledge and I found myself in a tent with three - to me unknown - men and I did not feel well at all. To be on the safe side I hid my pocket watch deep in the leg of one of my boots, but I still slept badly and I felt really uncomfortable.

Next morning we had to stand to attention in rows and the Americans came and counted our numbers. A wagon came and tin boxes were unloaded. We had not eaten in two days, so we secretly hoped there was something to eat for us at last. The boxes were brought into the tents of our officers, we were told to cue before the opening three at a time, and we were allowed five biscuits each and a small tin of Corned beef to share between the three. This was to be our daily meal for weeks to come. At first there were no problems with the biscuits, but soon we felt foolish as we got only the broken remains of the biscuits. The distribution became uncontrollable and usually we only got a small heap for the three of us. As we had time on our hands all day and our

hunger was the only thing to occupy our minds, we tried to puzzle the pieces back together, and lo and behold: we found out there were not even five between us, so we were being robbed by our own officers. As we were only seventeen at the time and had been learned to obey, no one dared complain. The officers still held the absolute command and being disobedient still was a middle offence. So we had to keep up with this way of distribution for another four weeks.

Then we had to pack our bags and march a few kilometres to a small train station, where we boarded, still in an orderly cue, a long train with freight wagons that was waiting for us. It took a long time before the train started. And as our officers had a wagon to themselves, there was no one to ask where we were heading. Slowly but steadily the fear for the unknown started to rise, because now it started for real. What was going to happen? The Amis had celebrated their victory on the 8th of May 1945 with wonderful fireworks, that we could only watch from afar and with mixed feelings. But apart from that we saw nothing. And whom would they hand us over to? By way of a hole in the wagon we could discuss the direction of the train and establish it was north-west, so not in the direction of the Russians. As the train stopped and we were allowed to get out, the first thing we saw was the water, the sea. We had to march on again and it was north all the time, and no one told us where we were going.

After quite a few kilometres it started to get dark, we halted in a clear spot. We were hoping to get something to chew, but instead we were told to put up the well known tents again and to get in for the night. Next morning we made our way further north until we saw water again to the right of the way we marched: the Baltic Sea. To the left we saw large farmhouses

spread far apart, and we were distributed between them. We were allocated a spot to build our tents in neat rows. But before that, like a miracle, we got a bowl of very good soup from the farm kitchen. A delicacy after weeks of meagre dry biscuits. And we could even get seconds (a ladle). We were blissful but it proved to become a restless night as our digestive organs protested heavily and the moaning for the latrines held on all night.

Next morning we had to take up our positions again and we thought it was going to be a horribly long counting again, because we stood in the kind of line that was used for that purpose. One of our officers arrived and explained where we were, in Schleswig-Holstein and that the Americans had handed us over to the English. But he didn't know yet what they intended to do with us. Then he told us the commander of our battalion would arrive shortly because he was looking for an orderly. He came, he proceeded along our lines, stood before me and told me I was to come with him right away. So I hurried to our tent and got the pocket watch that I had buried in the sand. He took me with him into the farm house that accommodated the officers and showed me a single tent in the yard that I could move into on my own.

When I had had a good look around, I could not believe my eyes. The tent was full of boxes with books, that he probably had stolen on the march back, in the same way that I had stolen the eggs and one of our officers the radio that I had to carry and that I dumped in the woods. I could hardly believe my luck: alone in a tent and with so many books at that. At home we only had a bible, a nicely illustrated life of the saints, that I studied intensely and that I dreamed about at night, and a

Western novel from my uncle Ben with the title: “Texas will be damned”, that I did not quite understand.

Of course at school we had the so called “reading books” that were obligatory, but with their subliminal morals and education they damaged the love of reading more than helped it. That changed when I irredeemably dived into the world of Karl May. One of my class mates, whose father was very well to do, had left his son several volumes. So we travelled ‘Through the desert’ with Cara Ben Nemsí and we cried with Winnetou.

Later on, when I had developed my literary taste a bit further and came into circles where my beloved Karl May was treated disparagingly, I was always sorry about that. I am more than happy that nowadays people start to acknowledge what a genius story teller he was, with stories from countries he had never even visited. And now I was surrounded with hundreds of books in my tent, as the orderly of our battalion commander, who could not care less about me and who did not need me in the first place. I suspected he cared only about the books and needed someone to guard them.

Another privilege was that I got my food from the farm kitchen with the kitchen staff. When I was raking through the books I came upon one with the title “The hangman of Paris”, a family history about a Parisian executioners dynasty, a horrific tale. It was the first and also the last book that was granted to me to read, because the privilege to eat from the farm kitchen seemed probably a bit too much of an advantage to the gods. A glass of cold buttermilk catapulted me straight into the infirmary, that was located in the mill.

I was diagnosed with dysentery and was placed near the toilettes, where I stayed for weeks on end until I weighed only 45 kilo's. When they had to vacate the mill I was quartered into another farmhouse and I recovered step by step. Then the English started to release us back to our home towns.

1945 - Release and home coming

In the mean time though, the Allies had started to divide Germany into four zones. The Russians got the Eastern part, the English the western part together with the French and the Americans. The first people to be released were those who had their home in the English part, and of them the people from Hamburg came first. Then those who belonged to the American zone were released, and last came the people that originated from the French zone, were I came from. All of this took a long time, because the English examined every soldier carefully and they hunted especially for members of the SS. They had the bad luck to have their blood type tattooed under their upper arm, so they could be helped quicker and better when they were wounded. After all they were elite soldiers and should be restored to health for the Führer as quickly as possible. This shows how a privilege can become a disaster, like my own move to the farmyard. A lot of the SS guys that were decorated with the treacherous numbers tried to have them surgically removed, but of course this left a scar. This made them even more suspicious: none of them got their discharge papers and they were allocated to a special group.

When at last we were sure we could hope to get to our home in the French zone, the English stopped the discharges to this zone because they suspected the French did receive the discharged persons only to lead them on to France to rebuild their country that we had destroyed. The English were not amused by this, because the French acted as if they were the victors, though they really were the losers, and they tried to ship everything that could be moved out of their zone. Our train station remained an enormous transshipment station for years, our forests were being cut down and the wood went to

France. After waiting for weeks I had an idea. I had registered for the French zone in innocence, without knowing the actual borders of the zones, so I went to the discharge office and asked to be shown the map of the zones. I established that the most eastern part of my region was Limburg and Limburg was part of the American zone. It seemed the gods were good to me again, but then they had punished me enough. In a wise foresight they had me make the acquaintance of a fellow prisoner who lived with his parents in a bakery in Limburg. We got along really well, and when he left he gave me his address and told me I would be more than welcome to visit as his place was not that far from my home town. The invitation would be a blessing again in the future, but to begin with I now had a perfect address for the American zone; a bakery in Limburg with name, street and number.

It did not take long before I could present myself at the discharge office. I was handed a number of papers that I had to have ready for inspection along the way home. After that I had to wait again in a special camp as extra trains for transportation were being put together. They were not passenger trains but cattle trains for about 50 to 60 people. A tin box was used as a toilet, so the usual comfort. The train went south and in the evening held in Marburg. Limburg was not that far away, but the train did not go any further, we had to get out and nicely stand in line again. We were with the Amis again and of our officers none were to be seen, they had been sorted long before. From now on we only saw the Americans and also for the first time a coloured soldier. Our numbers were counted again and apparently the complete transport was still there. At that time they sorted out another 30 men, and once again I was amongst them. We were guided to a covered wagon and had to get in. A coloured American

rode away like a bat out of hell and we were thrown left and right as we rode along. The fear for what they were now going to do with us though was even greater than the fear for the skills of the driver.

At last the wagon stopped. The flap was being pulled down, the hood lifted and we were allowed to get out. The driver got in again and rode off. And we stood and looked around in fear. As it had gone dark in the meantime we could distinguish nothing but a lot of lights. Then a Jeep with two soldiers arrived, turned and they signed us to follow them. We walked along and we suddenly stood in the middle of a brightly lit American camp and we could do nothing but look around flabbergasted. Then a soldier came up to us and when he saw our frightened faces he told us in perfect German that we did not have to be afraid. We would be released in eight days, but they desperately needed people to help to get more tents up. The next day we would be shown what we could do. Next we got an emergency ration, supposedly for soldiers at the front, and we ate it with delight. After that we were shown a sleeping space.

Next morning it was our job to haul every possible material that was necessary for the building of the tents to an assigned place, again under the command of a coloured soldier. When he realised how hard this job was for us, young and famished and half-starved boys, he gave us a sign to follow him and he took us to the kitchen tent. First thing there was a large pot with steaming potatoes, something we had been dreaming of for months, and we hastily filled our tins to the full to get out as quick as possible and start eating this banquet. The soldier was stunned by the way we were trying to head off, and irritated by the way we were behaving ourselves, he marched

along the other pots to show them to us. We followed him and could not believe our eyes. Six years of war and the following time as prisoners had made us get used to modesty, to a monk-like existence. We had almost forgotten that food is not only made for the need to still hunger, also taking into consideration to what state this war, that we literally grew up in, had brought us. The amount of destruction was so overwhelming that hardly anyone could believe these sobering merciless landscapes, these cities made out of heaps of rubble could ever be lived in again. In this mentally and morally desolate state now, we stood in front of these delights that had been unattainable to us for an indefinite time, and we looked at the soldier, who encouraged us to help ourselves. This was hardly possible as our tins were filled with potatoes, so back we ran to the potato pot, threw the potatoes back but for a few, and then we went for this opportunity of an unimaginable kind of repletion, that we had not even known to dream about. We squatted outside on the ground and devoured hastily what we had taken. And one after another we snuck back to the different meat pots and filled ourselves till we really could not get anything in anymore and we could hardly breathe. One after another laid down and fell asleep. In this way every day became a holiday in the last eight days of our captivity.

We almost regretted it when at last a train was put together that would take us in the direction of our home town. The coloured soldier regretted our depart as well. We had become fast friends in the meantime and we had soon realised that the coloured soldiers had another relationship to us, adolescents, almost children, than the white Americans. A lot of us were Gymnasiasten (grammar school students) speaking good English, which helped the relationship along. We were

delivered to the train station provided with lots of food. It was all very well organised as is everything with the Americans.

When we got to Limburg, I was the only one there, as all the men that were really from Limburg had arrived home long before. With the address of my former friend I soon found the bakery, I made myself known to the people there and was received very friendly. Their son was called, he came in with an enthusiastic "hello" and after a good dinner came something I had not enjoyed in a very long time: a hot bath! After that a soft bed in a beautiful old room with a grandfather clock that struck every hour and startled me every time. But I enjoyed it and I would stretch myself and fall asleep again with a feeling of deep satisfaction and the joy of knowing that I would soon be home again.

But I still had some problems to solve. Limburg was in the American zone and at the same time border town to the French zone, where the French would hunt down every released former German soldier and would send them straight to France, where they would have to stay for years to reconstruct the ruined towns and villages. But my new friends knew what to do and so we went over the 'green border' in the direction of Staffel and Diez. Here I took the next train to Montabaur from an unguarded train station. This was almost my home town and I went on foot through the familiar woods to Baumbach, my home village. As I had not announced my arrival, the surprise was correspondingly high. But the best thing was my father, who during the war had been a soldier and had been imprisoned, had come home just before me, all in one piece, and now we were all united again as a family at last. My father had no problems with the French, as he was too old, but I was afraid to report myself back, because I would

have been guided to France straight away. But as I had not reported back, there were no food ration cards for me either, so I could not stay at home and I had to go and find food for myself.

But what is family for, when you have a problem? And I did have family. The one who could help me was my uncle Eduard, the owner of the firm of Bay Keramik. A lot of people from the neighbouring villages in the region were working in his factory. Through one of them a job at a farm was arranged for me, and from then on I was working as a farm hand in agriculture, of which I knew nothing besides chickens, goats and pigs. But for me this place was a small paradise, a sanctuary. Not a Frenchman in site as opposed to our home village, where they cut down whole forests. I did not have to ID myself anywhere and could eat as much as I liked every day, something that was not obvious to me, as I had just been released weighing only 52 kilos.

1945 - As a Farmhand

The farmer's wife and daughter were very eager to nourish me back to a good nutritional status - which was also good for their status, and of course well meant. For the first time, I experienced those who mean well can do us a lot of harm, because you cannot defend yourself against them, because they mean well. My stomach and intestines, which were overwhelmed with the unfamiliar type and quantity of food, now had to pay the consequences. I was constantly forced to visit the outhouse, which stood near the dung pile. It was a small wooden house with a heart shape cut into the door, and a board with a large whole in the middle that served for practical defecation. After I felt somewhat better, I enjoyed the idyll of village life. There were big differences between my hometown and where I now was. It was still a pure farmers village, and most of the population lived, almost exclusively off agriculture. The day began with milking the cows, and when the cow herder blew his horn, the farmers opened their stalls, and the cows trudged their familiar path to the village pasture where they stayed until evening; to be milked again on their return.

Almost all of the farmers were smallholders. The only class difference existed in the draft animals, which they all needed to crop the fields. Back then, there were only two possibilities: a proud team of horses, or well-behaved milk cows - there were no tractors yet. My work consisted of mucking out the cowshed in the morning, whereby cow dung differed substantially from horse manure, which I acknowledged with envy. Cleaning was only possible because enough litter had been distributed on the entire stable floor the evening before. Litter consisted of shredded straw, and the soft cow dung

mingled with it. It was then scraped together with a pitchfork, loaded onto a wheelbarrow, and transported to the dung heap. When the farmer then added a horse in the stable, we were the only ones in town that had a mixed team; and an attraction. Daily work was - seasonal and weather related - always different. Sometimes easier, sometimes harder. Physical effort was a problem for me in the beginning, which the farmer didn't like at all. But I was very quick with light and complicated work, which brought back several plus points again.

Evenings were the best time, when the village youth met after work on a big old stairway for chattering, joking, teasing, and flirting. We were all not of marriageable age yet, accordingly harmless, and without erotic ulterior motives. Chaste and religiously educated, (I still didn't know what unchaste was) because unchastity, even in thought, was already considered a sin, and had to be confessed. Besides, the cheerful activity took place under the watchful eyes of adults. It was just happy and carefree, and late at night we looked forward to the next evening. I knew some of the boys from military basic training, and also from the Ceramic Technical College, and was therefore gladly included, particularly by the females. The village boys were almost all excellent soccer players, and I only had my track and field achievements to oppose their image, but that was of no importance here. Soccer was the biggest thing, and that's exactly what I hated from the bottom of my heart. At school I had already refused to hold my head against a sharply shot ball during soccer, and instead quickly ducked my head, which brought me the blessing of disqualification. I was never chosen again. Since some boys heard of my achievements in track and field, they thought I was surely a good soccer player also, but I had to pass. My

good looks couldn't compensate for my bad standing, at least not with the boys, but more so with the girls.

There were still ways to make a better impression though. There was a forest nearby with an idyllic pond, and I could swim, which no one else in the village could. So I was a little sensation. At the village festivals, of which there were many, I also gained points in dancing, which increased my reputation considerably, at least among the females. Success was not long in coming. A lot of girls gathered in front of my bedroom window late at night, and begged, "Serry (my nickname) come to the window." until I got up from my straw mattress, and went to the window to joke around with them. But then it started to get loud. Now the farmers bedroom was just above mine, and I was afraid this would cause trouble. In the morning, I was astonished that the noise was not worth mentioning, until I learned that this method of approach was common here among the youth, similar to the custom of "Fensterln" in Bavaria; merely gender equitable, and the other way around, which I found very pleasant because it spared me some rejection. [Fensterln: When a young man is fond of a girl, he places a ladder under her bedroom window during the night, when all is quiet and asleep, and climbs up, taps lightly on the window, and asks whether he might come in, only for a kiss. This was tolerated due to the often strict village customs and parental prohibitions, that prohibited lovers from in-depth conversations and more intimate reciprocal activities in the daytime and in public.]

The nightly noise ended abruptly when the prettiest girl in the village wanted to begin a flirt with me. I was on cloud nine. It was first love for both of us. When I went swimming, a path led by her house and it was no problem for her to meet me. I waited for her dressed because I didn't want to scare her being half-naked, since we were both still very prudish, and except for tender kissing nothing happened. It was pure love and we were blissful. But as Schiller once said: "The joy of life so pure and rightful. Were not for mortals to partake". Those spurned - driven by envy - had not remained idle, and had quickly spotted our tender acts. The good news was then joyfully delivered to the parents of my dearest, and then our first love was also our shortest. I could hang onto my dreams for another day and night, but when I waited for her at the pond the next day, and she didn't show, a pain slowly crept up in me that I never knew before. I sensed that she was suffering the same pain, but I could not comfort her.

This stroke of fate did not come as a complete surprise, though. I could hardly believe the luck of our love anyway, because my status, compared to hers, was too different. She was the daughter of a wealthy family, and I was a farmhand. I never went to the pond again, and never saw her again during the remaining time of my stay in the village. I kept my distance from all others, especially from my window admirers, because they had spied on us and blew the whistle. Of course the whole village knew about our relationship, and I expected all kinds of teasing and gloating, but oddly enough it did not happen. Apparently they felt sorry for me, because they had seen how I plagued myself with hard work, which obviously was not my thing, and yet I had stuck it out and not complained. I had been accepted in this village and had been happy here, and now I was the unhappy one. My heartache

was noticed, for I had previously been a cheerful, smart fellow, and now I was silent and quiet, and no longer on the stairway in the evening because I feared being mocked.

When the farmer bought a horse and wagon though, I was happy, because I loved horses. On Sundays, I proudly drove the farmer's daughter, who was much older than me, to relatives and acquaintances, and on weekdays I drove to the field with the mixed team. I loved the horse, and slowly I saw my grief with the girl in a different light. Actually, I could be proud and happy to have experienced love with the prettiest girl in the village (which the other boys envied me for), if only briefly. This experience showed me, the poor farmhand, that I meant more to girls than one could expect in my social class, and slowly my self-confidence grew again. I should often learn that my chances with girls were always contrary to those of their parents, as soon as they noticed something. On the other hand, it kept me from bonding, and gave me the freedom to try out many more things. I maintained that for a long time.

Slowly winter approached, and with it the day of farewell from this idyllic and endearing world which I now had to leave, since there was no work for farmhands during winter in the fields. I said good-bye only to the farmers, and then I disappeared, unnoticed and sad - not knowing that this village still had a lot of meaningful surprises in store for me. Once again, an eventful chapter in life, which left its mark on me, had ended. And it was certainly due to this, that I settled down in another small farming village in the second half of my life.



1946 - Black Marketeer

It was still quite dismal back home. The French had given up picking up former soldiers of the German Wehrmacht to send to France, but they continued cutting down the forests. So I was able to register and got ration cards, but you couldn't live as well with them as on the farm. Thus, we found ourselves back in the dark past of our ancestors when money didn't exist, but only goods against goods.

We had money though, but I couldn't buy a nail, let alone a wooden board for the carpenter to make a pair of skis for me. I absolutely wanted a pair, since we had enough snow and mountains. So I marched to our sawmill and politely asked the owner for a board of ashwood. He looked at me suspiciously, and asked, "What will you give me for it?" "I want to pay for it." I said, innocently. "But I don't want money for it, and if you have nothing else to offer you can forget it." This humiliating answer made me angry and brave at the same time. That same night, I stole a suitable board from the stack I remembered seeing, thinking it wouldn't be noticed. I didn't realize, that the sawed boards were stacked to dry in form of the original trunk, with small cross-pieces as spacers.

I went to the carpenter and so did the sawyer. He asked the carpenter who he got the board from. Satisfied with the information, he went to the gendarme and pressed charges against me for theft. The gendarme came to us without delay, and asked me if I had stolen the board. I admitted it, and told him that I wanted to buy a board from the owner, but he wouldn't give me one for money. If at all, only for another item, and I didn't have that. The gendarme said, "So, so. If that's true, then come with me." We went to the owner of the

sawmill, who now for his part was asked if my statement was true.

Since there were witnesses (some workers had observed it), he grudgingly had to admit it had been so. He was then told that he was the actual catalyst of this theft, and that it wouldn't have happened if he had accepted my money, as was his duty, and left me the board! For the sake of peace, the good village policeman suggested that he accept the money for the ominous board (five Reichsmark) and withdraw the charges. He agreed.

Since money was always scarce and valuable at home, I now learned that it was almost worthless. Since I didn't receive a wage from the farmer, not even a penny, but could eat enough every day, this was much more important to me than money, which I didn't need. Now it dawned on me that money isn't a commodity, but a promise, and at this stage an empty one. What really had value now were goods, in whichever form!

Our good uncle Eduard Bay had meanwhile changed his ceramic production over from decorative ceramics to tableware, because that was now sought-after, and it was a good exchange object. In the meantime, bartering had boomed, and it took place on the so-called black market, but it was strictly forbidden. The former occupying forces watched over it. That was no obstacle though, for a clever black marketeer. I first joined a savvy trafficker who got goods from the Bay production, and who couldn't turn me down (which he rather would have).

Now a whole new stage in life began again, which consisted of constant train travel, but only in the French zone. In the last days of the war, the German Wehrmacht fought fiercely

against the Invasion of the Americans in this area, because now it was about their own homeland. Consequentially much was destroyed there, and after the passage of the Americans, the people barely had an intact pot in the house. This now offered us a macabre advantage. We only visited farming villages, and there was at least something edible again among the farmers, but nothing else. This made me realize that you couldn't get anything with money which had a value of goods. There was still something very important you could pay for with money though, namely a train ticket with the Reichsbahn (German State Railway), as it was then still called. If you needed money, you only had to offer cigarettes at the train stations. Then you got five Reichsmark for one cigarette. Most of the time, 10 cigarettes were exchanged for 50 Reichsmark, so that one could travel further than the zone limits allowed.

After visiting two farms with my escort, we divided the next village between us, and I set out on my own with the newfound knowledge of bartering. I wanted to apply the most important factor of dealing right away, namely haggling, which was always fun. Haggle means nothing else than to get as much as possible of something, but to give as little for it. Two opposites collide, and in the beginning it looks as if you will never come to an agreement.

Now you need a feel for how important what you have to offer is to the other person . One must not forget that bartering is, in a certain way, also a trade of honor. It's about the "honor" of having the feeling: I "ripped him off", in other words "I pulled one over on him." The farmers, very familiar with this method since ancient times, immediately realized that I was a bloody beginner. They pulled one over on me without me noticing it, and gave me the feeling, like "Hans in Luck", to have made a

good deal. Back on the train home, we showed each other our achievements. My companion was satisfied when he saw that I was probably no competitor for him. He bragged about what he had gotten hold of, and what I had done wrong. But he was mistaken, because failure spurred me on even more.

First I went to our train station where I met a nice, elderly train driver who would render me very valuable services in the future. He liked me right away, probably because at that time, despite the care I got on the farm, I physically still made a rather piteous impression on him. I told him what I planned to do, and he got me a list of train connections, and departure times. Now I could easily set up a plan, so I thought, but there were other problems that weren't calculable. The trains were rarely on time; a problem that hasn't fully been resolved to this day. The delays had an advantage though - everything is good for something - the trains were mostly overcrowded with hoarders and black marketeers. If you were lucky, you got hold of a hot cup of broth in the waiting rooms.

But most important, I got to know the most diverse people. So I was able to get close to people that I never would have met in the overcrowded trains. I received important information about how and where to barter, where the strictest controls were, and how to cross the zonal borders to expand the scope of action, because there was hardly anything to be gained in our poor French zone besides food from the farmers. Now one could choose. The British were in the north, and the Americans in the south. Northern Germany was destroyed by bombs, especially the Ruhr region, in contrast to southern Germany, which was spared more. Both parts of the country were at first inaccessible through the zonal borders. The eastern zone, which Stalin claimed, was worse off. The people

there were plundered even more. The French jealously watched over their border, because Stalin didn't want to grant them a zone. Churchill stood up for them though, and so they were assigned one, much to our dismay. For now, I had to make do with my home zone.

Since my sisters and I urgently needed new shoes, during my travels, and waiting in train stations, I learned where they could be gotten; in a town in the Palatinate named Hauenstein. So I took the train there. When I arrived, I was told that the French had confiscated all shoe factories, and the shoes made by local workers were all sent to France. A French officer was the administrator. I was shown where he lived, and I went. A startled, young woman opened the door, and it suddenly came to my mind, that I couldn't speak to her in her language. So I just spoke in my language, and listed what I had to offer. To my surprise, in best German, she said "Please come in, and show me what you have." When she noticed my surprise, she said she came from the town of Lothringen, and had to learn both languages there.

Besides tableware, I also had some decorative ceramics from my uncle's prewar stock. The young woman was elated, and asked what I wanted for it. Well, what already? Shoes of course, they can be had here. She said her husband would be coming home for lunch soon, and then I could tell him what kind of shoes I want. She noticed my scepticism, because now I felt uneasy about the matter, but she reassured me that I had nothing to fear from her husband. He had been a prisoner of war in Germany, and had been treated well. He also spoke some German. When he came and saw how excited his pretty, young wife was over my old ceramics, we quickly came to an agreement. This encounter became a friendship that lasted

until the currency reform in July 1948. But until then, I could order shoes in all sizes and colors. Of course only in small quantities.

Meanwhile, due to my many contacts, I expanded my assortment to everything and anything required to purchase a particular item. An example: I wanted a bicycle from someone who had one but didn't need it anymore, and he wanted a piglet for it. So I went to the farmers in search of one. They all had several pigs in the stables, and of course younger ones which they raised, because the older ones had been butchered.

"Short question. What does it cost, and what do you want for it?" Money was still the standard value of trade here, but without being used. So the question was still "What does it cost?" He stated the price, and wanted fabric for a suit. Hallelujah! I offered him shoes. "No. Suit fabric, or the pig stays in the stable." He also remained steadfast with other objects I could meanwhile get. Bicycle and piglet didn't find each other. But since everything is good for something, I realized that I was missing something essential in my assortment: fabrics! But these were only available in what for us was the promised land; in the American zone, especially in southern Germany. That wasn't fair.

Zonal borders didn't exist for trains, but they were being controlled, at least by the French. I never saw Americans on the borders; it didn't interest them. Passes were issued, but only for rare exceptions, and such led me on my first trip abroad across the border. An acquaintance of my father had a son with a rare disease who had to go to Wiesbaden for therapy. He was my age, pretty much my size, and had such a special pass without a photo. It was handed to me with

hesitation, and for something from my black assortment of course. With that I took a test drive to my friends in my beloved Limburg, with no problem. The pass was acknowledged. On this trip I met the nice train driver from Siershahn again.

Since I could expect to be supplied with bread from the people in the bakery again, I asked him if he would take some back for me to Siershahn in his wagon. He agreed because he knew that something would fall off for him. The date we set worked out. I delivered my bread to his wagon, and climbed in a passenger wagon with my pass. It was easy to cross the border again. I picked up my bread in Siershahn, and gave him his due share. During the ride home in my compartment, I came up with the idea to do the same on the way to Limburg. This time, not with bread, but with my bartering objects for the American zone. He agreed, and we made arrangements to meet again in Limburg, from where I rode further south, unchecked, to Wuerttemberg. A few days later, I returned to Limburg to meet him again, and then rode back home. Among other things, this was how I obtained suit fabric for the piglet, and with the piglet, my bicycle.

Meanwhile, I learned the skill of red-technique (red is a dialect expression that refers to the German word "ritz", which means "scratch." Red is pronounced "rade"). Hereby one carved ornaments into hand thrown pots which were then coated with cobalt (for blue), or iron oxide (for brown), then fired in the kiln, and so got the salt glaze. It's an old technique that is timeless, still manufactured today, and has its fans and collectors. I was payed for my work with these pieces, which were particularly popular in my barter business.

Since I was now able to get all sorts of material, I also thought of myself, and the condition of my clothes, which were made almost entirely of old, redyed uniforms. At that time there were still master tailors in our village who were almost exclusively occupied with so-called "turning". This means that worn down, and already shiny suits were unstitched, then turned inside out, and then sewn back together again, so they looked like new.

Now I came along with brand new fabric, and wanted to have a suit tailored. I thought he would be amazed over my acquirement, but he just asked, "And where is the lining? Where is the yarn? Where are the buttons? Where is the buckram? Where is the bottom binding for the pants?" Without a word, I tucked my fabric under my arm, and went to the next master tailor. But when he started with "Where is ...?" again, I waved him off, and said, "Write down what, and how much you need, and I'll try to get it. What I don't get, we'll take from old suits." Now I discovered that it's much easier to acquire good material than the many little things that make it a suit. In time, I gradually got everything together, and one day I was dressed in a great suit, with a new shirt, and a new tie; all gotten from the American zone. The new shoes I got from the French, who I also visited in the meantime, because shoes couldn't be gotten anywhere else.

My business was running well, and there was nothing you couldn't get, albeit by swapping several times. I further deepened my friendship with the train driver to our mutual benefit, because back then, parcel post was also transported in wagons, which proved to be of great use for me. In doing so, I discovered my talent for organizing. I was under way most of the week, and travelling became more and more enjoyable. I

had memorized almost all train connections. Since the transport problem was solved, I was always looking for new bases, where I most also found food, and accommodation.

One day I received an invitation to the funfair from the farmer I worked for as a farmhand, which was the village of my first love. Regarding my newest clothes, I gladly accepted the invitation. Since I had a second suit made beside the first one, I strolled through the village on Saturday evening wearing the first, where I was joyfully greeted, and then showed up on Sunday wearing the second. First I went to the church, and later to the dance hall, where in the meantime new young girls had grown up, and as I already knew, eyed the boys shy and giggling. First, I enjoyed the admiration, and astonished looks over my appearance, (This was once Boxel's farmhand?) but I only got dressed up like this for my first love. First, the familiar girls were served on the dance floor, who gratefully enjoyed it.

Meanwhile, it didn't escape my attention that one of the very young girls had a great similarity to my first love, who unfortunately wasn't present (which almost offended me, because I was really only there because of her). I then danced my rounds with the young chicks, except for the one with the similarity; I saved her for later.

Little had changed in the village since my departure, the postwar lack of everything except for food still prevailed. Now people wanted to know where, and how I came to such great things.

Modestly, I said, "They come from where they're available."

"And where is that?"

"You just have to find out, and that's best done when you're

constantly traveling, and meeting lot's of people who give you tips on where to get this, or that. If you can give some tips yourself, you learn more, and more."

After this lecture, I wanted to take pretty girls in my arms again, and headed straight for the girl with the similarity. I noticed that she wanted to tell me something, but she didn't really dare. But then she blurted, "Irmgard isn't here!"

"She won't come either." I said, laconically. My answer baffled her.

"And how do you know that?"

"Because she doesn't want to see me, otherwise she would be here, or do you have another answer? You look very much like her, are you related?" She turned red as a beet, and wanted to get away from me, but I didn't let her go. I wanted to know now.

„She's my cousin."

"Then you know why she can't come?"

She just nodded.

We silently finished the dance, and then I brought her back to her place, and left without saying goodbye. Then I went to my former employer and to my old straw bed.

Since I saw no sense in hanging around for another day, it was time to get back home. Business was waiting, and it also helped me to forget the village episode, because my schedule was getting tight.

In the meantime, I had some potteries to supply with my red (Ritz)-technique. This is only possible when the clay is in a soft, leather-hard condition, that can only be maintained a short time with a damp cloth.

In order not to neglect my barter business, I had to travel again, and again to implement the goods that I received as payment. My trade became more and more extensive, and diverse. I even managed to get a couple of matching ski boots from the French for the skis from the ominous stolen board. Since I wanted my own workshop, I managed to get all the needed materials, and had one built.

1948 - Currency Reform

Exceeding all expectations, meanwhile the British and American forces decided to convert the worthless Reichsmark into a whole new currency. For me it was a disaster, because it meant the complete ruin of my well-organized black market activity. I will never forget June 18th, 1948. I was standing in the main train station in Koblenz when the news was announced over loud-speakers: "On June 20th the currency reform will be implemented." A day later, on June 21st, the DM (Deutsche Mark) was the only means of payment in the western zones. It was the end of low cost train travel. Everyone now received a immediate payout of 40.00 DM and a month later another of 20.00 DM. All Reichsmark and Rentenmark had to be deposited onto a Reichsmark account, and the conversion had to be applied for. The accounts were then checked and converted to Deutsche Mark (DM) in the ratio 1 to 10. Suddenly, all sorts of things appeared in shop windows that hadn't been seen in years. Only now most people didn't have the money to buy them. From now on, a whole new era began for the people in the three Western Zones, in which they found their way around only slowly. The goods that were now offered were all hoarded things that were previously meant for bartering.

Since these stocks were soon used up, further production of goods was necessary. The Americans pumped additional money into the economy with the so-called Marshall Plan. This enabled banks and savings associations (Sparkasse) to grant loans, so the reconstruction of destroyed cities and industries could also begin. Thereby the economic cycle slowly began to turn. Decommissioned factories carefully began to produce and offer goods again. First consumer goods,

and later on also luxury goods, whatever was meant by that, surely for everyone something else. It could already be a good-smelling soap, because for years we had to wash with clay soap which was totally odorless.

In this last phase, my life in relative freedom was completely filled with the exchange of all kinds of objects, and didn't allow any other future visions. Now I was literally out on the street, without the shimmer of an idea how life will go on. With the last valid ticket, I sadly rode home. It was to be my last big train ride for a long time.



1948 - return to normal life

Epoch finished, similar to the farewell to the farm, but that had opened completely new ways for me. Since, according to my experiences, "everything is good for something", I now looked around for what that might be. Lo and behold, my beloved technical school reopened and I made it to graduate. And since I had built my own kiln in my workshop, I started my own production and immediately got an order for feeding vessels in aquariums in different shapes. And from the same customer an order for large round disks with approximately 8cm diameter, ca. 1cm thick, with consecutive numbers. These were used in crematoriums to mark the cremated bodies... It was not a truly edifying activity.

To stop being a drain on my parent's pocket, as we say, I tried it as a helping potter at the neighboring liquor pitcher factory. It worked right away, because I had also learned pottery at school. There I had to give the still soft, cylindrically pressed forms a shoulder and a small neck, so that the pitcher could be closed exactly, which was not so easy. For a while I enjoyed it, especially because I now had a secure income, with which I could pay my parents the costs of my preservation and also afford me a lot of things. Once when a big truck came to pick up a load of our jugs, each of us got two pitchers of Steinhäger schnapps. I think it was a gin swill. I had never drank schnapps, but I did not want to be inferior to others in drinking. At night I almost fought for my life because I had to vomit so badly. Once again, one of my mottos: "Everything is good for something!" For a whole long life, to this day, no sip of schnapps (or similar swill) has flowed through my throat again, because I had to learn painfully, what a terrible poison alcohol is.

This episode had consequences again. It took quite a while for me to get over this alcoholic poisoning. But there was no way back to this place, where everything reminded me of this disease. Now my uncle Eduard Bay was back on the line. His company was doing well, and my father was a master burner there, but not for long. Because Uncle Bay also let one of these advanced electric tunnel kilns be built which led to the end of jobs with hundreds of years old tradition. Just like with the potters, who were replaced by plaster molds. It didn't take long until all the major companies started using this method, turning these wonderful decorative ceramics into mass articles!

Imagine, these tunnel ovens delivering every day, every night, every Sunday and holiday without interruption, finished and faultless ceramic parts on the journey to the clientele. And that, at cheaper prices than would have been possible with the earlier method. Since these accumulating quantities could no longer be absorbed in such quantities in the previous radius, sales were now distributed worldwide. What I get confirmed every day on Facebook. Having experienced these phases first-hand, I believe that the beginning of this progress marked the beginning of the end of this beautiful decorative ceramics era.

I was offered to make molds for the factory in my workshop - which I gratefully accepted. I still had a steady income and did not have to go to a factory. It was not a lot of fun, because I was not challenged. But since I was always very diligent, I earned so much that I could fulfill my biggest dream: I bought the first car of my life, a 1937 pre-war Opel Kadett, a dream car. I never drove a more beautiful car after that. The next generations became better, I have to admit, but never as

elegant as before. The wind tunnel has meanwhile shaved all cars clean.

Now I experienced the last free years of my youth, without suspecting it. We were a group that were not boys anymore, but still not men yet. On Sundays we toured the dance halls at the local church festivals. At first we were four, but word got around, and we temporarily got to twelve; that was already a proud troop. And when we moved into halls or party tents, we always found equal attention from girls and boys. We looked around with practiced eyes, and the prettiest girls were quickly served. As an elder and organizer, I kept an eye on the boys, and before a ruckus hit, I signaled a quick departure. But this was often delayed by girls, because they did not want to let go of one or more of the handsome boys.

The carefree life continued for some years. Meanwhile, we had also visited the village where I had spent half a year stilling my hunger (and for my first love). As the only war participant (!) and organizer of the group, I was the undisputed leader.

I put this visit under the slogan: "respectable behaviour", that meant not getting drunk or staging provocations! Next, and that was more difficult, was to let the village boys take the precedence for the invitation to dance, so at the first sounds of music, and to be satisfied with the girls who remained sitting, which was an abomination to them. They remained standing, stubborn as they were used to picking the blooming flowers. I also explained the reason for that because I did not want to appear as the leader of a thugs gang.

But now something unforeseen happened. A cheeky girl among the spurned stood up and went to one of our handsome boys and pulled him onto the dance floor. Immediately, the rest of the remaining ones jumped up and grabbed what they could get. This time a few boys remained sitting or standing, just like me. Since they knew me well here, they also knew who I was waiting for and they noted with relish that she was not there, for whatever reason. But I should learn the reason later. But her cousin was there with her brother, whom I had met years ago in the war in a four-week military training camp.

I went to them. Her brother greeted me with great joy, but I got rebuffed by his sister. A little surprised, I asked if I had done anything to her. Then she snapped at me: "You still ask that?" "Yees, I ask you that and want to know what and when I did something to you." After some hesitation, it came out that I had said something about her to the brother of one of her friends. What, she did not say. I was completely perplexed, looked around the hall and saw the rapporteur. I took her hand and pulled her across the hall to the rapporteur and said calmly to him: "Please tell me again what I said to you about this girl back then, I forgot it."

Then he slowly admitted: "You did not say anything, you did not need that either, because the two of them were always just talking about you. That annoyed me so much, and then I said to my sister, if she (who I just held by the hand) would know what you said about her, she would have a really stupid look on her face!"

That's exactly what she had now and she wanted to jump at him angrily. I pulled her back and brought her to her brother at the table, where she began to cry pitifully in rage and shame. I was very sorry for that now. I tried to console her and interpret

the boy's actions not as malice but as painful and pure jealousy. He was punished enough now with the embarrassment that now hung on him, and now everyone would make fun of it.

She had gotten a little older and prettier, she looked as good as her cousin. Quite the contrary: She was very slim, had beautiful bright natural curls and a lovely face, which I would have liked to look at a little longer. But my people gave me the signal to set out, because for them this evening had been rather boring and it was still early enough to try our luck at some other funfair.

When I got up to leave, the siblings asked me to stay a little longer but I did not want to, but I promised to visit them alone, hugged the girl and gave her a tender kiss on her forehead, manly shook her brother's hand and disappeared, unaware that this evening should once again brutally change my world.

The relationship with the girls was determined by our strictly educated chastity. Unchastity was a mortal sin, because when you died with it, without confession and absolution from the pastor, you went straight to hell, where only howling and teeth crunching ruled and even threatening fires burned.

In general, especially for us children, this so-called dear God was a permanent threat. He harassed us with constant threats and prohibitions. The "You should" and "You should not" were our ubiquitous companion, with the effect that we had to confess every four weeks. The so-called confessional was a box with a half-door in front, a curtain above it and on the sides left and right a board wall with a knee-bench for the remorseful sinner. At the height of the head was a perforated

area through which one had to whisper his sins. On the other side one menacingly saw an ear and there was always a problem, namely: Where to get the sins? Where and how and with what could we sin at all? Nobody helped us here, only the imagination, and this is very differently arranged and pronounced. I had no problem with it, which proved very useful in my very different stages of life. There you got along not all that bad with inventiveness and also learned behaviour rules for the future life. So we daringly lied our un-committed sins in the inclined ear, and the last sentence always had to be: "I lied", so absolution (forgiveness of sins) was not endangered. Then, by virtue of that, we were able to walk dignifiedly to holy communion. (The obligation to confess was only introduced in 1215 by Pope Innocent III as a control instrument).

This was a stopover to explain our behavior, specifically and in particular, to the other sex, so unknown to us. We were so prude that we did not dare to kiss the girls on the lips, afraid this would make them pregnant. Totally unexplained, we remained unconcerned for some time and indulged in the unbound life. For a while I still enjoyed these unrepeatable freedoms, coupled with the almost childlike lightheartedness that you would never reach again later. For some, it enters slowly, the so-called seriousness of life. With me it struck suddenly and brutally.

The activity that I still practiced at that time could not satisfy me in the long run, even though it was well paid. The errors and confusions of the war and post-war era slowly turned into a quiet normalcy of the reconstruction of the houses and factories. With the help of the new money, the economy slowly started to move again, and after a few years, people were already talking about a "Wirtschaftswunder" (economic miracle). Because the time and the possibilities were there to try something new in this country which was already in the midst of awakening. With the pretty new money, it became better and better to make something, which always brought new money. And now something happened again, which I had already experienced several times. When an epoch expires, for whatever reason, the way is free for something new!

Now, when one is ready to apply the qualities of imagination, vitality, and risk-taking, one increases considerably the further development of his current life. Whereby misjudgments are unavoidable and can even be useful, because they also further us. I was now offered a permanent job at the company Fohr, which already had a good name before the war. It rose to a very successful decorative ceramics company with a very capable ceramist who specialized in so-called running glazes. My father was a master burner there. The kilns were all fired with wood and coal. The burning time went on for days and nights and the most important phase was the last one, because the exact temperature led to joy or suffering. It was metered with the help of so-called Seger cones, which were placed near the inner wall in front of a spyhole, through which one could control them from the outside. These cones consisted of different clay substances with different melting points. There were always 3 cones pressed diagonally into a soft clay block, each with a 10° C different melting point. Accordingly, the

running glazes or enamel glazes were aligned. Here my father came into action, because as a master burner he was responsible for a successful burning. I was very often there to bring him food and monitored with him the last and most important burning phase.

The company was owned by two brothers, Wilhelm and Alfred Fohr. They had differences of opinions and separated, which was then also insurmountable, because they built a wall right in the middle of the factory and were both bankrupt in no time.

One part of the company was located next to the factory of my Uncle Eduard Bay, who later bought it. The other part was taken over by the Jasba company, which then upgraded it technically with an electric tunnel kiln and produced its own products there. Bay, Fohr and Jasba were all kindred and helped each other. Jasba then offered Wilhelm and his son Artur Fohr in 1953 to take over the business again. That's what they did and they started to produce anew. I was offered a job as a modeler. I did not hesitate a moment to swap the previous well-paid job for a lower salary, but a much more interesting job, and looked forward to the challenge, much to the chagrin of my uncle. It should not be the last hassle of those I would give him in my further development. He sent me his book keeper, who threatened that if I got off at him, I could never knock on his door again. It did not help him, threats have not worked on me for a long time. I had decided and absolutely wanted this change. I should experience such situations more often, and it was always painful for both sides.

A classmate and friend, Oswald Kleudgen, who was an excellent ceramics painter, accompanied me. In a short space of time, I created a completely new range of form, which was totally different from what had been produced here so far. In the meantime, Oswald had developed some decor suggestions. We looked for something suitable and made sample pieces that could be presented to the clientele. The customers were enthusiastic, mainly the English, and so we had a great success off the cuff. Also, I became a legend at first thanks to my artful skills to blow small balls of clay through a glass tube on passers-by from my window in the upper floor, and to hit them. Some of those affected and affronted went into the office to complain and wanted to confront the shooter. They threatened with offence reports. Then the angry ones were led into my room, which was empty. The shooter had meanwhile disappeared in the wide halls of the factory and thus was nowhere to be seen. The offer to look at the workers was futile for them, because they had not seen me, so an identification was impossible. That was indeed the last performance from my youth.

1954 - The serious side of life

The promise I had made at this memorable fair, in the already well-mentioned farming village, to the well-known brother and sister (said cousin) had been redeemed. I had visited her alone, with a result that was to change my life from scratch. The disappointment with my first love first saved me from up-coming feelings on closer encounters with the opposite sex. But this time I had not quite managed to disappear carelessly. This weakness should take revenge immediately. At the ardent request, for a soon return, I could not stand firm and left hope for her. Hope is a not to be underestimated force, which imperiously strives for fulfillment. I was afraid that it could become something more serious, but I really wanted to avoid it at this stage because I was not ready to disband my Sunday group. At first, I made the pitiful attempt to get this thing fallen into oblivion.

But I had underestimated said hope, because now a date came in the way in the form of an invitation with the request to come to the house of the siblings at the time of the upcoming fun fair. Now it was getting serious, because if I agreed, I also had to leave my group alone on this most important day for us. That had never happened before. But somehow this situation was not really inconvenient for me. I was older than almost all and, above all, more mature. And it was clear to me, this time of carefreeness could not always go on, because everything has its time, nothing stays as it is, everything is in motion. So I found the time ripe for another change in my still young life.

Since this girl had meanwhile become more important to me than the Sundays tripping around on the village fairgrounds in the area, my farewell was not so difficult as I had feared, at least for me. But it was inconceivable to my nice boys, and they were consoling themselves in the hope that it would be a one-time event. I was sorry for them, because it had been a great time with them, with always some surprises that came up spontaneously. As consistently as I had detached myself from my uncle, I now also operate this change. Because one thing I had already had to learn by now: Inconsistency, is always the worst solution, whatever it's about! Any procrastination of problems only makes them bigger.

The family I was invited to consisted of four people. Besides the brother and sister, there was a little girl and the mother, who met me with understandable mistrust. The father went missing in the war and never showed up again. The mother only knew me as a farmhand from a farmer, and that was not the best recommendation, because she was not unaware of the interest that her big daughter had developed for me. It was not a very pleasant situation for me because I could not show rich parents or an academic education. Which did not bother her daughter in the least, because she did not save up her sympathy proofs, even her brother did not mind. But I had a special status to offer, as I owned the beautiful Opel Kadett, and was one of the few in the village who owned a car. In the marquee, I also had to expect no applause by the young men of the village. Because I already had taken the prettiest girl for me, if only for one little while, so that none of them had got access to her afterwards. She then was wooed away by a boy from another village and thus finally left the supply market for a partnership in this village.

Just me of all people now appeared again on the supply market and as usual, again with the prettiest one, who left no doubts with her facial expressions, for whom she had decided. I was so fond of her spontaneously that I carelessly let my emotions run wild. It was all very different this time than with her cousin. No trace of prudery, as it was then. We only mutely assured each other of our mutual affection, but without any eroticism.

We were so busy with our feelings that we had completely forgotten her brother, because he had meanwhile disappeared without a word. I looked at my partner blankly, then she said to me a little bashful, that her brother is shy with girls. I did not want to believe that because he was a handsome, strong young man with blond curls. I decided to teach him something about my experiences with girls. Because up to the insurmountable barrier of sexuality, I could tell him various rules.

Now the next change has already begun, and I had to take away the hope from my young people to spend Sundays with them again as usual. It was very sad, but I could not and did not want go on, because I was already firmly in a new beginning, which I absolutely wanted to pursue and as soon turned out, had to. Now I spent the weekends with the family and could no longer imagine being anywhere other than with her and all the others now not only accepted me but also liked me. We took nice road trips with my car, and everything was coming up roses.

But: "The undivided joy of life is not given to any earthling." [Quotation from "The Ring of Polykrates" by Friedrich Schiller]. The mother became ill, very sick even and we were worried about her life. Shortly thereafter, I got a call in my company from a relative of the family, to come immediately. The two girls needed me and did not want anyone else. Her brother hung himself and is dead! There it was, the seriousness of life, which has a lot to do with responsibility. Responsibility that is expected from us through all our life in the most varied forms, and which we can not and must not escape, otherwise you can not be happy yourself! The worst thing was that his sister had searched for him and found a hanged man, a picture she would never get rid of anymore. What was suddenly demanded of me, I became aware of only gradually. First of all, to grasp the incomprehensible, which was beyond comprehension. Then the girls without their seriously ill mother, in this situation. I was now requested to do actions that would bring even mature people to their limits. And I was anything but grown-up, had just been a green, naive boy.

It benefited me now that I had to take responsibility for very young children since my earliest childhood. And when my father was away for years in the war, I was taking some responsibility for my younger sisters, which I did with great seriousness. But that was no comparison with what I was about to do here, because back then my mother was there, too, and I was not alone with my siblings. The only good thing about it was that I had no idea of what else would be required of me. At that time, in such a small village, the village community was still so interconnected that if anything happened, the whole village would know within an hour or less.

The forwarding always started with the same sentence: "Did you hear, that...?" There was never a secret hidden, and in the matter that had brought me here on such short notice, not at all. But that also had its good side, because neighbourly help was urgently needed. When I arrived, the worst was already done, and all I had to do was take care of the totally shell-shocked sisters. Her dead brother was already lying clean in an adjoining room, covered with a bed sheet.

First, I made sure that the little sister had to leave this house and be accommodated with neighbors' children, as she wished. When that was settled, I thanked those who had helped, and who planned to stay. I then asked them to leave me alone with the dead boy's sister, which they did not like, because they still wanted to know why the sister wanted to have me, instead of a relative. And yet, it would have been easy to recognize how far we already were with our relationship. When I was alone with her and wanted to take her in her arms, she held me back and asked in a trembling voice: "Will my brother be buried at the wall now?" Heaven and hell, I had not wasted any thought on that yet, there were more important things to do, so I believed. But before I started to think about it, the second question came to me, to which I could not answer at the first moment: "Who tells Mum?". I silently took her in my arms and just let her cry, cry and cry, while I racked my brain to answer those memorable questions. So the wall first, that was a tough nut to crack! At that time, according to the Catholic Church's interpretation, her brother was a suicide, and whether murderer or suicide, they were not buried in the sacred graveyard's earth, but in an unconsecrated place at the said wall to remain damned for eternity.

So cruel was the Catholic Church back then to the desperate people who could not or did not want to live anymore. Because if someone goes so far as to kill himself, then it must be very bad for him, and then they additionally wanted to punish him with damnation! The church dealt just as hard with the poor bereaved. They were already innocently punished enough. To have a suicide in the family was reputed as a disgrace, and that was a constant burden that could not be escaped.

At that time, my first doubts about this dear God and his servants occurred to me, they should not be the last! Since no one came to the usual deathwatch, I asked a young man from the neighborhood to spend the night with us to prevent malicious suspicion. Almost the whole night we talked about the elementary question of "Why oh why." I could not contribute, but the young man said her brother was panicking because he feared that his mother, whom he loved so much, and who loved him too, would die and he could not shoulder the burden of responsibility. But my opinion was that there must have been several reasons, but we would probably never know and indeed we never found out. It was now important for me, who would tell her mother as soon as possible, so that it would not be told to her by a malicious tongue? Silence. Then the young man meant that maybe I was the right person. Hey, I did not agree and said nothing more on this topic, because I had a better idea!

My idea was aimed straight at the village pastor, who, however, was considered a very puritanical man. I asked for a talk and since I had already spent half a year in this village and appeared in church every sunday, which could not have escaped his notice, I got an appointment. I stood before him

with an urgent request to inform the poor sick mother, whose husband was still considered missing, of this cruel stroke of fate. He should do it namely in his position as a spiritual supporter. Who else would be better for that?

He frowned, and I added: "Now that God has this poor woman who has already lost her husband and is now being punished like that, only a servant of God can have access to her before she surrenders to the desperation that would mean her death and two underage children would be orphans. Only you can prevent that now." I said. "At the same time you could promise her that her poor boy would receive a dignified burial and would not be buried at the wall." He was silent for a long time, then he looked at me and said, "Why are you so committed to this family?"

I looked fixedly at him for a few moments and said: "They called me. The girls did not want neighbors or relatives, only I should come to them, so they expected help and support from me, and that's why I'm here now." He remained silent for a while, then he said, "Do you know what you are asking me to do?"

I nodded my head and said softly, "Yes, but what would you do in my place?" He did not answer and dismissed me obviously disturbed and angry. That could not mean any good. As I knew something about the church hierarchy, I pondered who I could address in the deanery, and if that did not help, to reach to the diocese. I wanted to fight for the honour of this house and at least leave nothing unattempted. If nothing would work, I would initiate my withdrawal from this "club", as a late revenge, so to speak. This all went through my head. In the meantime, they had not been idle and had put the body in a coffin and made all preconditions for a funeral.

The only question that remained was: Where? Only the pastor could decide that. A delegation from the parish council was sent to him and - what a miracle, he had not only been to the mother to comfort her, but also promised a normal burial. Because of the uncertain outcome of my operation with the pastor, I had not told anyone about it, either before, especially not afterwards, and held back modestly in the further process. Maybe that would have happened without my intervention, but since this was far from certain, I was pleased to have tried something unusual, even in terms of a failure. This realization has helped me to get further in the further course of my long life, namely to do something unusual once in a while, albeit with uncertain outcome. During the procedure, which followed, I slowly became aware of the situation in which I was here, which I would never have had chosen myself in life if I'd had the choice. In no way associated with this family not long ago, I was suddenly assigned the stead of the dead brother. As such, I now stood before the open grave, two sobbing children left and right. That's when I knew that from now on, nothing would be the way it once was.

So once again a period of life was over and with what a finality. What would come, seemed to me now almost decided. And so it was, the children were looked after by relatives, and I came every weekend. At some point, while clearing up the brother's things, on the edge of a magazine, we found a text whose content was not unlike a legacy, it read: "Dear Heinz, help my dear loved ones." This could already be considered in our current situation as a request from the hereafter! After some time, the mother came back home, which then gave me a grisly experience.

When she was up and about again on some degree, she wanted to go to the grave of her son. Who else besides me should lead her there, that was self-evident for everyone. Not for me, but I found no objection and brought her to the grave. She looked down for a while, then raised her head way back, looked up at the sky, and then let out a scream... like I had never heard before (and never will hear again, I hope). It pierced, as the saying goes, marrow and bone, over mountain and valley, not wanting to end, until I was so annoyed that I grabbed her by the arm and pulled her away from the grave and led her home. I remembered the mourners who formerly had been hired for such occasions, they would have turned green with envy. I was also very pale, as I was told later.

For me, this episode had a threefold effect, which I gladly gave into, angry as I was, because I had been sent to the forecourt of hell without warning. But also the feelings of grief had noticeably cooled and gave me the opportunity of a quick departure. On the way home, I also got the suspicion that these funeral cries were just a performance. And I resolved, as much as possible, to repress everything that burdened me - and that was already a decent plenty.

Some things which I had started, were not getting done in my company. I caught up with that in record time. The result were timelessly classic but also modern forms, which were produced successfully for many years after my departure (change to another company). Oswald developed suitable decors for them. After more than 60 years, the now resulting objects should meet me again under very special circumstances. In addition, I took over the supervision of casting and other departments, which were entrusted with the production of blanks.

It was particularly about the pricing for each operational step. In the process, I got to know the trade unions when the workers were not satisfied with the prices I set. There were heated debates and sometimes also lazy compromises. But I did it all with enthusiasm, and the depressing experiences moved more and more into the background. When I thought I'd made it to the end of this episode, a boy from the neighboring factory left a letter for me in the office. It was from her, of course. Now I stood at a fork in the road. I still could choose. But what? I then decided to go for the cheapest, to delay, to give time for reflection. I could stand this for a good while, until then the obligatory funfair invitation came from my farmer. And then I fell into the trap.



1954 - And then I was a family

Then everything went very fast. And the seriousness of life had me already firmly under control. There was a wedding on a small scale, far away in a small town on the Rhine. Thereafter, at my express request, immediately to a wedding trip to the mountains. It was winter and real mountains and snow have always been my dream. Our train was a special train for winter vacationers. That was still there at the time, with lots of nice and funny people who had already been part of it and were able to tell great stories. I have not been sitting next to my now wedded girl for some time, just running around in anticipation. Until a slipper hit my head that seemed familiar to me. I looked around for her and she pointed to the empty seat next to her. Oh yes, I completely forgot about that. I was married to a pretty woman, so I sat down again. When we (I) announced that we were on our honeymoon, no one was left sitting and I was often able to change my place, now it did not attract attention. Our destination was Mittenwald. Once there, we were welcomed with a brass band, which we found great. There were also many people with signs on a pole with names on them. That was in 1953, and it was almost all private quarters. We found our names quickly at a nice younger man. He loaded our luggage into a hand cart and we set off. The house, which was to be our quarters, was quite new and looked good in the alpine style, with rooms for guests.

We got a nice room, with a balcony, looked around and looked at us, because here it was that our wedding night would come to fulfillment. And since none of us had been told anything about the how, innocent and unknowing as we were, we were now and here to lose both (the innocence and

the unknowing), through practices that we had diligently avoided, thanks to the strict Catholic education. The first attempt was a sheer flop, and I was ashamed of this uncontrolled petting. There was no demand for a continuation of this action and we fell asleep fairly disappointed. The next morning, a very extensive breakfast awaited us. When our hosts saw our depressed faces, they believed that we did not like the breakfast. But we wanted to confess our mishap first and incidentally mentioned that we were on the honeymoon and had slept here for the first time together! Our hosts laughed with relief and congratulated us warmly, then they asked us in disbelief whether none of us had been prepared for it. We both shook our heads and said no, but they did not want to believe that. But now they insisted that we should have breakfast first. We hesitated, then they said it was all right, how it went, and they would talk to us again later. After breakfast, they sat down to us and explained calmly and factually what we had tried there yesterday and why it had failed.

Since we (I) had come here to ski, we were sent to a ski rental now, and immediately my mood lifted and repressed this unpleasant episode. Mittenwald is located in the Karwendel foothills and is not only a winter sports resort, but also quite famous for its violin making. So it had a lot to offer and we wanted to enjoy it now. Skiing at that time was not yet a popular sport, but something more for the locals, who also had plenty of opportunity for it during the winter.

When we had loaded ourselves with the necessary equipment and found a man who should teach us the necessary things, we moved to the mountain. We did not climb it, but a hill, called the "Idiot Hill" (nursery slope) and which was intended

for beginners. There were also some of our train attendants, who struggled to conquer the hill - it looked miserable. But I've had some experience with my stolen boards, but always straight ahead with nothing standing in the way. I had not managed to do a curve, and that's what I wanted to learn here. There was neither a tow lift nor a groomed piste, so there was little chance of a curve. But the Norwegians had come up with something for that.

Our ski instructor drove up and wrote some nice turns in the snow and stopped, then he waved me to come. I did that and drove straight to him, without a hint of a curve, while he constantly screamed something like "Kristeln". He slipped sideways so as not to be knocked over, and as I passed him, he gave me a slight sideways thrust, so I staggered and landed in the snow. Now my poor girl was to come, but all the calls did not help. She did not move from the spot, so we marched back to the starting place. Now more and more of our train companions came and landed row by row, more or less all horizontally, in the snow, just like me. Since my young wifey now had company, I really wanted to continue and also to become able to cut curves. What the teacher meant by "Kristeln" was a new skiing system called "Kristiania", and then there was "Telemark", all from Norway. I tried very hard, but I was not satisfied. Now I was supposed to do "Kristeln", but I did not get very far and always built more beautiful tubs in the snow. when I looked up at one time, I saw two young women, their feet in the bindings, sitting on the back of the boards, slipping elegantly down the hill. One of them actually belonged to me. That was obviously fun to her, but I guess I was a bad role model and she had found someone whose method she liked better. I struggled with

"Kristiania" and "Telemark"-swing, while my partner maintained her style with evident pleasure, unlike me.

On the way home we went to a nice old inn and consumed a huge snack, and a beer with the same size. When we found each other again in the bed, after some hesitation, we began to try out what had been suggested to us as an initial occupation, as erotizing, which, of course, was nothing more than a tender mutual caress, which we had always severely denied ourselves (for well-known reasons, so as not to get close to hell) and now felt it so wonderful. And, oh miracle, my multi-purpose weapon suddenly gained in strength by the mutual caressing. now getting to the erogenous zones, the desire to come even closer together accelerated, and so we now succeeded effortlessly in what totally and literally failed yesterday. Now we were really married we appeared at the breakfast table with our faces radiant with joy. Our hosts beamed with joy and congratulated us once again very warmly.

After that, we did not feel like skiing anymore and we looked at the beautiful village, that had more to offer than mountains and snow, namely violin makers and their instruments. What a work of art is such a violin, and what beautiful sounds can be performed with it. But also how difficult is it, to elicit the harmonious tones. My girl was not so delighted with it, because she had been maltreated as a child with violin lessons. And she had annoyed her mother so much with her rasping until the horrible exercises ended for both of them. After a few more failed attempts to get home as perfect skiers, we just posed on ski for the photographer to show where we had been and what we had been doing. Then I took a 25-year break from skiing and only started again with it in the

Dolomites. But until that happened, my life was still so exciting and full of surprises. As it was before, it should stay on.

Now we were really married! The final confirmation was not long in coming, because, the elementary lesson for a wedding night became a success story in the form that we would soon count three, and we thought the family was complete now. But it took only one and a half year, then we were four. I had been accepted as an equal partner the village since the death of my brother-in-law, but it was always difficult for me to settle in or even adapt myself. But it came to real problems, when I refused to continue to go church on Sundays, as I usually did. And this was absolutely incomprehensible to my mother-in-law. As a way out, I chose to escape to Baumbach to my parents. Thereby, my desire was always stronger for a fundamental change. Thereby, my desire became stronger and stronger for a fundamental change. In my current company, I couldn't get ahead anyway.

1955 – Scheurich

So I quietly got active again, studied the trade journals, found two vacancies that were suitable for me and announced a visit. When I told this to my friend and colleague Oswald Kleudgen, he did not want to believe that I was serious about it. He rejected my suggestion to come with me to this job interview. But when the time came for the trip, I had changed his mind and he came along after all. We looked at the company and also found the owner very pleasant. I was impressed by the state of the technical equipment and for me it was clear, it's here I wanted to be. At parting, Mr. Scheurich put a silver five-mark coin in our hands and said he would be happy if we would make a commitment. The announcement of a change of location was badly received at home. Just like at Oswald's family. Which in our case was far more dramatic. The mother-in-law, now the proud grandmother of two grandchildren, was now losing no less than her daughter, her two grandsons, and her daughter's husband whom she had come to appreciate. Just because we did not move to a neighboring town. And now she was alone with her youngest child.

Now I have to praise both women. When they realized that it was important to me and that I was serious about it, none of them filed a contradiction. Especially since I could assure them that at first it would only change that I could only be with them at the weekends. The company had guaranteed us, Oswald and me, every weekend a fully fueled company car. So we were able to soothe our families until we were together again. Since I was out of the house every working day anyway, that made little difference.

I intended to stage a relocation anyway only when I was sure that my decision was correct. This, because I had the option of my current company, to be able to come back at any time. That was also true for Oswald. For our still current company that was already a bitter loss that could not be replaced so quickly. And indeed, we were not long away, then there was already a request, if we would like to come back. We did not want to. For now, Oswald and I lived in an inn next to the company, where we also got our food. When I had finished completely new vessels in record time and Oswald made suitable decors for it, our sales department and also the representatives, who had to sell the stuff, were excited. Above all, however, they were delighted that they were now able to serve a whole new group of buyers with these articles. When things went so well, I was sure I would stay here and to bring my family here.

I let ask in the company if anyone knew of an apartment for us, a family with two small children. After a few days a woman came to me and said that she knew something suitable, but that was two villages away and I would have to travel by train every day, just as she did now. I kept on waiting for a better offer, which did not come. So I drove home with the woman and she took me to a fairly big grocery store and introduced me. There also was a young woman in the shop and we both noticed immediately, I liked her and she liked me. That was already pretty good. She then showed us the rooms, there were just as many as we needed. With a view of the river Main and opposite a vineyard, crowned by a ruined castle, it was a real enchanting view. And then the beautiful town of Klingenberg, famous for its excellent red wine.

The flat was new and ready to move into. Because it was on the third floor, it was very cheap, and I said to the nice woman, we'll take it. With a company-owned truck and a driver, the move was executed at short notice. We did not have too many pieces of furniture yet and with Oswald and the lessors, we carried the belongings up three flights of stairs. With the help of the homeowners, we distributed them into the various rooms.

The next weekend, on the return trip, I took the mother of my children to their new home, without children, who stayed with their grandmother. Except on our honeymoon, she had never been further away from her hometown. She already started to become homesick, when she had barely sighted the flat. As I proudly and enthusiastically showed her the view of this beautiful surroundings, the first tears were already flowing. What's that supposed to mean, was my baffled question, because I expected something else but tears. "Here are so many red roofs!". It almost knocked me over and I suddenly realized, I am connected to a totally immature child. At home with her mother in her usual environment, I did not notice that at all.

My first thought was, I'll bring her home. Because here with two small children without the mother, in a completely new and unknown environment (without black roofs on the houses), and I'm gone all day, she was totally helpless. And I was almost certain that I would be burdened with a very high level of responsibility for the rest of my life. Exactly that had put me in this, of me not planned state! I realized that now with shabby clarity. I did not have two children but three (and the fourth should still be introduced and born here)!

Spontaneously I remembered our lessors, with whom I have already had become friends and who had been looking forward to my wife and children. I climbed down the three steps and told the woman - though not of the red roofs - but of the overwhelming homesickness. She immediately came upstairs with me and, thank god, they liked each other spontaneously, just as it had been with me. She silently took her in her arms and let her sob and signaled me to remove, which I did with mixed feelings. When they came to me together, my (third) child had calmed down. The good woman noticed immediately that I too was quite disturbed now, because she had met me only as a cheerful, happy man, and found encouraging words now for me, too. I was in dire need of it, because I would have to bear this burden of responsibility for a very, very long time, and there would be little room for joy. But it still did exist.

My faithful friend Oswald now lived alone in the inn, which was not so bad for him during the week, but he was alone at the weekend. So I invited him to spend the Sundays with us, and all my three children were happy about the visit, which he gratefully took on. He liked the kids and they liked him, and they missed him a lot when he got a company flat and his wife was back with him. He has never been seen with us since. His wife strictly refused contact with us. She accused me of having abducted him (she was not quite wrong with that). After the birth of our third child, it was now a bit tight in the flat, and the third floor began to get a little painstaking. Then I got a pretty, former teacher's, house from the company with a beautiful garden, located by a stream. There we could pleasantly spend my remaining time at Scheurich. Oswald and I went on like we did at Fohr, and here too the success did not stop.

In the meantime I met a Refa-Man, who made me curious and advised me to complete a course "workflow study". [Refa is short for: Reichsausschuß für Arbeitszeitermittlung = Reich-committee for working time determination. It was founded in 1924 and re-established as association for work studies in 1946, but kept the abbreviation as a name]. Since I knew the problems with the division of work and the determination of labour costs from the Fohr company, I agreed immediately. And now came a phase for me that I do not want to miss, but I do not want to experience it again. Converting a company, that built its entire production at hourly rates, which is the simplest thing of the wage determination at all, to unit wages. Simply put, every movement is evaluated in terms of time. This is not possible without a time-measuring device, namely a stopwatch, which was received by the entire workforce with the utmost mistrust. It first needed a thorough explanation, so that I could begin this activity in the first place. But then I managed to carefully build up something similar to trust. It was a very interesting, but not a pleasant task, because I had not only the workers against me, but the individual department heads feared more work, which was true. When I had finished that and the management was finally able to calculate with exact costs, I had brought it to the best hated man in the workforce in this company. in contrast to my reputation in the management, which appreciated that.

The small formal requirements for designs and executions I had alongside, were easily done. And now I saw no more job improvements for me in this company. And since I was still relatively young, I did not want to wait here for the pension, because I was aiming for something very special. So now a change was due, which I then silently initiated and finally made perfect. The hard thing came when I had to tell Oswald.

First he did not want to believe it again, because I had a top position in the company, why start somewhere new. When he realized that I was serious again, he spontaneously wanted to come with me. The new company I targeted was called CARSTENS and had a better quality name. This was one of my main reasons. Scheurich was still considered a cheap provider for fairground people [among other things, it started with selling cheap pottery to fairgrounds as prices for fun fairground stalls]. I promised Oswald to let him come if I had established myself there. He realised that. Because I was given the organization over the entire production process, which did not suit me at all, that was another reason to quit the field. I wanted to design, but not to manage, and that should be my job in the new company. In the meantime, the day approached when my timely notice had to be pronounced so that I could start in the new company on July, 1st, 1959. So it was agreed with the new boss Christian Carstens. On May, 30th, 1959 I said during a conversation with Mr. Scheurich: "By the way, I quit." He looked at me speechless and then said: "I do not accept the termination!"



1959 – Carstens Tönnishof

When I arrived at the new company, it did not look like I had made the right decision with this change, because Carstens had concealed from me that his mother was the chief designer in this company. But that was not all, it turned out that the father, who had died, did not think that my current boss, the son, was capable to lead the company by himself. So he put a director of his trust at his side, without whom his son could not make a decision. And the decision to hire me was made without the consent of him. This director promptly appeared on my first day, and without introducing himself, he said to me: "Well, do you dare to enter this witch's cauldron?" I scanned my chances of going back to Scheurich, because they assured me, when leaving, to hire me again at any time. Then I said to the man which I did not know who he was and what position he was in: "This is different than I am used to, but you should always try something new to get ahead. That has always proved to be right with me, so now I'll go into a witch's cauldron, after all, you will not freeze there."

I liked the room that had been assigned to me. There were two turntables, a desk, and a number of low cabinets. It was luxurious to me, because at Scheurich, I had only one turntable and a table in one corner of the molding foundry. The room next door had a breakthrough in the wall and so I could keep my eyes on the machine setters to give directions and answer questions. This was new to me, too. All of this I liked exceptionally well. Now the ambition tickled me, and I caressed my self-esteem. I've had done so many things, since I came out of the war. Giving me a fear, has already had the opposite effect on me as a child. I was able to apply this effect immediately! There was a knock on the door and on my

"Come in" came a machine setter from next door, who introduced himself as "Scholz, modeller"! "And why are you with the machine setters?", I asked. "We already do have a modeller", he said challengingly. "And where is he?" "At the very top, where Mother Carstens is, too," it came out of him somewhat gleeful. "And what do you think, why I am here?" He shrugged and left, grinning. Now the cauldron slowly began to steam. I saw the phone on the desk and thought. That was pretty steep! Now I realized why the young boss had put so much emphasis on getting me into his company. He needed help, this was confirmed as I learned more and more about what and how it was going on here. There were two equal bosses who didn't get on well together, so there were two parties in the company. For me that was audible and noticeable from the beginning, namely by those who greeted me and by the non-greeters. But I was not going to be deterred and greeted everyone, and always first. That made an impression, and soon I was greeted by everyone without any problems. But now, after all, I wanted to stay here and fight for it instead of complaining to my young boss, because I liked him. He was the first boss who was likeable to me from the start. I did not show anything about what I had experienced and pretended that nothing that was going on here was concerning me.

The Carstens came all from the East, where they owned several very good ceramic factories, but all were expropriated. The father of Christian, Ernst Carstens then went to the west, to the English zone, because his daughter was working there as an interpreter with the English and had good relations with the occupying force.

The English recommended Ernst Carstens the old potters' village Fredelsloh and nearby there a former gliding school with two large barns, which were called Tönnishof, as manufacturing facilities for crockery that were needed everywhere. They also helped with the build-up. Thus, Carstens was when I started there, mainly a crockery factory, which produced as a minor subject also some decorative ceramics. Since I was aware of the offer of Carstens decorative ceramics from the fairs, I had already thought about an alternative product range. There still were some designs from my time at Scheurich which didn't come to production there. So I could start right away. When I finished three objects and told the men next door that I would have liked to pour them off immediately (negative castings), they told me sheepishly that they had other urgent tasks. Well, if it's like that, then we will first check the urgencies, and I let my boss come by phone. He saw the three new models and believed that I had brought them with me. They were just completed here and today, I explained. The men next door could testify that. He looked over, they nodded eagerly. But there is a problem, was my objection. The problem was quickly gone, and the slogan was issued that my objects had priority over everything else.

But the men still had concerns and made it clear to me, that the mother of my boss would soon come from above again and because she worked with the modeller from upstairs, they had to pour off first what he designed. So there was one more problem to solve, and while we were at it, I asked the boss for an appointment, this time in his office. Because it was now embarrassing for him as he had kept that from me, and now it was getting serious for both of us.

He guessed what was coming and expected reproaches. But I didn't make any, instead I made suggestions that he had not expected, namely to gather all the representatives here at the weekend. I thought I was capable to create a new assortment until then, so about 12 pieces, and to present them to the Messrs. Then they could give their opinion on the saleability and also make suggestions. This had two advantages as they were involved in the development design and would stand for these products at the customers and have more success, for the benefit of all parties involved. I had already successfully practiced that with Scheurich.

Christian Carstens and I were of the same age and liked each other from the first meeting. But from that day on, we became friends for life, not only for the time of my participation in this company, from 1959 to a nearly tragic parting in 1967. And even after that until his early death. But now I want to describe the years to be spent there. It was the second best time in my life (my best came after that). When I looked at the production process in the company (with my Refa knowledge), I noticed the first thing that all the goods were burned twice, first in a bisque firing and then in a glost firing, that was new to me. And to my question why, I got the answer: Because that was always the case, otherwise it would not work. Well well. Did you try it? No, why? Then WE try it now. The attempt succeeded and from now on only the single-firing procedure was executed, which brought an enormous cost saving, which was really necessary to the company at present. And then I changed some work processes that brought improvements and thus I strengthened my status in this company more and more, which was very important to me, because there still was a very tough nut to crack.

The topic of Mother Carstens was spared me at first, she was still with relatives who had been asked to keep her there for a while. Of course they had already informed her that there was a very bustling and quick young man at work down there, who had already changed quite a few things in the company (single-firing process). Now it was a big problem for Christian Carstens, and no one saw a solution for that, and I suspected the solution stuck with me. I also had no qualms about not being able to do it, I learned that from Scheurich, where I changed hundreds of jobs or made them superfluous and paid the remaining workers only for what they had actually done. There were protests of course, they were normality! But it was not as easy as I thought it would be. My idea was that the lady up there could continue working with her modeller in her own way as usual. But the plan did not work. When she saw what had already come into being and in which time, she went to her son and explained to him: I no longer want to work with the J... (her modeller), I just want to work with "the Siery"! He had feared that, and tried to dissuade her on the grounds that I would design the models that I make myself and would have been successful with good salable objects in other companies. But she strictly refused to continue working with her modeler. Then she came to me, was extremely polite and nice, and told me endlessly about her vita. The next morning she came back and said, we could work together wonderfully! My objection was that I could not use anyone in my work, let alone anyone who makes proposals to me, I would have enough ideas. Whereupon she said: One could just try it.

Now it was getting serious. I had learned that the first annoyance is better than all the lazy compromises that arise through inconsistency.

So now I marched to my boss, Christian Carstens, and faced him with the choice: either his mother let me continue to work alone, as usual, or this was only a short guest role for me. He made no attempt to change my mind, but just said: I'll fix it. That's what happened, and she never entered my work area again. Now one only had to find a solution for her modeller. Unlike with Mother Carstens, I was sorry for him. She wanted to get involved absolutely, and this man felt deserted by her. My suggestion was, we bring him here next door, and according to my proposals he can make particularly complicated objects that can be offered to special shops. That would also do good to the Image of the company. The proposal was accepted. In the meantime, our glaze people were asked to make color samples, and some of these were selected and applied to the new models, which were then presented to the representatives.

There were now fierce discussions, because each had his own region and knew the tastes of its customers. Because what the people of Hamburg liked, you couldn't offer to the people of Munich etc. It was not so much about the forms, but about the colours. But with further colour samples, which were already presorted, we could satisfy them. Then came, for me temporally very convenient, the autumn fair in Frankfurt! It was not the success that I would have liked to see. But that could not be anyway, because Carstens was still known in the industry as a crockery factory with a small proportion of decorative ceramics. After all, our representatives were confident, because several wholesalers showed interest and also ordered samples. And as it turned out, it sold well after all. In this sense, it was a success after all and with zeal we prepared ourselves for the Spring Fair.

It was once not only the so-called normal assortment supplemented, but also alongside this range we created some special series with their own shapes and decorations. With the help of the representatives, we also forced a new booth and we could look forward to a surprise success at the next trade fair. That was the breakthrough, the wholesale had bitten. Of course, the crockery sector suffered more and more, that we could not compensate so quickly with the decorative ceramics. In addition, the operation was overstaffed and caused far too high a cost and the banks refused further loans. Therefore a bankruptcy was coming up soon.

This was now the responsibility of executive director Marx. In order to spare himself this embarrassment, he offered the immediate termination and wanted to leave the company without further conditions. Now at the same time, several of his protégés were released and it was appealed to the rest of the workforce, as far as possible, to replace the gaps that had arisen. This worked smoothly, and the banks stayed quiet for now. In the meantime, a new range of shapes with matching glaze decors had been created, which was specially designed for specialist retailers. We named them Carstens Atelier ceramics, which continued to be complemented on and on in shape and color.

Now, the filter coffee maker Melitta, who had also built up a ceramic production, showed interest and would gladly have taken over Carstens, which had financial problems. Melitta had already contacted the banks, who would have liked to see this change of ownership.

Our wholesalers were upset that we were now serving the major department stores that had meanwhile come into

existence. The specialized trade took it very badly, because there the same commodity of Carstens was offered cheaper.

We then quickly decided to develop an assortment each for the wholesalers and the specialized retailers. Since this proposal came from me as well, I was challenged, but also highly motivated, to stand up to Melitta. During the following weekend, I had created an almost complete new range of forms until Monday. The wholesalers were enthusiastic and with that we could calm down the banks again. Thus, Melitta got left out. With director Marx quitting, and the streamlined workforce, a whole new and very successful era began for Carstens. The business was in good shape and everything went well. The department stores were now quite keen on the Carstens goods and did not give up. Christian Carstens knew that I was against it, and I knew he could not or would not say 'no' no longer. Then I suggested to him that we do something like that back when Melitta already knocked at the door with the banks behind them. We made a completely different assortment, which was cheap in production and in price, and so I became the inventor of the "Europa" relief vases. Christian Carstens and the department stores were thrilled, only I had no good feeling about this, I should not be wrong.

For Christian Carstens, I was not only the chief designer, but also the permanent consultant, especially for sensitive matters. He had his own hunting ground and persuaded me to take the hunting exam. After passing the exam, when it became serious with the shooting, I realized that I was useless for that. But the forest and the animals had always fascinated me as a kid and a boy. And so, as a keeper and a bad shooter, I was still able to enjoy the forest and its animals.

Christian Carstens was not quite as efficient as his father when it came to women, but from time to time he dragged along aspiring artists, or those who wanted to be, who had made a potty somewhere. Often these were the daughters of acquaintances or friends. I enjoyed these changes. More than a harmless flirt did not come out of it.

But then he arrived with a mature woman. I picked up the scent and became curious. That was a mistake. I had never shown any interest in anyone else, but her instinct immediately registered: "I impressed him!". She really had, because I had seen such a perfect lady at most once in the cinema. Everything was just right with her. But now the alarm bells were ringing at me. That meant: Siery, listen, something can't be right, so find out! My first question was: "How did you come to this company?" "My husband is an employee here." "And who is your husband?" "Mr. Heuckeroth." "Aha!" was my answer, and she knew immediately what conclusions I drew from it, because that was the worst recommendation she could apply now and here.

Now, I almost felt sorry for her, asked no more questions, and I asked her to tell her development. It was the usual arts and crafts education where she learned pottery and set up a small pottery workshop at her father's house. She told me about exhibitions she had participated in, showed newspaper clippings of her exhibits, but I had seen better things. Then I wanted to know if she had worked in a larger company, so she mentioned Ruscha. Can I see something, she shook her head. Her husband had a company flat here and she was able to spend a few days here. She also used it, and it was not long before I was asked to go to the boss' office. The mature women sat with Christian Carstens in his office, exactly like I

expected it to be. I let her feel my rudeness up close as I paid no attention to her and immediately turned to Christian saying: Can I talk to you alone? It worked! She immediately jumped up, went to the door and disappeared. Christian was completely baffled by this situation, and when I quietly asked him why he had ordered me here, he just said: Sit down!

And while he was talking, I suddenly realized that I should seriously seek a due change. It was time again, as with the previous companies, in the best position to be, but not to be particularly challenged any more. Everything went well, that made me dissatisfied and that could only be changed by a change to another company. A whole new environment, new challenges and tasks, that's what I needed again. And to initiate this, this lady came to me as if sent by the gods. The idea of putting up something crazy here with her as my farewell present was just right for me. Leaving was something I did not want to do to the company before, so as not to jeopardize the necessary turnover. During his argumentations, I barely listened. Only when the most important question came, to which it was for me now, it changed. It was, how could it be otherwise: "Could you at least have a look at it?" With a mute affirming nod, I pulled away and left him doubtful. If you cannot change something that does not suit you, you should at least make the *best* out of it. I had already learned that, because that created motivation, which you need all the time, if you are creative, and it creates things that would not have existed, if everything went smoothly before.

Satisfied, I went to my little studio and continued what I had started. Knowing that Christian would come here to reassure himself whether I was serious. He came, looked at me questioningly. My Answer: Send her here to me, then I'll take

a look at her works. She came with a small folder and said that Mr. Carstens told her that I would like to talk to her again and then decide if I could do something with her suggestions. She added: "But I'll tell you right away that I have little hope after your performance!". "So what did you expect when you introduced yourself?" was my answer. "What is needed and required here is a rock-hard job with a constant burden of responsibility, and once you fail, you get double penalties, because if you cannot stay, the cards are stacked against you, because failure quickly gets around in these circles. What you demand from me, everything in me is reluctant, and I have always strictly rejected all such offers and it has not done any harm to the company, on the contrary, sales have improved from year to year. And what you want from me, I do only because my boss has asked me. You have probably impressed him so much that he expects something from you, which I have not designed so far. So put your work on my desk, I'll take a look at it and then you come back tomorrow."

Then I looked at what she had thought up and was disappointed. It was, in my imagination, nothing that could be described as something special, and certainly not as something crazy. It was nearly hard for me to tell that to her. Then I remembered that I wanted to use her for my considered withdrawal. It also occurred to me again that she had mentioned Ruscha, a smaller company that made excellent pottery and where I saw opportunities to develop my design skills. So I spared her my opinion on her suggestions and offered her the possibility that together we could design very sophisticated objects, for special exhibitions that she already wanted to have assembled, or for excellent craft shops. But this company would not benefit much from it.

My goal in mind made me accepting of some unpalatable compromises and I could magnificently compensate this with what might arise from this collaboration, something I would not have dared to do without this woman. And so, I could elegantly transfer the frown to the fine lady. She had been offered a guest role, every month for a week, but not here with me, but in the decor department, to make suggestions. It turned out soon that she could handle colors better than shapes. We could both live well with that now. It came to ambivalent cooperation at the expense of the company. We made very fancy objects that were excellently suited for exhibitions of decorative arts, with which we even found recognition in Faenza, Italy, but also achieved some prestige for the company. Only, it was for our clientele, on which we were dependent, perfect flops. But since I undeterred served the company with my well salable series, they could afford this luxury and let us continue to grant with our games, in which I now also liked. Unfortunately, she then caused me a bitter disappointment, the occasion was probably my next chapter.

1965 - Ingrid Illgner

Meanwhile, Christian discovered a new designer, a young woman by the name of Ingrid Illgner, who came from the tableware industry which was the core business of Carstens. We still produced tableware, though less and less. She was able to present a few decor designs that immediately inspired me. Not only the designs, but also the person inspired me, though I did not want to admit it. So I stayed cool and calm, being a married man with a pretty wife, and three daughters! One design immediately triggered formal ideas in my mind and I quickly made models of it which was enthusiastically accepted. In short, it became an international hit due to its graceful simplicity in form, color and painting, and was produced for many years to come (Tessin). Further combined works followed which were not as successful, but still have collectors value to this day (such as the "Orion" series). Meanwhile, our mutual esteem grew, and so did the consequences. We could barely hide our growing affection. Then, when I introduced Ingrid to my family and she was welcomed with open arms by my wife as well as my children, I found myself in that well-known state again that confirmed my wish for a change.

1967 - Rudolf Schardt

The wish was implemented at the next Spring Fair in Frankfurt through mediation by Ms. Heuckeroth who introduced me to the owner of the Ruscha company, Mr. Rudolf Schardt. The position I had in mind just happened to be vacant. For me, it could not have been better. A real challenge finally lured again, with new opportunities and new clientele, which were somewhat more demanding than at Carstens.

I did not hesitate for a moment, and still during the fair, I informed Christian Carstens that I was leaving my position as chief designer in his company by the end of the month. I thereby gave him the opportunity to find a substitute for me during the fair, which he succeeded in doing. It did not calm his disappointment and bitterness, though. We had become friends in the fight to maintain the company. He vented his anger in a bitter letter, in which he accused me of irresponsible behavior towards the company and its hundreds of workers and employees. But it did not stop him from giving me an excellent testimonial of my achievements in this company in its current state. After the separation, we quickly found ourselves together again, because he still attached great importance to my opinion, and we often met in Autobahn service areas. At the same time Ms. Heuckeroth, who wanted to go with me to Ruscha, announced that she was quitting her job. Ingrid Illgner also found a job as chief designer at Waechtersbach Keramik.

Once again a very important part of my life, which shaped me very much for what awaited me, and gave me the best prerequisites for what I still had planned, had ended.

I had already began modeling sculptures at Carstens (but for myself and not for the company), which was what I enjoyed most in school, but then neglected. Through my membership with the hunting-association, I met a famous hunting painter who suggested I model a series of huntable animals. He gave me some pictures, and I went for it enthusiastically. I developed my own strict style, out of worry not to fall into the usual kitsch, which succeeded at first attempt. In spite of the strictness, the finished objects also had a certain pleasant radiance. The painter was fascinated and promised me he would present them at the next Hunting Painter's Exhibition in Wolfsburg. He kept his word and promptly got into trouble with colleagues, especially with the then VW Chef Nordhoff who was a passionate hunter; because the jury awarded the highly anticipated first prize to the Bison from my animal series. It was a scandal, because sculptures had never been in this exhibition. No one besides my artist friend and the jury congratulated me.

A gallery owner from Hannover walked up to me and said: "If you cast these sculptures in bronze, I will take them right away."

I was still overwhelmed with the success, and could only say: "Why do you only want them in bronze, and not in ceramic?"

"Because only then will they be valuable."

Insulted, I said: "Then you can forget it!"

My painter friend was aghast. "Do you realize what you just passed up?" he said.

"Yes," I said "I know I did not sell myself to a gallery owner who will tell me what I should do for the rest of my life, so he can sell it!" I never regretted my decision, and kept the wonderful freedom to do what I like and can always enjoy over again. I never used them to make money!

Now back again to the Spring of 1967, the right moment for a new beginning in every aspect, which would be the best time of my life. First though, wherever I stood and went, there were problems to be solved.

Mr. Rudolf Schardt, the sole owner of Ruscha, was very nice, but the company, which had seen better times, was now in a similar condition as those I found the other three in. Therefore, I was able to put my experience to good use. At the same time, I had to move with my family again who had a lot of trouble with my change; simply because everything was different and worse than before in their eyes. They suddenly found themselves unprepared in a totally new world. I had to overcome my own doubts whether the decision I made was right. Since there was no way back for me, we all had to try to come to terms with it.

It turned out to be easier than we anticipated. My new boss was very helpful in finding an apartment and helping us move, as well as the people from the company, which was a huge relief. The children managed better than their mother, but I did not expect otherwise and had no time be concerned with it.

When I agreed to come here, I did so under the condition that I would also work for other companies on the side, which meant that I was fully engaged after work and on the weekends. My family had to cope on their own. I still had my workshop in my parents house to carry out my orders there, and have the opportunity to meet with the woman who I would love to make my lifetime companion. Only everything, but really everything spoke against it!

We kept in touch almost daily by mail. I received her letters in a neighboring town by general delivery under a false name (Michael Michaelis). Since I often extended these weekends to Sunday, we had these days almost always to ourselves.

Meanwhile, Ingrid Illgner was highly regarded in her company, because she pepped up an old, dusty company with huge success. The company belonged to Fürst zu Isenburg und Büdingen and succeeded with antiques and art deco. It had a good name but did not move with the times and was withering away. This was just right for Ms. Illgner in her present situation. First, she brought color into the available stock and demanded a whole new stand for the fair, which was designed according to her ideas. Everything was granted without complaint, and at the next fair the company shone in bright colors and light. The Waechtersbacher Steingutfabrik was back in full trend again, much to the delight of the Prince who then thankfully invited her to family feasts in the castle. There she made acquaintances with nobility, a favor that no employee of the company had yet enjoyed. In this context, she was offered a trip to Mexico to relatives of the Prince for a few weeks.

I started to brood and compared what I had to offer her with what was happening around her now. The idea of having no contact with her for weeks got me down. And who knows who else she would meet there - compared to me, who always claimed I could not get divorced because my sense of responsibility towards my wife and children would not allow it? But what would I have left that made me happy if I lost her? Then, it suddenly hit me: If I did not act now, I would never, ever forgive myself. It was almost too late, she was already at the airport in Frankfurt ready to take off! So I called

the airport and asked to call her out: "Ms. Ingrid Illgner, please call Mr. Heinz Siery at home, immediately. It is urgent!" She actually did call, and I said: "Don't fly away, come back, I will get a divorce!" She just said: "I will."



1969 - A Whole New Life

I was so happy and grateful and could now quite calmly tell my wife what I had just initiated. It hadn't escaped her attention that something was going on between Ingrid and me, and she wasn't very surprised. She just asked, "What will become of me now?" I hadn't asked myself this yet, because until now I hadn't considered this situation in any way. Since I often mastered problems in similar situations I was sure to find a solution for this one too! For the time being, nothing changed for her and the children. They stayed in the house, only I'd be there less often which was hardly noticed. Financially there were no problems since I was in permanent employment. The children had no problem with my choice, since they knew and liked Ingrid from the Tönnishof time. They liked her almost more than their own mother - and that hasn't changed to this day.

However, I wanted to change something else for myself which had me preoccupied for some time. I wanted my own studio nearby, where I could work freelance and not always have to commute to Westerwald. The factory workshop plan was then extended to include a small apartment for me, and when Ingrid came at the weekend for her too. A whole new life began for us now. We were evidently blessed by the gods. I was offered an old farm in a small neighboring village that the real-estate agent had in the portfolio for years because no one wanted it. It didn't look very inviting, but in its bad condition I recognized the possibilities which proved more and more true afterwards. I simply said, "I'll take it!" In disbelief, he asked me "Are you sure?" I said, "If the price is right, I'm very sure. Then you can finish the contract right away!"

The price was right, and a short time later I was the proud owner of a large but dilapidated farm!

I proudly told Ingrid about my new acquisition. When I showed it to her, she looked around, then looked at me and said, "If you think so!" I purposely didn't prepare her for what she was going to see next, and then I showed her the worst. The toilette stood at the edge of the dunghill. It was a tiny wooden outhouse with a heart carved into the door. Inside was a wooden bench at seat height into which a 30 cm hole was cut out for convenient emptying.

Now it's time to explain a bit of Ingrid's biography. Her father was the sales manager of a global company and they lived in a mansion in the town of Wiesbaden (which I already inspected when we were in the Frankfurt Fair together). I had the audacity to offer her this dump as a future home and workplace, and to top it off, in a tiny farming village with about 350 inhabitants! Now it was important for me to see how she reacted. She still had a great position at Waechtersbach Keramik, was gladly seen in the princes' castle and enjoyed all the privileges offered in such a position. And now she was standing in Schweinheim (translated: Pig Home) which was the adequate village name, in a U-shaped courtyard surrounded by three buildings that looked less inviting, namely the residence, the stables, and the barn. It created a beautiful courtyard which I particularly liked. The residence made the best impression. It was still being rented by three tenants. That meant living quarters, at least temporarily.

Since I was willing to start a new relationship, I had to be absolutely sure that she accepted uncertain times ahead that didn't seem to promise her anything of what she now already had. She had to trust me blindly. She did without an objection!

From now on a whole new phase of life began for us. I built rock solid on my already proven qualities to react right in every new situation. When a magnificent object stood before me, which I was sure I could do something great with, I wasn't alone, unlike the earlier situation!

Now I showed my future partner the ruinous acquisition, and told her of my plan to fulfill my dream with it, namely to work independently in my own studio making beautiful, unique pieces for which there were always customers. Sculptures also inspired me. To achieve this goal, I resigned from a highly-valued and prestigious position at Carstens, and was now in a shaky company that indeed had a better image but substantially worse sales, which I was just in the process of improving.

She looked at me and said, "And what can I do?" I said, "Help me with everything you can. We'll find out what that is, and then you'll be amazed at what you can do. **You can do much more than you think you can.** I know from experience. You too fled from the Russians in Chemnitz in 1945, and had to start from scratch in the West. And how much and fast did your father then achieve a high position here? We're not starting from scratch here, because the land on which we're now standing, with everything on it belongs to me. The tenants have received notice of termination and three rooms will be available immediately.

I'll furnish them with the necessities so I can move from Rheinbach and initiate the separation. The rest of the family can still reach me in the company."

It wasn't as easy as I thought though. You can't end a long-term relationship easily and pain-free, especially when a strong sense of responsibility starts to gnaw at your conscience! It was an ambiguous situation. On the one hand, I was happy about a new chapter in life. But how was their helpless mother going to make it? I wasn't worried about the children. They could reach me every day and the oldest was already 15. These worries caused me undefinable illnesses that were so bad at times I couldn't even drive long distances with the car. Things changed quickly for her though after she met a doctor who was also separated. Their mutual consolation led to a permanent relationship and after a while I was cheerful again and able to work diligently in our new studio. There was a lot to do and it was fun again. The renovations were moving ahead and I was really beginning to enjoy it. Nothing is as satisfying as what you do yourself. You can only find out what it's like when you don't let something be done, but do it yourself.

My dream was beginning to take shape and so was hers. Her dream was once pretty hopeless because I always emphasized that I couldn't get divorced. Now suddenly everything was moving towards her dream of being together with me forever.

When she saw the rooms, she started making suggestions on what could be done where and how. I was blissful. And so our future life began, especially after she used and tested the heart toilette and officially and relevantly "initiated and channeled"

its beginning there. I waited in anticipation for her reaction. Quite sober she said, "What do you need now for this apartment?" Without a word I took her in my arms and knew: Our new life begins now!



1969 - A Crazy Couple!

Considering who and what we were when we arrived here in the Spring of 1969, as soon as the astonished Schweinheimer's heard that we bought this old masonry, which they rated unfit for sale, they declared us crazy and gave us the well-meant advice to "Tear it down." Later, they were amazed when they saw what we had made of these ruins, and their amazement even turned into admiration.

Meanwhile, we acquired four further objects in the vicinity of the first, which were in similar ruinous condition, and restored them to a condition that astounded every visitor. To this day, our craziness has not been lost, and we cultivate it as our trademark. All this was only possible because two crazy lovers came together to start a whole new life, even though they hardly knew each other.

We now had the opportunity to build our own ceramic studio equipped with a kiln and other necessary utensils. With our existing talent and knowledge, we were able to offer wealthy citizens very beautiful, valuable and unique ceramic murals for their homes. These were well received, and secured our financial situation because I still had high alimony payments.

After I brought my potters wheel back from Westerwald, I also set up a model-making workshop to create forms for smaller ceramic companies. After all, this was my original profession, also improved my financial situation, and I enjoyed it.

The goal was clear, but the implementation was a continuous challenge for mind and hands. In search of tiles to replace the heart outhouse, we found nothing that suited us. What lied closer at hand, than to make them ourselves? Not as simple tiles though, but as a ceramic mural. We talked about this with the tile dealer, who then asked if we could also make large walls of this kind, which we keenly affirmed. This conversation was again the beginning of a whole new big task. Meanwhile, the economic miracle had created a well-heeled middle class who wanted to show their wealth. This was done more often in form of an indoor pool, which became a status symbol. We could now upgrade this with our ceramic murals. Now Ingrid came into action, because she wasn't just an excellent painter, she had a feeling for color as well which was equally, if not more important for this kind of painting. The tile dealer put us in touch with a potential customer who was currently building such an object of prestige.

A short insight into our completely new working technique

The plan was for a wall 12 meters long x 2.50 meters high! That was anything but trifle for a start. How were we so daring to tackle this tough chunk? We simply started! It was made to a true scale sketch (also a novelty), it was accepted, and we could start. Luckily, we only had a vague idea of what we had agreed to do. So, first of all, we started with the devices to do such a thing, everything else would arise as a result. I got us matching ceramic slabs from Maastricht in Holland and then did a lot of colour glaze tests. Whatever else was needed, I got from my company. A large table of 4 x 1,50 meters was created, the design was rasterized and numbered according to the size of the plate. Now, the entire height and a small part of the width of the mural was designed with the appropriate slabs. Now my partner showed what she was able to do. With the help of the 1:10 screened design, she sketched the image motifs enlarged on the small section of the giant wall. Now she had to trace these lines with a ball filled with a special mass with attached cannula, which required a secure hand. Then she filled out the bordered areas with the coloured glazes with a brush. In this condition, the glazes do not have the least similarity in appearance to their look after firing. The first finished rows came in the kiln now. The last one is only half finished and gets shoved to the beginning where new blanks are attached to it, so that no break in the wall arises, and so it goes on continuously. But first comes the most exciting moment with this technique, namely, when the first fired pieces come out of the oven, and if everything is ok, it can go on.

We were satisfied, but it took weeks before the last piece came well out of the oven. The affixing was a tiler's job. There was no problem with the numbering, which was always on the back. It is the reverse to the chessboard, so: the numbers in length and the letters are alphabetically in height. So, the first slab was on the lower left corner, the first row was: A-1 to A-99, then the second row was B-1 to B-99. The system has proved to be successful.

When everything was finished and visible on the wall, we were more than a little proud and got the next order. It was breathtaking what we had created in this, not even half-finished ruins. Something that we had never believed before to be able to do at all. At that time, my saying once again confirmed that **you can do much more than you think you can.**

It has been confirmed again and again, because then we have created so much more of which we did not know how to do such a thing. We had an idea and tried to realise it and simply started. Since we now had contact with many swimming pool builders, we generously planned a pool also for our own house, for which the spacious barn, including the pigsties, provided enough space. All work almost always consisted of the side effect that one learns the fastest by learning by mistakes. Also, this learning has never stopped. That was the case with the swimming pool walls, and when we wanted to build a tiled stove, we did not find any tiles to match our ceramic requirements. So, it was clear to us: Then we'll do it ourselves. Which simultaneously led to a completely new production program. What I found even more interesting than the large murals, because here I was again required as a form designer what would then develop into a special stroke of luck!

For at some point the era of indoor swimming pools subsided, triggered by the first oil crisis. At that time we were already fully occupied with the design of fireplaces and tiled stoves, and here again my wonderful partner brought the tiles to the right value with her artful painting. Timeless, beautiful and valuable objects were created and each was an original, adapted to the architecture of the apartment and the environment - which the customers appreciated very much. To yet another field of activity brought us a customer, for whom we had made a tile fireplace.

He also wanted to have such tiles in his kitchen - a great idea for us! He got his tiles for the kitchen only because we were just the right size, because tiles were normally not suitable for kitchenettes. Much better were the slabs, which we used for our swimming pool walls. They were also better to clean in a kitchen. We found a top kitchen manufacturer who was willing to equip the next model kitchen with our work. To make it short, it was again a full hit. We could not do as much as requested and delivery times got longer, because all were unique pieces. But we could choose the customers, which was very advantageous. It was getting so that we chose certain kitchens to create something suitable for it, which was also more fun. But at some point Ingrid got severe back problems, so we had to restrain ourselves and then made the experience that "less is more" and we limited ourselves to particularly interesting orders. But the best part for both of us was how quickly and confidently we had coordinated each other. It was always teamwork where each one brought in their talents, knowledge and skills, so it always satisfied both of us. We complemented each other optimally from the beginning and the success confirmed it.

In addition to our own work, we still supplied some ceramic companies with models and decor designs. We were working as freelancers, especially of course with Ruscha, which was our mainstay at the beginning and guaranteed financial security. We kept that up until the end of the era of decorative ceramics, which we greatly regretted, because that was our original field of activity for decades and we also contributed our own taste of style, which had helped that the companies were busy all year round.



1998 -

Nothing stays as it is, everything is in a state of flux!

The turnover at Ruscha was constantly decreasing and my claim for money had meanwhile accumulated to 25,000.00 German Marks. Before going into bankruptcy, they assigned the complete product range to me, so I could file claims with the insolvency administrator. But I did not even try that because I had a better idea. She was, in my own manner, crazy again but worth a try. Namely to go to my former company Scheurich and there to the Scheurich-grandson Peter Baumann. Peter took over the management of Scheurich from his father Hubert Baumann, the Scheurich-son-in-law, who died in a tragic accident in 1980. Scheurich had no success anymore with the decorative ceramics because of a lack of company image, which they still not had achieved. They almost only produced flowerpots. I contacted Peter Baumann, and recommended him to buy the entire company Ruscha from the bankruptcy assets. Since my name was still fondly remembered by Scheurich, he accepted the offer and bought the Ruscha for 250,000.00 DM, on the condition that Ingrid and I would keep making designs for the company. Something that we, regarding my Ruscha product range, were very much happy to accept.

Scheurich then fully produced everything as they had taken it from Ruscha, created an extra booth for the fair, built a great catalog and made this all under the logo Ruscha. We were all very busy. Ingrid had also developed terrific wall plates, which were indeed an elementary part of the Ruscha production. And so, we were full of hope for a small success! It stayed small, because unfortunately we had forgotten to rent the booth for well-known ex-Ruscha people. The

customers smelled a rat and kept back. Whether we wanted to admit it or not, the era of decorative ceramics was finally over and remained unrepeatable. Which, in turn, has given the countless numbers of products scattered throughout the world a new reputation and has given me the undeserved title of a Pottery Pope.

Since I had also made sculptures in ceramics and had moved from animals to human figurines, focusing on interpersonal relationships, Ingrid suggested that some be cast in bronze, just for comparison. She was right again! As later often, too. I was delighted and let cast some more.

When we had our house completely modified and all living and working spaces were fully occupied, we had to rent a barn from a neighboring house to accommodate our materials, which became more and more. Then a plot with a barn was offered to us, which of course was very convenient. The barn belonged to an entire property with stables and a house, which belonged to an elderly woman, who later moved into the house of a daughter. And so, we also acquired the entire property with all the buildings. Now we were able to alter these for exhibition purposes of our work, which was again a special task and gave us a lot of pleasure. Equipped with all the ceramic possibilities our studio had to offer, we were able to demonstrate to our customers what was possible for us. Our work was getting better and better and we did succeed, so when another house was offered to us in our immediate neighbourhood, we used that for exhibitions too. Meanwhile, we were so experienced in the renovation of old, rundown half-timbered courtyards, that we didn't hesitate to take over a fourth neighbour object, which was now for sale, too.

From the outside, all have retained their half-timbered character, only inside, none resembled the other even approximately. This was made possible by using the diversity of our own ceramics and our other works. All bathrooms, fireplaces, tiled stoves and murals were made in our own studio. Alone 13 different tiled stoves and fireplaces are to be visited. The buildings were complemented with matching courtyards and gardens, where the larger bronze sculptures have found an appropriate place. The smaller ones were placed inside accordingly. There were now about 250.

Now only a beautiful old church was our neighbor, which was not for sale. In gratitude for the many opportunities offered to us by the village, we donated three sculptures for the church and the community. Two Madonnas for the little church and a Pietà for the memorial of the fallen to commemorate the mothers of the fallen, which caused confusion at first. But when a pastor explained the meaning of the sculpture at a memorial service, it was accepted. The parish thanked the donors (us) with a solemn initiation in the church and a small village festival. It was an uplifting time for us, especially in the dedication Mass, for which a member of the parish, Mr. Lanzerath, had specially created a small booklet with pictures of the sculptures and songs for the Mass which were sung along to diligently. I had been condemned to give a speech after the pastor, and took this unusual opportunity to thank the whole village, which had offered us this unique opportunity to represent our creative work so complexly. I also thanked all those who helped each in their own way.

For this, I got the first (and probably last) public applause, which is unusual in a church.

Another highlight brought this donation when a Cologne suffragan bishop in full regalia gave the episcopal blessing in a small sacrificial hour. Very pleased with our work, he promised to visit us privately. And in fact he came with two other priests, all of whom were very fond of the sculptures, especially the Bishop, who believing that one of them was representing the Holy Spirit. On leaving, he marched again to the object, probably to say goodbye. He now has his own diocese in Berlin and became a Cardinal. Astonishing was that nobody got bothered that none of us two was a member of a parish anymore. In the meantime, we had wonderful exhibitions, especially with our bronze sculptures. One exhibition was in Cologne at Rolls Royce and another one at the Museum of Euskirchen. Both were very well designed. In addition, we have the permanent exhibition in our own facilities, both indoors and outdoors.

1980 - Biography & Mutants

I had the idea with the biography already a few years ago and started with it on a skiing holiday because of bad weather. There were always long breaks, but it would have been a pity if I had done it quickly back then. Because since the beginning to today, so much has happened that was also newsworthy. Our creative phase, as far as ceramics are concerned, was slowly ending. All the companies for which we were still active until the end, did not exist anymore. Large ceramic walls for indoor pools had not been an issue for quite some time. Only our tiled stoves and fireplaces were still interesting to customers, but that too ceased slowly. Soapstone suddenly was a bestseller. For some time I had fallen in love with bronze, but I have remained true to pottery up to a size of 80 cm when designing. Because bronze is actually a metamorphosis! It is never an original, namely the casting of an original. They are only originals when they are forged, but that requires a blacksmithing profession. Only with the sizes over 80 cm I had to resort to a foreign material which was an absolute novelty for me, namely now working with Ytong stones instead of using soft clay or plaster. But I also liked that, because now I was finally able to get to life-size dimensions, which was already a different world, because I always have them in sight of me.

Then I fell for something very crazy, namely my beloved Mutants (regarding to: to mutate, to develop further). Our clientele were all successful post-war entrepreneurs who wanted to show their success in a demonstrative way. We needed something to give new customers an impression of success at the very first meeting, because we had to sell them something of what they did not get to see before.

What was better than a Porsche 911? What then got confirmed, because a Porsche was literally waiting for us, at a customer who had exactly the one that suited us. He had to give it away with a heavy heart because his family had become too big. We got an agreement and so we now became a customer of Porsche, too, which was also the birth of the mutants. When we were allowed to exhibit a number of our bronze sculptures at the Rolls-Royce presentation of a new luxury car, the Porsche people immediately came up to us and wanted the same exhibition with us at their own place, again for the presentation of a new car model. We had to reject it, because Rolls-Royce had staged such a great exhibition for us, which was already spatially unrepeatable. But I promised the Porsche people to come up with something special for them and already had an idea!

The car was now the topic. It consists of innumerable individual parts - and where does the rest of a once proud vehicle remain? On the scrapyards, which was now my treasure trove. It was pure fascination. I collected everything that a formerly mobile device could deliver and that came from the wheels or the motors. But I also found a lot of immobile origin, objects which got me so enthusiastic that I had to take them with me. And now it brought back the ceramist in me, with an almost brilliant idea. Namely to fit the individual parts into a special ceramic material, in order to represent something almost figurative. The whole thing then gets melted at 1030 degrees in our ceramic kiln, which gives the structures a special aura. It was a unique formal orgy for me. So not only figurative structures were created, but also reliefs, which once again exert their own charm.

First off they had their own room. But then there were so many that we had now united them in a larger room, on the base of a mined kiln and on postaments from former exhibitions, to a complete artwork. So now all are happy together, in different heights and widths. And together with the reliefs on the walls and, of course, a matching wall painting by Ingrid on a wall, with which we have once again created this wonderful setting.

They have become so beloved to me that I have not been able to part with one of the Mutants so far. The same thing happened to me with the ceramic sculptures, from which I could not part either, which again was a stroke of luck, because I could later have them cast in bronze. And so, we have almost everything exhibited here, which we created all through the years in our small world. The Porsche people were delighted, but I do not know if the vehicle ennobled with our mutant help became a success model. We are still delighted and enjoy more and more of the creatures. Even my ceramic friends admired them enthusiastically, but they view my bronze work rather sceptically. It is fascinating how opportunities arise, as with Porsche and a cancellation for an already used exhibition (the one for Rolls-Royce). A completely new and crazy combination: to create completely new structures out of scrap with ceramics, which are so unique and unrepeatable, and without this symbiosis not feasible. Nobody has tried that before!

So: Everything is good for something!

2013 - A book for the fan community

Meanwhile, we have learned from Dutch collectors that German ceramics from the 50s and 60s of the last century, including so many objects from my early days in the decorative ceramics industry, are enthusiastically collected. What made my name reach such a level of awareness that I just could not believe it - and not just with the Dutch, but worldwide. Some models were stylized into icons. We were urged to join Facebook so that we could better correspond with each other. Also, a book about our work could be written. We were immediately recommended to a renowned art publisher, who showed interest, so that we once again got into a completely new, unknown area of assignment with enthusiasm. The time was favorable, because we had just finished a fifth object of our half-timbered courtyards collection in our street, directly opposite, again arranged with many new specific features inside and outside.

Working on the book was quite stressful in the beginning, because our idea of it and the idea of the publisher were terrifyingly far apart. But we were able to convince the publisher that we had our own idea and also ideas for the layout of our book. So, at last it came to admittedly suspense-packed but also interesting cooperation. We squatted in front of the computer every day to check page after page and suggest changes if necessary. Especially with the colours, my wonderful wife had a very unique idea and remained rock-solid. It was the same with the size ratios of the many pictures.

And that's exactly where we experienced the first breakdown. We had delivered a lot of photos which I had taken, but then I had to be told: they are not **printable**. The problem then got solved by a very good professional photographer from the neighbouring village, who, thank Heaven, admired our work here from the beginning and had made pictures over the years. Now we were able to score with his excellent pictures, with which he has a very significant share of this book and so he was appropriately mentioned in the book.

And so, both sides fought intensively until the final design even of the book inside cover. For the articles the publishing house found very good authors, like Dr. Makus and Alexandra Marx. Our mayor, Dr. Friedl, stated in an article, what enrichment our facilities for the village and city mean. But a very special part in the success of this book was the publishing director. He himself was often here with the prototypes, comparing the sheets to the original colours and taking notes for the printing, where he himself was present to correct everything again.

Meanwhile, we have become friends, which pleases us very much. He is also our own publisher now.

When the long-awaited day came and we could take the book in our hands, everyone involved was overjoyed. It had become a good book and arrived punctually, albeit extremely scarce, at the Frankfurt Book Fair and then made the journey to the world, because it is bilingual. With this book, we have fulfilled a great wish of ours. After all, what we have created here will not be able to continue to exist so long after us. Even though every visitor says, "It has to be preserved," we cannot believe it. Because in this fast-moving time,

everything is geared only to the market and profit. As soon as anything appears on the market, they are already working on the successor. There is little interest in the enduring.

That's why we also enjoy the book, which gives a little insight into our work and which survives a little longer somewhere in the world than what is still here to see and to experience. All the more, we enjoy it ourselves, every day, in spite of the many work that it demands from us. When I wake up in the morning, while still in bed, I can see the whole church tower up to the top and the gilded weathercock whose direction tells me what kind of weather we can expect today. But:. "Life's undivided joy ..." etc.

2013 - How Illness Can Change A Life

Some things change our life from one day to the next...

We had just returned from a nice winter vacation, and Ingrid brought the shingles with her as a souvenir. It caused her a lot of pain which she could not endure without painkillers and sleeping pills. This resulted in constipation, which then developed into bowel obstruction, and subsequent emergency surgery in the Euskirchen Hospital to which she simply did not want to go. They were not sure if it would succeed without a stoma. This cost us many sleepless nights.

The colon did us a favor and began to work again. When Ingrid was able to walk a bit, she desperately wanted to leave the clinic and go to rehab. When she arrived, the doctor ordered a thorough blood test, and she was diagnosed with kidney failure. She was immediately returned to the hospital, to the same ward, to the same doctor who operated her, and who, as a surgeon was completely overtaxed.

Now a long ordeal began, which almost ended in a disaster! They pumped her full of water to get the kidneys going. Now she looked as if she had been inflated. About 12 Liters of water had spread unequally in her body, and caused terrible pain. Since they did not know what else they could do, she was taken to the neighboring hospital for a kidney biopsy, which was very painful and revealed nothing. When her condition turned critical, they decided to put her on dialysis. If a miracle did not save her now, she would need a lifelong dialysis three to four times a week. I fed her like a little bird with what I prepared at home, because what they offered was no meal for a seriously ill patient. It was a thoughtless, brazen, insult.

Then the miracle did happen. Her kidneys slowly began to work again, and after a few days there was no concern to discontinue dialysis and remove the port. This alone was a gift from heaven. The doctors were stunned, and could not explain the recovery. One by one, they came to marvel at the poor little human-being they had almost given up on, and they actually did speak of a miracle.

She was now hospitalized for 12 weeks, and weighed merely 45 kilo. Now they wanted to send her to rehab, even though she was not able to sit, let alone walk, and we both insisted to bring her home to me. In an emaciated condition she was taken home in an ambulance. I had provided for the necessary medical aids, like toilet chair, wheelchair, walker, and a special mattress. Thanks to my 24-hour care, and the medical care of our tireless, loving family doctor, who was on the spot if something did not work, she was now recovering day by day. It took weeks before she was able to stand and walk a bit with the walker. With the help of a very competent massagist, she had to learn all over again.

The problems she has since her hospital stay, above all the side-effects from the enormous amount of medication she was given, which none of the doctors can explain, still cause her great discomfort. We are trying to make the best of what is possible, but it is still very hard!

This illness again ended a chapter in life. This time for both of us. We cannot live as carefree as before. As with everything though, there is also good in this, because we now live in a stage we would not have reached so fast, if at all, without this illness. We are grateful for every day we can spend with each other, and everything around us suddenly has a different

valence. Since then we live in a state of gratitude and contentment that cannot be valued high enough.

Since 1968 - Skiing in the mountains

I still indulge in my passion for skiing in the mountains, which started with a stolen board and a following police report. However, since Mittenwald with a nearly twenty-five year break. But then right and intensively with new techniques and of course with the appropriately improved boards. I have been doing this again for over forty years now. During this time not only has the material (and the clothing) changed, but also the people with whom I started my resumption of skiing. Back then it was still very tedious when it came to both the ski runs and the ski lifts. But it was much more sociable, because when you had booked a whole week with a ski instructor, you had to drive down a hill and was, depending on ability, assigned to a ski instructor. So, then groups of ten to twelve students were put together, which then remained together for the whole week. These groups were again divided into numbers according to their ability: Group 1 & 2 were beginners, group 3-4 were medium to good and group 5 the top class. Until then, a few years have gone by.

But then there was already the ambition in play and there it was not as funny as at 3 & 4. Standing in front of our ski instructor in a row, we had to give our first name and the origin. The whole goings-on was called skiing school. So again and again one came together with the most different types of people. And since we all did almost equally well or equally bad at the beginning, it worked quite well. Since at that time there were only hanger lifts, i.e. two on one hanger, it was possible to get a closer sniff of each other.

Also, there weren't any firm ski runs, so quickly there were a lot of falls because of the "tubs" and "humps", which made the downhill skiing particularly laborious, but also funny, because you could not get to threatening speeds and the tumbling caused no injuries but laughter. This created longstanding acquaintanceships and friendships, which partly last until today.

It all stayed that way for decades until new techniques came, such as snow guns, which provided artificial snow or as wide piste-smoothers, which created motorway-wide runs for the skiers. And last but not least, there were chair lifts with which four to eight people could be comfortably transported to the mountains, to then glide down the smooth wide slopes in more or less elegant turns down to the chair station, to climb a chair again. All this brought a lot of unfamiliar changes in our usual ski holiday. We had to completely change our usual skiing technique. Throughout the past few years, we had laboriously learned to use the ski poles to make the turns and to master the mogul slopes. Meanwhile, we were proud to have moved up into Group 5. It was tempting to experience these possible speeds that we had not dared to dream of before. When I once, without ski instructor and group, accompanied only by carelessness, accomplished a tempo-reinforced fall, which gave me a clean tendon tear in the left shoulder, I had been taught what speed can do. After the operation in the clinic they shoved a 20 cm thick drum under my arm and strapped it for six weeks.

The slopes are now populated by wannabe ski racers, with the same behavior as the wannabe race drivers on the roads. Then came also the driving with a so-called snowboard, a 30-40 cm wide and 150-180 cm long board, which is slightly bent up at the front. The feet are crossways strapped in bindings so you cannot move them. The young people were enthusiastic about this type of snow travel, and the skiers with the two boards and the two sticks were contemptuously blamed as Stöckle drivers. I couldn't stop thinking about it, so I got me such a board and again a teacher. The very first exercises took place on an ice glacier, on which only about 2-3 cm snow lay! The now inevitable falls usually ended on the bum, which made my tailbone very bad. I learned it after all, but after some time I became a stick driver again, as I find it more elegant, and one is more flexible.

In the railways and the chair lifts, you hardly hear a word, because almost all are busy with their I- or smartphones. Meanwhile, there were also still natural, but more serious changes. From year to year, more and more long-standing acquaintances were missing and the distance to the descendants was getting bigger and bigger. Since I am still very good with the boards and do not look as old as I am, I bring it as a passionate stick driver still to an amazing performance. And as far as the digitalization, whether PC, I or Smartphone, concerns, I keep up with it, too. But all that does not help me, because it can't mask the almost total absence of my generation. What I miss most is the cheerful sociability and human closeness, which was intensively cultivated in my generation. It was almost more important to us than the actual skiing with its hardships, which we did not take as seriously as the current up-tempo generation.

In order to get into this wonderful high mountain world in winter, we not only have to cope with a fair amount of snowfall and snowy roads, but also congested passes, where all you can do is orient ourselves at the poles on the side of the road and ask yourself: Do we still have to do this to ourselves? But once we have made it and arrived in this enchanting, snow-covered landscape, we know that we will do it again and again for as long as we can. But above all, still guided by the prospect of skiing on wonderfully groomed slopes, which is still tremendously fun, even though I am now increasingly asked: "Are you still skiing?" "Yes, why not?" Is my answer.

But the day will come closer when I sense this great feeling of speed - which always reminds me of flying - for a last time and when I finish it with great wistfulness. What would then remain as winter sports, would be cross-country skiing, but I will not do that to me, because that's another world, and that could only make me sad. Everything has its time, and I can say, "I enjoyed it in my own way and I'm grateful for it," and I hope I'll be still able to do it for quite a while.

The same thing will probably also happen to me with the car driving, which I enjoyed enthusiastically for decades. Since we were more than diligent, we could afford the corresponding cars. I never thought I'd leave the steering wheel to my wife, but since she's an excellent driver, I let chauffeur myself with pleasure sometimes and enjoy the scenery I've never really seen before. Only at night and in the rain and snow, she then leaves me behind the wheel. So we complement each other perfectly, as always, which made us so successful!

The departure from driving myself is made easier for me by the fact that it is no longer a pure pleasure, as I was used to it for a long time. Especially over the highways, the way becomes uncomfortable, if you no longer like to participate as a wannabe racer and give preference to more comfortable cars. If one dares nevertheless on the left track of the motorway, the side designated for racers, one is unequivocally referred back between two trucks on the right. To escape this horror, we now drive long distances only at night, but this with great pleasure. I have no problem with that, not like many others because of the view at night. This really well-developed road belongs only to us then, often for many kilometres. An uplifting feeling, and when the morning starts to break, it still takes a while until the fight for the left lane again gets occupied by out-and-rested lone fighters. Then we are already at the destination of our journey.

2016

- Everything's Changing With Frightening Speed

Since nothing stays as it is, a constant adjustment to change is demanded. Only the speed in which everything is changing, is slowly becoming frightening, whereby much of what was once good is lost in the process and not always replaced with something better. When I began to busy myself with a PC I backed the wrong horse from the start. I bought an Apple computer, since it was considered the best at that time, which it was, but because of it I was a lone rider in the prairie. No one in my environment was familiar with it and I was forced to rely on support from Bonn where I purchased it. This wasn't only inconvenient but not cheap either, and the software was more than modest, and all the more expensive.

But despite that, I enjoy the innovations of these fast-paced times where in ever shorter intervals predecessors are replaced with even better successors that constantly change this seemingly unreal, so-called digital world. No sooner have you befriended a complicated device, they come up with an improved successor that excels the current one and leaves it looking underservedly old.

I started with these fascinating and almost incomprehensible possibilities when the WWW was still called BTX (short for "Bildschirmtext", a German "screen text"). First of all, it was tedious to get the hang of it and therefore very few people were willing to make the effort. It took a long time until more people grew interest and found their way into this medium. Especially the younger generation took a liking to it.

To my regret, it wasn't my generation anymore. That's why to this day, I regret not being able to communicate with my own generation via this medium. But that doesn't stop me from interacting with friends in this totally new digital world, although I can only use a fraction of the possibilities which it has. I'm afraid though that humanity will be much easier to manipulate in the future than it already is.

Regardless of that, I'm very happy and grateful that I'm allowed to experience all of this and know how to use it. Alone the conveniences that these devices offer me, such as sending letters and pictures, doing banking, scanning and printing texts and sending them by e-mail or fax. And our telephone has almost transformed into a PC and shrunk to nano size with memory space that you needed boxes and paid a fortune for in the past. Still, I'm curious to what else will come, because there is still much to come, that's for sure, because everything that is feasible will also be done. Whether you need it or not, if it's new, you have to have it!

Similar to our decorative ceramics, when you liked it and it was new again, you wanted it. But their true value is only now being really appreciated, after decades, after landing worthless and despised in flea-markets, and are now being diligently bought with enthusiasm by a global collector community, which I can enjoy every day on Facebook. And the best thing about it for me is that their value, in relation to the articles manufactured today, increases with age.

And so I experience the enjoyment of a recognition that I still do not believe I deserve. The collectors put the greatest value in the makers name of these entities because that's the value stamp and crucial for the price. With so-called art it's no

different. The name determines the pecuniary value, which the gallery owner ennobles with the price (which is the real artist now, because he determines the price, which is then also the actual value scale, in which he then also accordingly participates). Unlike me, I don't get a cent for the use of my name, and I'm satisfied with the all the recognition I undeservedly receive. The hauls from the raids of happy owners are now shown daily on Facebook, and they ask me for a comment. You can then simply click on the "Like" button or write a comment, whereby the smallest is the most valuable, namely my stamp: "von mir"! ("by me" - red.) Then you can celebrate, but not without first thanking me (with nice words)!

It's a happy feeling that the countless products of my "misdeeds" since 1954, after 60 years, are proudly presented today with the request to confirm that they are from me. And that worldwide. What more does one want? Since I've never valued these mass-produced objects, they're now experiencing an appreciation "I" have never granted them. At the fairs I always looked with envy at the works of smaller studios who were able to show off with fancy pieces. I really wanted to do that, too - and have done it with my wonderful wife and partner.

In terms of design, we continued to work freelance for the decorative ceramics industry until the end. But in our own studio we advanced and entered other dimensions and materials. Added to this was the acquisition of half-timbered houses in need of restoration. A totally new area of responsibility, which was also tackled with joy and made us happy again and again when we restored them to their former glory. With this and with our bronze donations, we've given

the village of our beloved new home an unmissable legacy. The buildings are galleries and museums at the same time, accessible to anyone interested who wants to submit to the effort. Five courtyards, each with three buildings (residential house, stable and barn), which results in approx. 55 rooms, each of which is individually designed and none of which has a hint of resemblance to another room. Which doesn't mean that we won't make changes in these rooms again. In retrospect, we ourselves are astonished by the "silly things" we've done in the course of our crazy coexistence.

Just to see what we have around us every day confirms that only in this partnership were we able to be successful. In addition, there are the many, countless creations for demanding homeowners who wanted their home equipped with something unusual, such as ceramic mural painting, fireplaces and tiled stoves, etc. All this was made possible by the coincidental encounter of two completely different people. But both with the tendency to do something unusual and take risks.

Gratitude Makes Getting Older Easier!

Now again to my beginning, to my unplanned birth, which made my wonderfully rich life possible. In gratitude, I remember the many people who in my long life, in whatever form, have meant, helped or given to me.

One is never alone and always dependent upon their environment. We experience the longest and intense dependency as children, contrary to most animals. It lasts about 20 years, and until we reach a proper maturity, several more. In retrospect, I probably reached that stage in my early forties, but maturing only really ends when we leave the big world stage.

From a certain stage of serenity one can enjoy the remaining time more intense and grateful than before. It is amazing how valences change in different age stages, and one can only marvel at how unimportant most of what we burdened ourselves with was.

The first half of my career I was inevitably subject to supporting the lives of several people. This changed abruptly after my last change in companies which changed two things. I freed myself from a marriage that wasn't even a relationship, since I alone was responsible for anything and everything.

In order to spend the best second half of my life with the woman whom I've been living and working with now for 46 years; with a lot of combined work, happy and always with pleasure in our creations. Only because we ideally complemented and promoted each other, was what we accomplished possible. We never saw each other as

competitors, and were always careful to support each other in our different talents and skills, and also to accept criticism, which led to the optimal result we both could enjoy.

During my career as a designer in the decorative ceramic industry I always determined the length and end of employment myself, though gradually for longer periods of time. Only the end of the final chapter in life I won't (yet) be able to determine myself (although I could warm up to the idea of self-determination).

Above all, I'm endlessly grateful for being able to spend the last half of my life with this wonderful woman at my side. Our mutual appreciation grows more and more every day, and so we treat each other as a wonderful gift! We're submerged in a state of love that can produce true feelings of happiness with its power. To love and be loved is the greatest gift life has to offer, but you have to go through quite some hell to get there!

With one foot in the nineties, I will end the story of my life for now. A life that opened many different worlds of experience for me, and shaped my personality in their own unique way. It was a full, eventful life with many highs and lows, which is how life should be. It fills me with much gratitude, because being thankful also engenders happiness!

But heaven can wait. There's still much to do. Because

**you can do much more
than you think you can.**