Vol. 1
Intro /
Overview
English

Peter M. Dittl.
1989

copy for Lischen

Peter N. Witt

1989

SKETCHES FROM MY MEMORY.

Contents:

Motto: from Barbara Tuchman, in "Practicing History",1981: She had arrived at "a sense of history as accidental and perhaps cyclical, of human conduct as a steady stream running through endless fields of changing circumstances, of good and bad always coexisting and inextricably mixed in periods and in people, of crosscurrents usually present to contradict too-easy generalizations."

Note: this is the short, preliminary part of my Thoughts and Memories. I wrote it for my own amusement, and to entertain my favorite people: close relatives, like my wife and daughters, and a few others. I am grateful for the untiring assistance which my friend C.F.Reed provided.

grandparents' Mendelssohn house in Grunewald

grandfather Witt with first wife, Eliza + children, Westend
c 1890

Childhood Environment.

It has been well established that we inherit many behavioral traits from our ancestors; like physical characteristics, these traits are somehow coded in the genes. In an inbred family like my mother's, such traits should manifest themselves strongly. However, there is the environment, in which we grow up, which plays a decisive role in forming our habits, tastes, even guiding our interests. In my childhood my mother's family surrounded me physically closely and influenced me spiritually, and my father's family played only a peripheral role in the lives of us children. Particularly after my parents' divorce in the early 1920s, when I was only a few years old, we saw our father only on weekends, and all four children lived with ~~their~~ mother.

I can ~~only~~ describe the setting of my early childhood; but it will be difficult to transmit the feeling of envelopment and warmth, which surrounded me while I grew up. Such feeling was brought about by a number of factors: though we are a family of multinational ancestry, Berlin was now our home. It had been the home of most of my mother's family since my great-great-great-greatgrandfather had entered it by foot in the early 18th century (see chapter on family history).- My father's father had settled in Berlin as professor of chemistry and Rektor of the Berlin Technische Hochschule in the middle of his life in the late 19th century, and he stayed there until his death in 1915.

My mother was born in the more than 100 year old house of the Mendelssohn family in the center of the city (Jägerstrasse). The house became part of the growing private bank in the 1890s, and my grandparents moved to their newly built much larger house in Berlin-Grunewald, Herthastrasse 5. My mother, her three sisters and her brother grew up there, and my grandparents lived there when I was a child.

My father was born in the Berlin suburb of Westend, which adjoins Grunewald. His father, who was born in St. Petersburg in Russia, and who had grown up in Zürich in Switzerland, had moved there at the end of the 19th century. He had lived there first with his half-Spanish wife, and after her death, with his English wife.There were 5 children ~~of~~ the first marriage, and one child- a girl- ~~of~~ the second.(For more see chapter on family history).

my parents' house, Berlin-Grunewald, Königsallee 18

2 living rooms with family portraits in my grandparents' house.
left: l → r: Moses M., Emma Bianet + daughter Emile, Felix M.B.
ri: top 2 Oppenheimers, bottom: Marianne M.

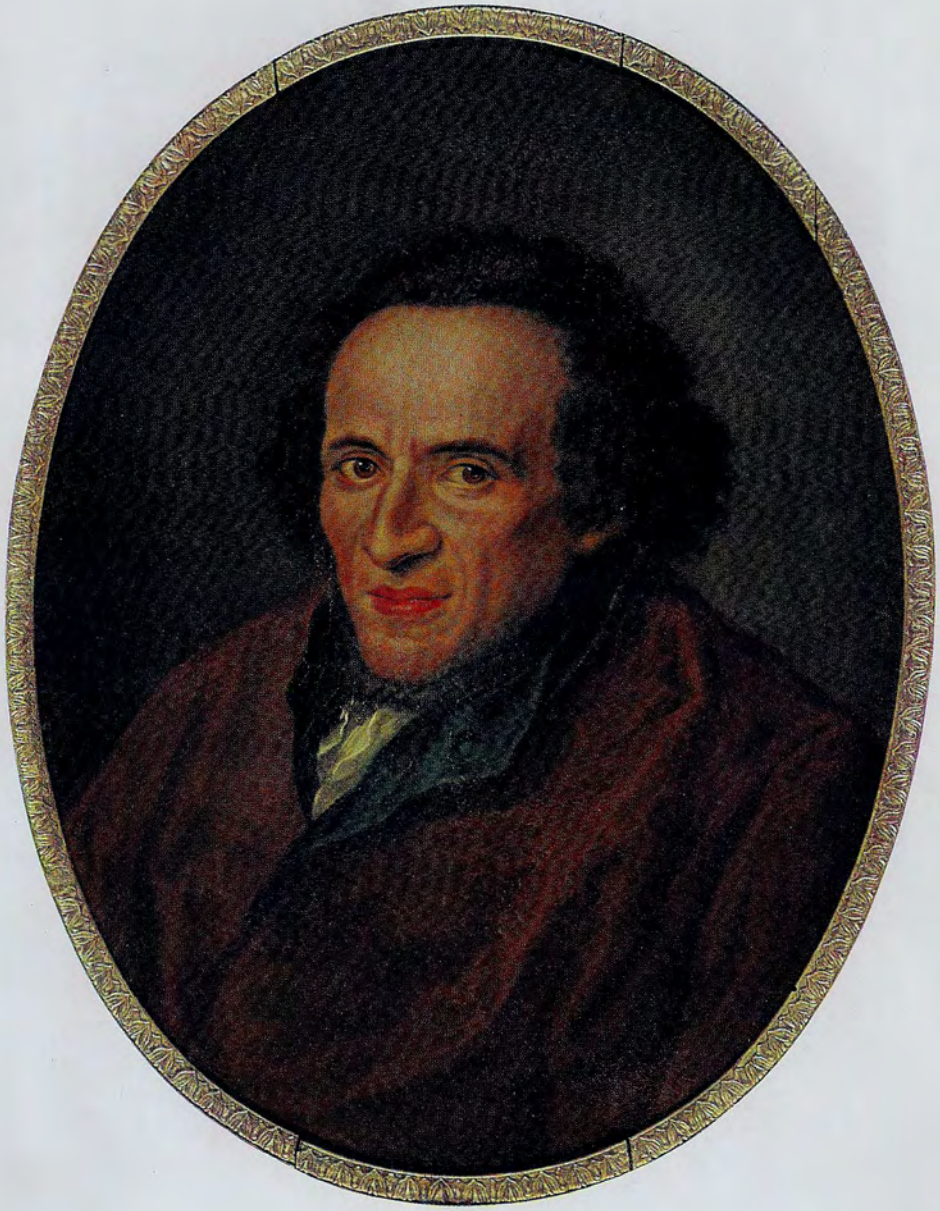
My parents built their house in what had been the fruit and vegetable garden across the lake from my mother's parents. This lovely house was my home for over 20 years. It was totally destroyed in 1943 during aerial bombardments in the Second World War.

Most of my first cousins lived near us. We played with them and with other relatives, who also lived nearby. As I remember, we rarely played with children ~~which~~ who were not related to us.

Looking back now, from late twentieth century America, our surroundings in the 1920s appear as a remarkably stable environment for a child. The atmosphere in which we grew up was even more unusual, particularly in regard to my mother's strong family. There were books like "Die Familie Mendelssohn" (The Mendelssohn Family), which were widely read, and which described our 18th and early 19th century relatives. The author was an uncle, Sebastian Hensel, who was the son of Fanny Mendelssohn, the musically gifted sister of the composer Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, and of Wilhelm Hensel, the court painter of the Prussian kings, who had drawn hundreds of sketches of his contemporaries.

Sebastian became a landowner in East Prussia, where he lived ~~rather remote from~~ Berlin. He remembered fondly his childhood in Berlin in the large Mendelssohn house in the Leipziger Strasse 3, and he wrote a family history for his children, drawing from letters, diaries and his own memory. It covered the years 1729 to 1874. At the urging of his friends, he finally published an abbreviated version in two volumes. It became an unexpected success. New editions and translations appeared in quick succession for nearly 100 years. Apart from its account of particular people, it offered the reader a model history of a German-Jewish family in the 18. and 19. centuries. The book itself stood on our shelf, where we children could read about our family at any time.

There were public concerts in Berlin, in which the music of our greatuncle Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy ~~was~~ played, and (to which we went). There were letters preserved in boxes in the attic or available in print, which our forefathers had written to each other, and letters from their contemporaries, which they had received. We had been great preservers of memorabilia, and it was told, that when Felix Mendelssohn Bertholdy, the composer, died, his wastepaper basket was sealed, so that no scrap of paper ~~was~~ would be lost for the next generation.



Portrait, Moses Mendelssohn, 1780, J. C. Frisch

There were other reminders, not only the portraits of ~~many~~ ancestors and relatives on the walls, but objects like the first tooth lost by my greatgreatuncle Beni a century earlier, or the china monkey, which one of our Jewish ancestors had to buy in order to get permission to marry in 18th century Berlin. This requirement was decreed by Frederick the Great, the "tolerant monarch", who wanted his newly founded Berlin china manufactures supported.

Last not least were the oft-told family stories. I select three that may provide some insight into the history with which we became familiar, one from the 18th, one from the 19th and one from the 20th century.

The first story concerns Moses Mendelssohn, the 18th century philosopher and emancipator of the Jews in Prussia. He is my great-great-great-greatgrandfather; my mother's father and my mother's mother were both his descendants. He was a small man, a hunchback, stuttering and rather shy. When he came to Hamburg as a young man, he visited the merchant Gugenheim in his office. They had met before in Bad Pyrmont, and Gugenheim had told him that his daughter Fromet thought highly of Mendelssohn and his writings. He was invited to go upstairs and meet her, and there they had a long talk. When he visited Gugenheim again the next day, Moses asked what the lovely daughter had said about his visit. "You want the honest truth, respected rabbi?" asked Gugenheim. "Naturally", was Moses' answer. "Well, you are a philosopher, a wise and great man; I fear you will hold it against the girl when she said she was frightened when she saw you,because..." "Because I have a hunchback?" asked Moses. Gugenheim nodded."I thought so; but I still would like to say good-buy to your daughter."

Gugenheim consented, and Moses went upstairs and sat down near the girl, who was sewing. Although their talk went beautifully, the girl never looked up from her work and avoided Mendelssohn's eyes. Finally, after he had skillfully directed the conversation to marriage, she asked:"Do you believe that marriages are concluded in heaven?" He answered:"Certainly, and for me there was a special incident. When a child is born, it is announced in heaven that there will be a certain boy for a certain girl. When I was born, my future wife was known, but, sad to say, it was also known that the girl would have a hunchback. Dear God, I said, a girl which does not grow straight can easily become bitter and hard. A girl should be beautiful. Please, God, give me the hunchback, and let the girl be slender and lovely." At these words the girl embraced him.-She became his wife and the mother of many children, from whom we descend.

Another story concerns a letter my greatuncle , Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, wrote home to his family in Berlin during a trip to Weimar. This composer is related to me four times: his father is the brother of two of my great-great-greatgrandfathers, his mother is the aunt of two of my great-greatgrandmothers.

It was November 1821, he was 12 years old and already an accomplished pianist and composer. His teacher, Zelter, who was a friend of the old poet Goethe, thought that the boy's music and company might be enjoyed by Goethe, who lived with all his fame as a rather lonely old man. Felix wrote:"Now listen all of you to me, and listen well. Today is Tuesday, and on Sunday 1st, the Sun of Weimar, Goethe, arrived...Professor Zelter came to me: Goethe is here, the old gentleman has arrived! We went immediately downstairs in Goethe's house...He is very friendly, but I find that none of his portraits does him justice...One can hardly believe, that he is 73; he looks rather fiftyish. Every morning I receive from the author of Faust and Werther a kiss, and every afternoon from the fatherly friend Goethe two kisses. Think of that!! In the afternoon I play two hours for Goethe: Bach fugues, or I improvise...and in the evening we sit all together, including Goethe, who normally does not eat supper." In this and later letters Felix tells about playing and explaining Beethoven to the first mistrustful and later enthusiastic Goethe. He reports a number of details which are still worth reading.

The third story, which happened nearly 100 years later, was told to me by my grandparents. I asked them about a large model ship, a sailing vessel, which hung from the ceiling in the entrance room to the wine cellars. It was a model of the yacht Hohenzollern, and had been received as a present from the last German emperor Wilhelm II. at the occasion of a visit to their house. It was shortly before the First World War, around 1910, that the present arrived at the house, and this goes together with a story:

Entrance hall, where emperor's box was opened.

Dining room with Dürkh wall paintings, where emperor's dinner was served.

Entrance room to the wine cellar. Above fire place the Mendelsohn crane with beer glass; boat model of the „Hohenzollern" hangs from the ceiling.

The emperor had "announced" his visit,- one does not invite an emperor! The announcement had been brought by the general von Scholl, his aide-de-camp, and an old friend of my grandfather's from the days of their joint military service in the Bonner Husaren and Fürstenwalder Ulanen. The model arrived in a box several days before the visit; it was duly unpacked and received without great enthusiasm. My grandparents were not interested in ships. Just before the emperor arrived, the general appeared and asked for the box. He was told that it had been unpacked and put away.The general was greatly upset. The emperor had personally supervised the building of the model, and he had looked forward to the surprise and pleasure from my grandparents at the unpacking in his presence, when it came out of the box. - The model was quickly repacked under the supervision of the general, and several rehearsals of the unpacking, with suitable expressions of great surprise, were held. When the emperor arrived, he was handed a chisel to open the box. Everybody stepped back in utter astonishment,- as rehearsed,- and exclaimed "Ohhh!" The performance proved satisfactory, and the visit was regarded as a great success. The entrance hall, where the scene had been played, was crossed by me as a child many times, and I always saw the scene in my mind's eye

The emperor, a grandson of Queen Victoria, was well-known for his spontaneity and vanity; they were thought handicaps to his rule. It was also no great treat to have dinner with him,at least as I was told by my maiden aunt Lischen. He had to be served first and he started to eat immediately very fast. When he put his fork down, everybody at the table had to stop eating. My great-aunt Lischen, who as an unmarried old lady sat at the other end of the table from the emperor, never forgave him for the fact, that she had only a brief taste of the delicious dinner that had been prepared.

There was a nice follow-up correspondence to the visit: my aunt Lilli, then just about 10 years of age, wrote a postcard to the emperor. It read:"Dear little emperor (the German "Liebes Kaiserchen" sounds even funnier): when you come next time to visit us, please wear the uniform of the Garde-du-Corps. My little brother likes that so much." She received a quick, handwritten response:"I love to come to your parents, and on my next visit I will definitely wear this uniform."- The correspondence was recently sold at auction by Lilli's oldest son.-The next visit never took place; there were the First World War and the revolution, during which the emperor fled Germany.

visit / parents' house

began soon thereafter

Headgardener Kowalski with Peter (right) and Detlef (left) Witt.

-While I was growing up, there were in addition to the various family houses and other buildings, ~~seated~~ about the Hertha-See, three gardens. My mother's garden, one of the three, was an important setting for my early development. I do not know whether a gardener is born or made. In my case, one could credit two circumstances during my childhood for stimulating a life-long interest in gardening: one was my mother's head gardener and my special friend, Kowalski, the other was our lovely, colorful and sunny garden, which surrounded the house in which I spent most of the first 25 years of my life.

At the time at which I was a little boy, Kowalski was a white-haired and white-mustachiod "old man"; I called him by the ~~diminutive~~ "Kochen". He had come to Berlin from the East as a young man, and had worked for years for my paternal grandfather Otto N. Witt; he had especially helped my grandfather in raising and hybridizing orchids. I still own a large number of photographs of my grandfather's orchids in bloom, each photograph with a measure next to the blossom, and with a name and date at the bottom. Kochen told me many times, that he had learned all his gardening from my grandfather long before my time; the grandfather had died several years before I was born. When my mother and father had their new house built in the early 1920s, the garden was laid out under Kowalski's supervision and with his assistance. He then took charge of tending it, and he loved and cared for it for many years. He decidedly preferred flowers over vegetables, and I have preserved similar tastes ~~until today~~.

~~His~~ arthritis, at that time called rheumatism, was one of the reasons that he appeared so old to me. He moved slowly and had difficulty in kneeling down, but that never kept him from doing what had to be done. He also had an allergy to primroses, but he grew the most beautiful and colorful primroses I have ever seen. Every morning, when I joined him in the garden, we went through the same ritual: I would ask him:"Kochen, how is your rheuma?" and he would either answer "My rheumatism is well, I am poorly;" or he would say "I am well, my rheuma is weak today!" After that we would both laugh, and then he would discuss the plan of work for the day. I still remember his rules for performing each chore. We would transplant seedlings, distribute manure, rearrange plants in the greenhouses and coldframes, mix soil, and do many other tasks.

Schwester Anna at the diving board of Francesco's pool

Every day we would take an inspection tour through the whole house, at which time he saw to it that fresh flowers were in every room. He had a strong preference for orchids, which he grew in the hot section of the greenhouse;- I still feel at home in a tropical greenhouse with its special odors. My mother did not share his preference, she disliked orchids, but she tolerated his idiosyncrasies. I remember one protest, however: He had asked my mother for an introduction to the home of a banker in Wannsee, who was known to have a particularly beautiful garden. He returned showing prowdly all the little cuttings and plantlets of rare flowers, which he had snitched behind the owner's back. These would go into our greenhouses and garden, to enrich the variety of colors and shapes. Stealing plants was to him in no way unethical.

He rarely bought plants, rather spent lots of time growing them from seeds and cuttings in the greenhouses and coldframes, and set them out the moment they were ready to blossom. Many beds in the garden were replanted several times a year. There appeared new color combinations, which were his way of pleasing my mother, as she was a color conscious painter.

Kochen lived with his wife and a grown-up son and daughter in a small house next to ours. This house had been built especially for him, and through its basement he could heat the greenhouses and enter them directly. He had several helpers in the garden for routine chores like raking of the leaves and mowing the lawns. The helpers came in for the day and left in the evening.- Kowalski liked to smoke a special kind of tobacco in his pipe, and I saved my Sunday-money all year to give him a package for his birthday and for Christmas. The tobacco and a bottle of Gilka Kümmel, a strong liquor which my nurse favored, were my main incentives for saving throughout the year.

I remember the garden, which surrounded our house, as particularly beautiful, much nicer than the much larger "parks" of my grandparents and of my greatuncle. I do not think that this is a distortion of memory; even by present standards I think I would judge this garden well designed and well-kept. When the house was built, it was located near the public thoroughfare, and the bathrooms, kitchen and other service rooms faced in that direction. On the opposite side one looked down on lawns sloping toward Herta See, and most bedrooms and living rooms looked out that way. From the upper floor of the house one looked down on old fruit trees, which my maternal grandparents had planted in the previous century, and on the lawns sloping toward the lake.

Of particular beauty were the old apple trees: in spring they ~~looked like~~ were clouds of pink and white blossoms, from which emanated a delicious, honey-like fragrance. Each of the apple, pear, cherry, peach and plum trees had been selected from a different strain, so that fruit would ~~become~~ ripe over a long period of time. Trees and the house complemented each other: one plum tree stood so close, that its branches reached the windows of our second floor playroom. My father was proud of the fact that he had watched carefully during construction of the house that not a branch was damaged. The sandy soil of Mark Brandenburg, the province in which Grunewald was located, was well-known for its advantage for growing good fruit trees, and in spring Berliners would leave the city to celebrate the time of the apple blossoms.

Along the lake and parallel to the house was a dry wall of grey stone. It was constructed so that it would hold the roots of hanging perennials, which formed tufts of radiant blue, red, yellow and white in early summer. A gravel path ran at the bottom of the stone wall along the lake, and between the path and the water, weeping willows bent over the lake. Some of these old trees leaned so far, that we could walk up their trunks. Under the willows in the water grew blue and yellow iris.

A path and stone steps led from the center of the house,- the garden room,- down to the lake and to a wooden bridge. As one crossed the bridge, one arrived at the bottom of the big lawn, which swept up to my grandparents' house. The entrance to the bridge on our side was flanked by high hedges of small-blossomed lilac. These shrubs had been transplanted from my greatgrandparents' house "Sorgenfrei" (Carefree / Sans Soucis) in Charlottenburg before the end of the last century. I have retained a preference for this old-fashioned lilac all my life.

To give an idea of the variety and usefulness of the garden, there follows an enumeration of some of its features:-There was a perennial border in various colors along the whole length of the house, which consisted mainly of plants from the (s)than famous nursery of Forster, West of Berlin. Its radiant blossoms could be seen against the dark-yellow background of the wall of the house.- One has to mention the long gazebo built of metal slats in the farthest corner of the garden, which was painted green, and which was overgrown with climbing roses of different colors and blossoms. In a round cupola at the end stood a marble Diana; we placed gifts of berries and flowers into her marble sandal.

-There were rows of beds for growing vegetables, strawberries, dahlias for cutting. Next to those were cold frames around which manure and leaves were packed in winter, and the windows of which were closed and opened every day, according to the weather.- There was a rose garden with bush and tree roses ~~for cutting~~, and long greenhouses with warm and cool sections, where many blossoming plants were grown for the house.- What a paradise for me as a litle boy! I spent many unforgettable hours of my first twenty years in that garden, and it set the standards for gardening at whereever I lived.

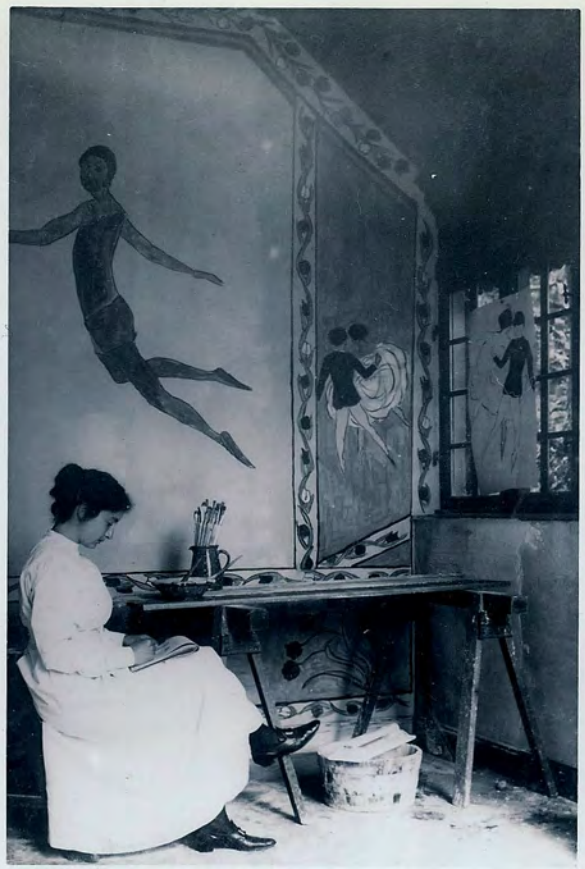
In memory returning to the house from the garden, another very important person appears: Schwester Anna. When I was a child, she had already been many years with the Mendelssohn family in various capacities. She moved from one family house to the other as the need for her help arose. When my greatuncle Robert at the end of the First World War and later my grandfather Franz von Mendelssohn in 1934 had strokes that partially paralyzed them, they wanted nobody else near them but Schwester Anna, and she nursed them both until their deaths. Whenever a baby was born in our family,- and that was a frequent occurrence between 1920 and 1930,- she appeared and helped, instructed, coordinated. When one of our many governesses had left, and the replacement had not yet arrived, she came and looked after us four children.

Normally we had two governesses, one for the boys and one for the girls, and they changed frequently. Nearly all of them are now forgotten, but Schwester Anna is fondly remembered. She was the only person who had permission from my mother to spank us; and those spankings were hard. As we sometimes got wilder and wilder, she would warn:"I have a loose hand!", and that would be sufficient to calm us down. She was firm in what she expected, and there was no escape from her rulings,-but we knew that she loved us. She was an excellent counterbalance to my vague and gentle mother, with whom she got along very well.

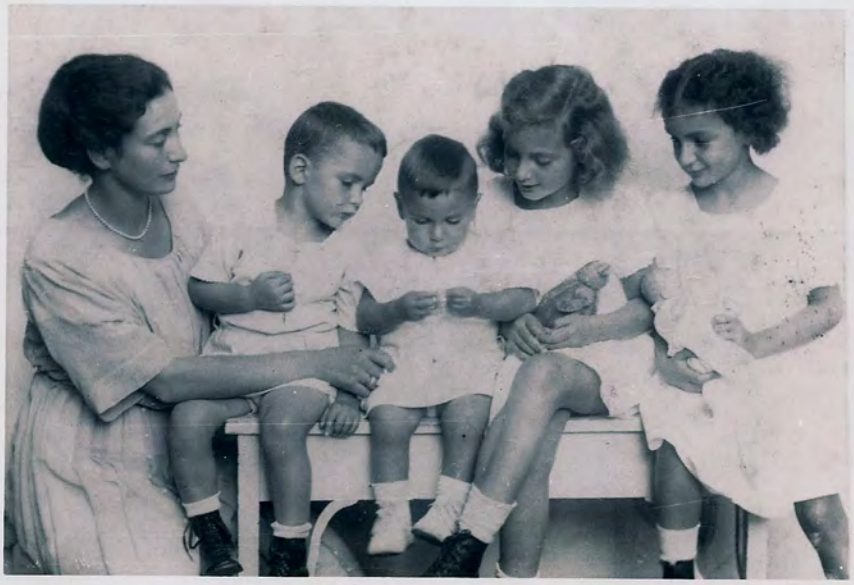
From the vantage point of another continent and more than 50 years later, Schwester Anna's background looks interesting. She was always close to her sister Hulda, who was for many years my grandmother's personal maid. Hulda dressed and looked after my grandmother. She occupied a room near my grandmother's bedroom, while the other servants,- with the exception of my grandfather's manservant,- lived in a separate building. Anna and Hulda were the daughters of an officer in the army of Sachsen, a medium-sized German kingdom. On Schwester Anna's desk was a photograph of her father in a colorfull uniform, sitting between his two daughters. Hulda and Anna were strongly attached to their late king and told stories about him in dialect. We loved to hear the stories told again and again in ~~the~~ Sächsisch ~~dialect~~ that sounded so funny to us.)

Though some of the flavor gets lost in translation, here are 2 as sample; One story refers to the well-beloved king's otherworldliness. He had obviously lived in the rarified atmosphere of the court, separated from the people, as kings used to do. Once, when he visited a prison, a murderer was introduced to him. The king asked whom he had murdered and was told that he had murdered his own mother. He admonished the murderer:"You murdered your lady mother? One really does not do that type of thing!"- The second story is of the king's departure from his capital after the revolution of 1918 to go into retirement. He had always done his duty, but he was obviously delighted to abdicate. When he looked out of the window of the train, he saw a cheering and weeping crowd of people who had come to say farewell. It is reported that he called with a worried voice:"You should really become better republicans!"- We loved to hear these stories again and again in the funny sounding Sächsisch dialect, and we were in the habit to quote the king.

I truly loved Schwester Anna, and her influence on my development was profound. Her modesty, kindness, loyalty and firmness were properties, that I tried to emulate. But I was only one of many who had a close relationship to her; she really had many "children". I was told that she had saved the life of one of my cousins, who had been born with a cleft palate. It was not pleasant to look at a baby so afflicted. He had great difficulty even in taking and swallowing food. His one rather cold grandmother had determined that he should be starved to death, because she regarded him as an undesirable member of her family. There was possibly some fear that it was a trait which could be passed to his descendants. Schwester Anna, who was called in to look after him, cared for him day and night and fed him lovingly. He finally could be operated on successfully, and grew into a healthy, lovely boy. Thanks to Schwester Anna there is another intelligent and good human being around, who is a credit to his profession, and who in turn helped many others human beings. His attachment to his old nurse has been lifelong.



Emma von Mendelsohn, painting the Russian ballet in her parents' tea house, after seeing it in Berlin around 1910.



Emma Witt - von Mendelsohn with her four children (Peter, Detlef, Mette (Margarethe), Evole in the early 1920s,
Photograph by Axel Heinemann, Jadinsthaler Strasse; an annual event.

I saw Schwester Anna regularly after my childhood, especially during the Second World War. At that time she was hunchbacked and crippled from arthritis. She lived in her "quiet corner", an apartment in Berlin, together with a number of single ladies, who retreated there between jobs. There they sewed garments for the poor. Whenever I turned up, she would prepare a special meal for me. At that time food was scarce, and I suspected that she had used her own short supplies and food stamps to treat me. I would always bring coffee, to which she was addicted, and if possible a bottle of Gilka Kümmel, her favorite liquor. At the end of the war she returned to her birthplace, by then in East Germany, to live with her sister Hulda. I sent her food packages and corresponded with her until her death in the 1960s. Until the end she delighted me with packages of old photographs of my family and with pictures of excursions and trips of long ago.

Schwester Anna presented a marked contrast to my mother, who had great difficulties in making decisions. My mother was unusually gentle. She became militant only when it was a question of opposing war. Her favorite words were:"Let us see", which postponed any decision. In essentials she was probably quite firm, but that did not appear in daily life. My mother's indecisiveness forced me early into my own decision making.

Here are two examples of decisions I had to make in my early teens: One day I told my mother, that we were too old to have governesses, that we were able to look after ourselves. She agreed immediately, and the last two governesses were dismissed. I am not sure how long they would have been kept, if I had not said anything.- Another time, when my school in Grunewald had become unbearable because of the antisemitism of a few pupils and teachers, I investigated going to another school.(see also chapter on "Schools"). I found a boarding school in Southern Germany that seemed exactly right for me, and I inquired about how and when I would be admitted. I presented the fully-formed plan abruptly to my mother. It was quite a shock to her, because we children had kept our difficulties from her, and it was the first departure from home for any of us. After very brief thought she agreed, and so in the fall of 1935 I transferred to Schule Birklehof in the Black Forest, a great change in my life. I was surprised that my mother agreed so quickly, but it showed me that she trusted in my judgment.

Schule Birkelhof in the Black Forest, 1936.

Perhaps more than in most lives, my mother was the center of our existence. She was always there, and she created the environment in which we lived. Part of her special background can be described by looking at her name: At her birth in 1890 in the old family house in Jägerstrasse, she had been christened Emma Clara Josepha Enole von Mendelssohn. The name Emma came from her paternal greatgrandmother Emma Biarnez née Bernardet, the wife of a Bordeaux wine-grower who wrote the book "Les Grand Vins de Bordeaux". Clara was the name of her maternal grandmother Westphal, née Mendelssohn, who was her father's aunt and the wife of the professor of psychiatry and neurology at the university hospital Charité in Berlin. Josepha is the female form of Joseph, and comes from her godfather Joseph Joachim, the violinist, pupil of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy and best friend of her father,- usually called "Uncle Jo". The name Enole came from her paternal grandmother Enole von Mendelssohn, née Biarnez, whose real name was Marie-Antoinette, but who was called the Basque diminutive for "little girl": Enole. She was the wife of my mothers' paternal grandfather Franz von Mendelssohn, a Berlin banker, who had been knighted by the emperor Friedrich III in 1888.

Of the four of my mother's grandparents, two were brother and sister and grandchildren of the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn; one other grandparent came from Bordeaux to Berlin; and the fourth was a scientist-physician in Berlin. The Bordeaux sentiment was strong: My mother's first wet-nurse made the same trip from Bordeaux to Berlin, because my mother's father slightly distrusted the milk of German women.(see also chapter on Family History").

My mother's names are indicators of the closeness and closedness of her world. Her family dominated her life until she escaped at the age of 61 by moving from her farm of Sankt Georgenhof, where more than 30 relatives lived as "permanent guests". She moved first into a small apartment in Bern, Switzerland. A few years later she moved again, with my wife and me, to America. Her characteristic remark at that time was:"Petchen, don't tell anybody at home; but I love it here in Syracuse!"

Emma von Mendelssohn never went to a public school; together with a few, selected girls of the neighborhood, she was educated at home. Private teachers, mostly from the University of Berlin, would come to Grunewald in their spare time and give high quality lectures. After finishing school, she began an apprenticeship with Dora Hitz, a women painter, an early collector of Japanese art, and an emancipated lady. In 1913 Emma married Felix H. Witt, a total stranger, with whom she had fallen in love. Until 1920 my father was mostly absent from Berlin, first in the First World War, and later with the Turkish Army. Between 1914 and 1920, 4 children were born to my parents, two girls and two boys. When my father returned to Berlin, he and my mother prepared for the building of their house in Grunewald. They were divorced before they moved into it.

rich → The sheltered and tradition-oriented life, in which my mother was supposed to grow up "like a lady", looks strange from the vantage point of today. She was expected to entrust most chores to her employees. As she loved her children above all, she encountered a contradiction between the things she really wanted to do most, and those she was expected to do. When she moved to Switzerland at age 61, she changed her hair-style,-which had been imposed on her by her father after the model of his mother,- so that now she could make her hair without the help of a personal maid in the morning. At age 66 she changed a diaper for the first time for one of my children, and she enjoyed that no end.- For me it seems remarkable that she conformed so long to a way of life which was imposed on her, and that she changed without difficulty at age 61, when that became possible.

Something in our daily life in Grunewald sheds additional light on those times. There were always a number of people, who would regularly, mostly once a week, keep us company at lunchtime (this being, in Germany, the main meal of the day). All these people were important to us, because they told about interesting lives they had led, though they had now fallen on hard times. Most were old, single ladies, highly gifted, and now lonely.

One was Tante Gaby: She had been the viola player in the Joachim Quartett, and she had traveled with her fellow musicians all over Europe. She could report on life at the Zar's court, or on meeting with Queen Victoria. I think she enjoyed herself immensely, when she sat at our table and relived her glorious past. When she died, she left to my mother a blue-enamel, diamond encrusted brooch that she had received from the last Zar after a concert.

Another visitor was Tante Eve, in her youth a friend of our Witt-grandmother Eliza, and like her of Spanish-German origin. She was witty and amusing, always brought presents she had made herself, like a glass of orange marmelade. She appeared to us like living history.

We children grew quite attached to all these guests, and we looked forward to their company. I believe now, that these invitations were deliberate efforts of my mother to provide support to lonely, old people, who sometimes had hardly enough to eat. It was done in such an unostentacious and dignified way, that it taught us children something about true kindness.

In later chapters other aspects of these early times in my life will be told, like life in school, love for animals, other people, including my father and our joint visits to the zoo. But my mother seems to have been the most important influence. Whether it is so for all children, I do not know. She created a world, which in retrospect looks like paradise to me. She had seen to it, that the lovely house was built, in which we grew up, and that the most exciting paintings of contemporary artists hung on the walls. She had selected the lay-out of the garden, in which I spent so much time and felt so happy. And she decided on the friendly company, which enriched our world. In her lively social life, her children stayed always the highest priority, directly followed by peace in the world, and by beauty and honesty in art. We experienced the results of things, which she did and did not do, and which guided us during growth and maturation.

Much from that time is forgotten, and memory has distorted others, but what is left forms the basis of life now, 60 years later. If I thought of the future at that time, I assumed that the world around us would stay the same, and everything would continue in the same framework. It is surprising how much was changed very soon with the rise of Hitler in Germany, the Second World War with the destruction of the Grunewald houses, and the post-war years. And still the early memories are the basis for my thinking today.

Tante Ele and her Family.

The memory which is told in this chapter may read like a myth or a fairy tale; this is the way in which I remember Tante Ele and her family. The three people in the tale are close relatives of mine; I saw them many times during my childhood, and even more frequently I heard stories about them and read in the papers, and later in biographies, reports on their whereabouts. More competent people may be able to analyze them from a psychopathological angle, or trace their turbulent lives to an abundance of inherited wealth or to too old a family with too much inbreeding. The mother may be called a pathological miser and malicious person, the daughter a nymphomaniac, and the son a homosexual. None of such labels seem to me to explain anything about the fascination and admiration, with which I experienced them. All three were outstanding artists, even if their characters and circumstances prevented them from ever becoming great performers; they led charmed lives, which ended sadly. This is the story of Eleonora von Mendelssohn, my mother's two times first cousin, her brother Francesco, and their mother Giulietta von Mendelssohn, nee Gordigiani. By now they are all dead, and they left no descendants; maybe this story will help to keep their memory alive.

There was a mysterious house and garden, bordering on one side on the property where I grew up (see Chilhood Surroundings). These were our only neighbors, because our garden was surrounded on two sides by the Hertha Lake; it bordered on the third side on the large highway "Koenigsallee", a continuation of Kurfürstendamm toward Wannsee and Potsdam, and only on the fourth side ran a tall fence of upright boards, on which espaliered fruit trees were trained. Across the fence we could glimpse the tops of tall trees and the roof of a large house on top of a hill. This magic neighboring property, simply called Herthastrasse one, was not completely foreign to us children. The inhabitants were relatives of ours, whom we met from time to time. We could cross the bridge over an arm of the lake into my grandparents' garden and turn left, and we would reach a small iron gate, through which we could enter Herthastrasse one. The gate was never locked; but we were discouraged from going through.

The original owner of the neighboring house was my greatuncle Robert von Mendelssohn. When my grandfather Franz von Mendelssohn bought in the early 1890s the land in Grunewald, his older brother Robert bought the adjoining land and built his house there.

14 years his junior

In contrast to Franz, who was 8 years younger, Robert had married late, a fourteen year younger musician, Giulietta Gordigiani. According to stories, Giulietta had been a mediocre singer, when Robert persuaded her to switch to the piano. This she played very beautifully and with fire. Her father had been a painter, the grandfather a composer, which indicates that she came from an artistic and talented family. Robert and Giulietta produced together 3 children, none of whom had offspring. One daughter, Angelica, died early, while the older two grew up to lead glamorous lives during the time I grew up.

Their father Robert had died in 1917, a year before I was born, and Giulietta had moved to her large villa in Fiesole above Florence; she appeared in Berlin only for an occasional visit. I remember some of her visits as major events, because Giulietta traveled in state, with a parrot and her personal maid Emma, and later with her young "boyfriend", the cellist Gaspar Cassado. When she was in residence, the house was lighted, and concerts and receptions took place in the evenings. I recall a concert in Herthastrasse 1 by Benjamino Gigli: He had sung in Berlin for a sold-out house the evening before, and Tante Giulietta made him repeat the concert in her house, so that my ailing grandfather Franz could also hear it.

When Tante Giulietta was not there, the two children, then in their twenties, lived alone with several servants in the grand house with its dark rooms, among beautiful paintings by Rembrandt, Cezanne and other great artists. My mother took us over to see the house of her absent cousins and pointed out to us the beauty of it.

When Tante Giulietta was there, the daughter and son, whom I regarded as very grown-up, were frequently in tears and went into hiding; this surprised me greatly. But in her absence, the two, when they were not on a trip or in their other house, a water castle in Austria, led rather quiet lives. One could read about their activities frequently in gossip papers or in a magazine like "Der Querschnitt", a copy of which with their pictures was recently given to me.

If the two could be said to have a profession, Eleonora appeared sometimes on the Berlin stage as an actress, and Francesco played the cello very well. There was never any doubt in my mind, that both were artistically highly gifted people; however they never lived the normal, hard-working lives which would have given them a chance to excel in their chosen professions. I think they suffered always from the consequences of an eccentric upbringing, and from having had very early nearly unlimited amounts of wealth and possessions.

In his own way Francesco was fond of animals; but there was some suspicion that he forgot them after a while and left their upkeep to the servants. Sooner or later a catastrophe would occur, and one had to get rid of the animals.- When we entered the magic garden through the small iron gate, we arrived in a dark passage of dense shrubbery and tall trees. Among the shrubs stood a heavy wire cage, in which a large hooting owl lived for many years. Usually the animal sat quiet and stared at us; it only turned its head toward the visitor. Frequently a dead chicken lay on the ground; this was meant for its nightly meal. The sight of the bloody bird added to the uncanny gloominess of the large predator.

At one time Francesco had acquired a herd of rare Afghan greyhounds. One day they succeeded in getting across the fence into our yard and killed all our guinea pigs. Apologies and restitution came promptly, and a new, higher fence was installed. I never saw Francesco together with his dogs, and I surmise that he had forgotten about them, long before they finally disappeared. But a small, lightbrown Whippet became our friend for a long time.

For several years, starting in the late 1920s, the neighboring garden possessed a special attraction for us: a large swimming pool. At that time a swimming pool was an extravagant installation; and I had never seen another pool in prosperous Grunewald. My grandfather had helped to finance the pool under the condition that we, his grandchildren, would be allowed to use it at specific hours. We derived enormous pleasure from diving off the board, and from swimming with our friends above and under water. At other times the area was strictly off-limits, and we rarely got a glimpse of the young and frequently famous actors (like Gustaf Gründgens, see his biography) and other elegant young men, who constituted the circle of Francesco's male friends.

For the winter months Francesco had established a special bathroom next to his bedroom in the big house. When we secretly entered on one of our exploring expeditions in absence of the owners, we discovered that the ceiling and all walls were covered with seemless mirrors, in which we could see ourselves many times, receding into the distance. In the middle of the bathroom stood an elevated antique marble bathtub, which was equipped with modern plumbing. We were overwhelmed, but had no idea what all this was for. Next to the bathroom was a special dressing room with huge cupboards filled with rows and rows of radiantly colored shirts in many colors. We were in awe of the extravagant life-style, of which we understood little, because at home we were brought up in the Puritan-Prussian tradition.

Francesco's older sister, called Tante Ele, was more familiar to us. She was a good friend of her first cousin's, my mother, and they visited back and forth. She was always friendly, but remained for me a person from another world, into which she presumably retreated, when we did not see her. Only once did I experience her on the stage in a Shakespeare play which Max Reinhardt directed in Berlin. I remember distinctly that during the performance I still saw her as my aunt, rather than as a foreign princess. The illusion intended in the play never caught me. I am not sure whether it was bad acting or my familiarity with her, which guided my judgment.

Tante Ele was very beautiful; in recently published books she is always called "The beautiful Eleonora von Mendelssohn". There were pictures of her in many places, and photographs in my grandmother's and my mother's private rooms. She was named after her godmother Eleonora Duse, the great actress, friend of d'Annuncio and of Tante Ele's father Robert. She looked a little bit like "Duse",(as she was called), particularly in a photograph over my mother's bed, which had Duse's handwritten greetings to my mother, "Emmchen". There was a large painting, the portrait of a lady by Sir Joshua Reynolds, in my grandmother's upstairs living room. For a long time I thought that this was a portrait of Tante Ele, though I am now sure that it was bought because of the painter rather than with a view of its likeness.

One summer in the late 1920s we spent our vacation in Tante Ele's water castle in Salzkammergut in Austria. At that time she had been married to and divorced from the Swiss pianist Edwin Fischer. After the divorce my mother visited her in Kammer, the water castle. When she arrived, the personal maid told my mother that Mrs. von Mendelssohn had just gone to the local church to get married again. The marriage to the administrator of the farm which belonged to the castle on her estate was obviously a sudden decision.

The second husband, Emmerich von Jessenski, was a very good looking, white haired, former Austro-Hungarian cavalry officer. We regarded him as a good friend for many years. Part of his fascination came from a story, that parts of his skull and one kneecap were made of silver. They had been implanted at the end of the First World War to cover wounds. Everybody liked "Onkel Jessie", when he appeared in his red velvet waistcoat with silver buttons under an elegant tweed jacket. He told wild stories about his adventures in a Hungarian accent.

This castle in Austria, where we spent our vacation, is still there. It is several hundred years old and very beautiful. It occupies nearly all of a small round island in a blue-green mountain lake, the Attersee. It had originally been built as part of a monastery, and the layout still shows rows of square and simple, but spacious cells.

Downstairs one looked through 18 feet of thick walls on all sides out on the lake and the far snow mountains. Most rooms were alike: opposite the window wall was a heavy wooden door, which led onto a wide corridor. This corridor ran on both floors all the way around the square courtyard, and downstairs it was reputedly wide enough to permit a carriage with four horses to be driven around. Hospitality was impressive: For instance, because there were so many identical bedrooms, each door had a number, and new guests were told to remember their room by number. Under each window in the thick wall was a sopha-bed, from which one could look across the lake to the mountains, and on the opposite end of the room was a curtained corner, which contained a modern bathroom.

Downstairs were large sitting rooms, a dining room, offices and an entrance hall. In the far corner of the hall was a water closet behind an ornate screen, and if one used the closet while somebody entered the hall, one had to shout a warning. This seemed to us children as sensible as it was unusual.

The year we visited, we were shown large wall paintings which had only recently been discovered and cleaned. A few years later a whole additional floor was found between the first and second floor, in which the owners during the Thirty Years' War had hidden their silver, carpets and paintings.

A long dam or bridge, probably successor to a draw bridge, connected the island with the surrounding country, where the farm lay. Agricultural land extended on both sides along the shore of the lake.

A special attraction of Kammer was the large herd of beautiful milk cows. They were stabled in long rows in a former refectory hall, where rows of columns supported the vaulted ceiling. At the end of the hall hung a portrait of Tante Ele's favorite steer, Caesar. The portrait had been painted by my mother and was a wedding present. It was probably the only animal portrait she ever did. There were stories about Caesar: His strength was so great, that no chain or fence could hold him. Whenever he decided to escape, Tante Ele was called. She was allegedly the only person who could lead him back into his stall. I am not sure whether these stories were based on fact; I never watched anything like that while I was there. But such stories added to our fascination with the place.

On many a day the large, light-brown cows would be brought over to graze on the island around the castle. It frequently happened that one strayed into a downstairs room and left a smelly brown pile on one of the Persian rugs. This occurred so frequently that nobody was any longer upset by it. It was more upsetting when a cow approached a guest who sat on an easy chair in the sun, and when it began to nibble on human hair. My brother and I were most amused, when we observed that a cow tried to eat our sister Enole's hair; when she exclaimed:"Peter, stop that nonsense", we felt nothing but outraged innocence.

The setting for living in Schloß Kammer was truly beautiful. Though it must have rained frequently that summer, as it always does in that part of Austria, I remember only sunny days. The castle was large, but very simple in its square outline around a square courtyard on the round island. An arch led from the dam through one wing into the courtyard, and one could watch from a window the arriving guests. There were 99 windows, a number which had something to do with a superstition about 100 or more being too ostentatious and, according to some reports, it had mattered in the old times with taxation; 100 or more windows ~~were taxed at a higher rate~~.

Tante Ele's guests were mostly actors, some like Elisabeth Bergner were very famous, others young and promising. In her recently published memoirs Bergner writes about Tante Ele admiringly, but also critical. There were also some writers and producers from Hollywood, the only ones I ever met. Interesting people were always coming and going. It does not surprise me that now, more than 50 years later, books about the 1920s and 30s mention Kammer and Tante Ele.

For my brother and me, except for two boys our age from Hollywood, there were no other children around. But we never seemed to feel lonely or bored. The grown-ups were friendly ~~to us~~ and left us alone, a state which we 4 Witt-children enjoyed. ~~The~~ two older sisters were well entertained by the celebrities with which they rubbed shoulders every day. My cousin Franz von Haimberger had decidedly different feelings: When he came over from Rindbach, where my grandparents and his parents had summer houses, he brought with him a large collection of corks from wine bottles. When we asked him about it, he told us that he had designed special games, which he could play in Kammer when it got too boring for him. I wonder why I still remember that insignificant conversation,- but it may be because it indicates a difference between him and us.

Our

We were never bored there...

I especially remember one day that summer, when Tante Ele came downstairs in the morning crying. All the guests were subdued, and many tried to get away for a day or two. It turned out that it was like in Grunewald, namely that Tante Giulietta, her mother, had arrived the night before. In her usual way she had screamed at the top of her voice, had criticized everybody and everything.- I recognized her as formidable, but I was never afraid of her. She was most impressive to look at, when she sailed into a room, and though there were numerous stories about her excentricity, she was always transformed when she sat down at the piano and played Chopin or Beethoven. When she poured her wild temper into the music, she became beautiful and even lovable. She was a great musician, who lived in the body of a less admirable human being.

my great aunt

After the summer in Kammer in the late Twenties, I saw Tante Giulietta only a few more times. Once she appeared together with her friend Cassado in my grandparents' house in Grunewald to play some music for all of us. After she had sat down at the piano, she asked Cassado something in Italian, and he left the room with a red face. We were told that she had sent him home, because he had forgotten to pull his woollen underpants on. The music began with a slight delay, but was greater than ever.

The last time I saw Tante Giulietta was in Berlin in the early 1930s. She was scheduled to accompany Cassado in a cello concert in the Singakademie, the concert hall where our uncle Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy had 100 years earlier conducted the first time the newly discovered Bach Saint Matthew's Passion. At that time Hitler already ruled Germany, and the Jews and other "foreigners" were frequently attacked in print and in person. Recently a boycott of Jewish shops had occurred in Berlin, and my grandfather Franz von Mendelssohn had visited Hitler, to tell him about the outrage of the Berlin merchants. He tried to prevent more damage in the future. Franz had inherited the office of "Ältester der Berliner Kaufmannschaft" (Elder of the Berlin Merchants), and as such he spoke for many others. Hitler had told him, that he had nothing to do with the boycott, and that Goehring alone was in charge.

The concert was billed with Giulietta's full name "Giulietta von Mendelssohn-Gordigiani", and there was good reason to believe that it could be interrupted and she attacked. Immediately the family banded together and rallied around Giulietta and Cassado, bought up most of the concert tickets, and got ready to protect them. I remember arriving with my mother, sister and brother at the Singakademie that evening. We found ourselves surrounded by cousins, aunts and uncles, and even distant relatives filled most of the seats. The rest of the crowd seemed sympathetic.

Tante Giulietta marched upright onto the stage, followed by the less bold Cassado. The music, f.i. Beethoven, which they played against the backdrop of defiance, sounded exceptionally beautiful to me. I believe that I can still hear some of it with my inner ear. The applause was deafening, and they left the stage upright and slowly. I remember that she stumbled briefly, and everybody held his breath. When she stood up again and departed, the audience was convinced that they had attended the farewell of a queen.

After that evening I never saw Tante Giulietta again, but stories about some of the difficulties she had with Mussolini, while she lived in her house in Florence, reached Berlin from time to time. It appeared that she always had gotten the better of the dictator.- Once she had received a telegram from her son Francesco,- the two communicated only by cable,- that he had a tapeworm. In her answer she indicated that it was most important for any treatment to watch the elimination of the "head". This was obviously interpreted by Mussolini's secret police as a plan for a plot against the "head of state". Police appeared at her gate. It was told, that she threw them out quickly and successfully.

My uncle Robert von Mendelssohn, her nephew, attended her funeral and reported about the reading of her will. She was known to be still very wealthy, particularly as she spent less and less as she grew older. It was said that she had only three dresses now, which she alternated ~~in wearing~~. Her numerous Italian relatives appeared for the reading of the will in the hope that they were to inherit. As it turned out, she had left her husband's Stradivarius cello to Cassado, and everything else went to a home for poor artists in Florence. She shocked and surprised the world one last time!

Tante Ele I saw several times more after the summer in Kammer. She was particularly fond of my grandmother, her aunt, who had for years substituted as loving mother, and whom she called "Tante Mieze". My grandmother always had time, love, and good advice for her wild niece. Each time I saw her, Eleonora looked different from the time I had seen her last. Once I saw her beautiful, dark-framed face heavily made-up, and the long, black hair was tinted red and cut short. She looked to me more like a clown than an Italian beauty. Her talk was subdued, but with sparks of the old spirit. It was said that she abused morphine heavily.

By that time she was long divorced from Emmerich von Jessenski, and he had received Kammer as a farewell present. Tante Ele moved together with her brother Francesco away from Hitler's Germany and Austria, to New York, and there she ~~met~~ saw frequently "Onkel Jessie", her one-time husband, who had in the meantime married an American heiress.

As Tante Ele's new husband and Onkel Jessie's new wife were in the habit of getting up late, the two were said frequntly to take breakfast together.

An aunt of mine, who visited Austria many years later, told about a house concert which she had attended at Kammer. There appeared the now very old Onkel Jessie with his American wife as the owners of the castle, and they were proud to show a child, which they had had together.

News about Tante Ele came now from America on roundabout ways, because of the war. One day ~~there~~ appeared at my grandmother's doorstep the well-known German actor Rudolf Forster, who had just come from America via the only open way across China and Siberia. He told her that he too had been married to Tante Ele and was already divorced again. He brought special greetings from Tante Ele to her favorite aunt.

My older sister, Margarete, called Motte, had moved to New York in 1935 in order to marry ~~there~~ Heinz Schneider. They were both from Berlin, but were not allowed to marry in Germany, because of Hitler's racial purity laws. Heinz had a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father, Motte 3 Jewish greatgreatgrandparents. They decided to marry in America, and my grandfather had written before the war to a banker friend in New York, who offered a job to Heinz. The two got married over there in 1935 and lived in New York thereafter. Motte saw Tante Ele frequntly, and they became friends. Motte's first daughter was named Eleonora. In her last marriage Tante Ele had married a Berlin friend of her brother's. This fourth or fifth husband ended his life by jumping out of the window of her apartment.

One of the last stories we heard about her was that she had given Toscanini out of enthusiasm over a wonderful concert her Cezanne painting as a present. She was generous to the end.- She died in New York shortly after the war; it may have been from a drug overdose or through suicide: I never knew for sure.

In the end Francesco was the only survivor of the family of three. He had spent years in a private New York psychiatric hospital, to which he had been committed allegedly to protect him from the police, who had spotted his friendships with young men. When he finally got out, he got married to his woman therapist, and the couple outlived his mother and sister.

These are brief snatches gleaned from my memory, some only remotely related with the other, presented without special order. Fragments are put together in the hope, that they might recreate in the reader a picture of three people I admired, and who are all dead by now,-of times long past,- and of places mostly far away. The picture can only be incomplete; still, I hope that the reader was fascinated by the magic, which it all had for me. Here were three people, which, in the words of Baudelaire,"threw their souls into the four winds", and lived full lives with great height and depth. I loved to watch them, read stories about their extravagant pursuits, their generosity. I find the world a richer place because of the memories that I have of Tante Ele and her family.

Animals I Knew and Loved.

Although all living matter has been for me a continuous source of wonder and delight, animals have always seemed even more wonderful than plants. Animals have played an important part in my life. They were my property, and yet not my property. No one can "own" other living beings,- one rather enjoys their company and proximity, and one may have the privilege of looking after their welfare. Many animals have been housed and fed by me over long periods of time.

My enthusiasm for animals is of a particular sort. I have always enjoyed reading about them, their needs and habits. I added to that my own observations, and quickly became an expert on the species. Intimate knowledge is the first step toward love.

~~Man~~ People and animals can relate to each other in many different ways. I can imagine the excitement ~~about~~ of going out into the woods and wait for hours, until a rare bird appears. To watch nature in its undisturbed setting seemes sometimes interesting, but has no high priority in my leisure time.

Nor have I joined with enthusiasm the group of animal collectors and classsifiers. Somebody can get excited and publish a paper, in which he describes a newly discovered species, which presents a variation on a well-known theme. According to Darwin's reasoning on the origin of species, the discovery of a new type adds a link to the ancestral tree of animals and thereby forms an important addition to our knowledge of the development of the species. However, when I worked with spiders I was satisfied with investigating two different species in thirty years; no great effort was made to identify and classify their relatives.

Mainly two aspects of animal life have caught my imagination: I enjoy breeding animals, preferably over many generations; and I like to watch and analyze their behavior.

Fascination with breeding, particularly for dogs and horses, is not a rare interest. Occasionally the practice has been carried to absurd lengths, producing finally animals hardly able to survive; some beautiful bulldogs have great difficulties in breething; Bedlington terriers have nearly died out because of ear troubles, caused by their narrow, sheeplike heads.In my years of dealing with goats, my own breeding objective has always been a combination of characteristics: milk production, robust bodies, good looks and gentle behavior. One without others seemed insufficient.

Behavior-,of special interest to me,- is defined as the manner in which the whole living being conducts itself, mostly in response to a stimulus. To watch behavior one watches the animal in various situations,- sometimes under man-made challenges,- so that one can draw conclusions on the functioning of inner drives and nervous codes, which the organism may have acquired in its earlier life or is born with.

Usually we see the result of both, inheritance and experience. To isolate one from the other, we wanted to find out in my laboratory what role experience plays in the complex building of a geometric orb web by a certain spider species. Several hundred offspring from one spider couple, having presumably similar genes, suggesting similar inherited behaviors, were divided into groups. Each group was raised in a different way, with different experiences. It will be reported later whether we found differences in the webs between groups- the webs being records of behavior. It is here only mentioned as an example of research into inherited behavior.

When I raised goats, I always selected those animals for breeding, which had outstanding milk production, strong and healthy bodies, good looks and gentle behavior. This was not always done by other breeders.

But most of all, beyond the questions and the experiments, I have loved animals,-individual animals. I think I can find an influence in that direction starting when I was a small boy. After my parents were divorced in the early 1920s, my sisters, brother and I,- still a little boy,- visited my father every weekend, as decreed by the divorce judge. We spent nearly every week an afternoon with our father in the zoo,- our father's pleasure and ours too. As frequent visitors and shareholders of the zoo,- we had each received a zoo share from our father,- we began to know most animals very well, and almost as well their caretakers.

One special friend was Mr. Liebetreu (translated literally as Love-Faithful), who took care of the chimpanzees. As soon as we arrived we would ring his bell, and he came out to conduct us to the cages. It must have looked strange to other visitors to find us 4 children at play in the monkey cages. We considered that we had reached the height of acceptance and pleasure when one of the chimpanzees stole my younger sister's hat and carried it up to the highest perch; we discussed the event for years after. Perhaps these early visits account for my lifelong feeling of being at home with animals and of being able to approach them without fear.

Animals play such a role in my memory, that I remember a specific animal frequently longer and better than a person; when somebody tells me that he has met me before, I sometimes remark inconsiderately but candidly that I possess a poorer memory for human faces than for animals. Perhaps it is a matter of genes: I find animal lovers and keepers in my mother's ancestry and even more in my father's; perhaps no mystery: my father's family bred Holstein cattle for about a thousand years (see chapter on Family History). It is almost a characteristic to be assumed, or at least anticipated in my relatives.

On a lecture trip many years ago I came to Vancouver on the remote West coast of Canada. I knew that a paternal first cousin, Doris Witt, lived there. I had only seen her a few times in my life, but wanted to use this opportunity to visit. She was the daughter of my father's oldest brother and had been born in China and lived there until she was in her teens. When I telephoned, she invited me to her house. It lay in a long, residential street, with narrow houses on both sides. As I entered the street, it struck me that one house stood out from the others: animals played on the front lawn and looked out of the windows. Of course it was my cousin's residence; she was as ardent an animal lover as I.

The first animals in my care were small fish kept in an aquarium; I tried to breed them. One of my cousins, an old hand at breeding these tropical fish, gave me a few guppies for my aquarium and warned me that I could expect living offspring soon; they would not lay eggs. In anticipation I studied books about tropical fish, their feeding and living conditions. I remember well the first babies: I saw tiny fish falling from the mother's belly to the gravel floor of the aquarium. I raced to my grandparents' house to fetch my cousin, so that he could advise me what to do. I found him sitting with the whole family at the midday meal. His reaction to the exciting news could be summed up:"So what!". Since then I have watched many animals giving birth and found that they can very well take care of it by themselves.

Corner of my bedroom in Grunewald with bird cage and aquaria.

My brother Detlef and I with several of our guinea pigs.

After the success with the guppies and their live offspring, I turned to some more difficult to breed tropical fish: the beautifully displaying Siamese Fighting Fish and the large Angel Fish. Plants and aquaria filled my bedroom and the playroom.

Probably at the suggestion of my stepfather Wäuchen (see other chapter), who also liked to have animals around, I began to breed rabbits. The first couple consisted of a black and white "Belgian Giant" male and a grey, large female. They were housed in a special small room in the basement. The female soon became pregnant. Every animal had to have a name at that time, various famous people were considered as godparents. I choose the names of two famous comedians, whom my older sisters admired very much, and who played a prominent role in Berlin society in the twenties: Max Pallenberg and Fritzie Massary. My two sisters were admirers, and so were easily teased by the irreverent diminutives I chose for the rabbits. "Palle" and "Masse" mated happily in the basement, and Masse gave birth to 12 babies, for whom I somehow was unable to provide names,- followed soon by grandchildren of Palle and Masse. To my great surprise I learned that my now old and cityish grandfather Franz von Mendelssohn had bred rabbits for many years when he was younger.

After these initial successes, my brother and I became quickly experts in guinea pig breeding. The animals had their enclosure in a remote corner of the garden, next to the "Little Grass House"(Grashäuschen); this was a tool shed with grass growing on its flat roof. It was where the various long garden ladders were stored, and so it was a rather long building. We had a good sized pasture on the roof for our guinea pigs and rabbits, from which they could not escape. We climbed up by means of a short ladder, pulled up the ladder and watched our animals graze- all of us in peace. I have fond memories of the hours on top of the little grass house. One of the animals I remember best from that time was"Männchen im Frack" (little man in tails), a male guinea pig, mostly black, but with a white chest.

As offspring arrived, our holdings increased rapidly. We began systematic breeding as the Witts had done with their Hollsteins centuries before, bringing together males and females with desirable characteristics, producing young whose offspring could be even more assuredly anticipated.

We had received through exchange and gifts:1. 2 wild guinea pigs from South American friends our age, who lived on a farm near Berlin, and 2. animals with long (Angora) or curly (Rosetten) hair. All went well until a fatal setback. The Arab race dogs of my next-door uncle Francesco von Mendelssohn (see chapter on Tante Ele and her family) jumped over the fence and ate most of our little guinea pigs. Our uncle offered to buy us any new guinea pig we wanted; we had lost our enthusiasm and terminated breeding.

Soon came the change to a bigger, but also much more frustrating animal. My stepfather suggested a visit to an acquaintance, a Hamburg importer and dealer in large animals. There I selected without much hesitation a single male Dorkas antelope, a small and very beautiful gazelle of North Africa. This species with its large, dark eyes, slender body and distinctive markings is so beautiful, that according to reports Arab ladies look at them when they are pregnant, so that their child will also be beautiful. Just two days ago I read that this animal is now also on the list of endangered species, having been caught and exported in unreasonable numbers.

We built a shelter with a sliding door, which my mother decorated with a painting of us two brothers with all our animals.

We discovered that we could safely let the antelope out into the large garden. There it raced around at high speed, punctuating the run with a series of high jumps in which all 4 legs came down together. After this romp the antelope peacefully returned to its small enclosure. There it waited patiently for another day of freedom.

Though we lived in Berlin surrounded by roads and houses, the large gardens made forgeting the outside world easy. Visitors had to pass between the garden gate and the house along a treelined avenue. One constant visitor was barber Walther, a small hunchbacked man, who shaved my grandfather every morning and reported the news. Dorkas was on one of his races around the gardens one morning when barber Walther arrived to make his usual placid walk from gate to house. As soon as he saw the racing animal, he became frightened and ascended a tree. When I arrived, I saw him clinging halfway up to the trunk of a large pine. It was difficult not to laugh while I helped him to the ground. I apologized profusely for the misbehavior of my animal. But even this many years later it seems like a funny picture, the barber clinging to the tree while the graceful little animal raced past, probably never noticing him. As far as I know, the barber was later killed in the bomb raids of the Second World War, like many of the people which I knew as a child.

The fate of the animal in the end was rather sad. Over the years Dorkas became increasingly aggressive. If he was free in the garden, we had to carry a chair to fend him off when he attacked. The animal was sufficiently small and light, that it became no real danger, and even a child could hold him back. There was no possibility of breeding with this animal; females were not for sale. One day a dog got into its enclosure and bit it. The deep wound on the back never healed completely, and the antelope finally died. By that time everybody had gotten rather tired of the embittered, lonely male. I should probably never have brought it home into an unsuitable environment. It provided much pleasure and beauty during several years, but the experience taught me to be careful about the selection of animals to keep.

Overlapping with the antelope I got my first dog,- the first in a long line of dogs which passed through my life. It was a thoroughbred, maybe slightly decadent, German Shepherd (or Alsatian) with a long line of distinguished ancestors. His mother carried the elegant name "Princess Freia von Borsfelde"; the father was a police dog. It came as a surprising present from my uncle, Robert von Mendelssohn, who must have learned by that time about my interest in animals. I saw it as a particularly nice gesture, ~~as~~ since to the best of my knowledge he never gave ~~nobody~~ anyone else ~~ever~~ a dog. or anything else?

Apis and I in Grunewald around 1930.

The training of Apis was my first chance to apply the ground rules of training that my father had given me. One interacts with the animal, guessing its potential and interests, and slowly gains ground in getting it to do what one wants. His Sealeham terrier, who lived to be 18 years old, was a model of casual obedience. The animal should behave free and easy, but follow reasonable commands, when they were given seriously and ~~were~~ stressed as important. I find it important that the dog does not obey slavishly. There should be a voluntary and free interaction between dog and man.

Apis and I took long walks together, and it was the first time that I came to know many small streets in the neighbourhood where I had lived all my life. We played together, and we enjoyed each other's company. It was a sad experience, when the dog got sick. I nursed him day and night, but there were none of the vaccinations in existence, which now save dogs' lives. When Apis died, I had lost a good friend. My father had always warned me that one outlives nearly all ones' animals, but that knowledge was not a consolation. It did not make it any easier.

My father liked animals of all kinds, but he was particularly fond of parrots. He collected not only living large and small parrots, but also their likenesses in china and other materials. He had a special set of plates painted in Nymphenburg depicting parrots after Buffon's 18.century Natural History. His most memorable parrot was Coco, a large Ara with a long tail in red and other radiant colours. He recognized his name and could pronounce it easily. Coco liked to be tickled on the neck. He used to lie on his back on the sopha,- an unusual position for a bird,- and ~~said~~ say distinctly:"Coco, Köpfchen kraulen" (Coco wants his head scratched).

Coco's wings were regularly clipped in order to keep him from flying away. Once we arrived at my father's farm-Biesenthal, East of Berlin- to find great excitemnent and firemens' ladders in the courtyard; it turned out that my father had forgotten to clip Coco's feathers, and the bird had flown through the window onto the roof of one of the houses. As I recall it, the bird encouraged the firemen with loud screams to come for him, but when they were almost within reach he flew off. The incident ended without damage either to men or bird; and Coco survived to live a long life.

The sequential report on animals in my life is now interrupted, so that the role which horses played throughout my life can be told. According to Buffon's predarwinian Natural History, horses are the animals closest to man; I agree. They like to be trained; the more one rides a horse and the more one trains it to perform specific steps and figures, the healthier and happier the animal appears.

The role which horses play in our daily existence changed very much during my life-time. When I was a child, horses were integrated into our daily lives. They were everywhere, from the stables behind our house to the horse-drawn wagons of the milkman and iceman. Now, 60 years later, one can live contentedly for years, without ever seeing a single horse.

There were stables with horses close to my grandfather's as well as close to my greatuncle's house in Grunewald, where I grew up. Though greatuncle Robert von Mendelssohn had died before I was born, his horses were maintained in good condition while I grew up, and the old stable master Adrian would ride out with them every day. When he saw one of us children, he would stop, tip his grey hat and talk briefly with us.

Robert's special love had been for Irish thoroughbreds, a rather heavy breed with clipped tails, who were especially good for pulling light carriages. He was supposed to have pronounced that it was more difficult to drive well with a fiery, highbred horse , than to ride on it's back. His stables were known for their extravagant marble walls and floors and for modern plumbing; horse droppings could be immediately flushed away. In the last months of his life, after a stroke had paralyzed him, his horses had to be brought every day into a special riding ring under his bedroom window.

Adrian, my greatuncle's stable master, was our first riding teacher. He was at that time probably about 70 years old,- or appeared that old to me,- the little boy. But he was ageless in appearance, because he walked,- or rode,- with a straight upright back, and rumour had it that his oldfashioned mustachio was kept dark with daily application of shoe polish.

According to him the proper way to sit on a horse was always upright, hands held in front at a fixed distance of one hand's width from the saddle pommel and the neck of the horse; the legs and the behind of the rider had to be always so tight in the saddle that 10 Mark bills shoved between body and leather would not slip out, even if you gallopped or jumped. From time to time this test was actually performed. The proper dress was always a hard round hat, tailored tight jacket with white plastron filling the opening and tailored trousers, which ended in made-to-measure high riding boots. My first own riding boots were discards from my grandfather, which had been made for him many years earlier. I wore them for several years.

I can still remember the discussions and controversies when we changed instructors. A young lady from a Prussian officers' family and a very good horse woman, Margot von Werthern, began to teach us new and evidently revolutionary methods of riding. She was a friend of my uncle, the younger Robert von Mendelssohn, and he backed her assigment strongly, while my aunt Enole von Haimberger was loudly in opposition. We had abandoned Adrian, who may have gotten too old, and we received several lessons a week from Margot von Werthern. Suddenly we were supposed to appear in open shirts and loose trousers, we would even wear low shoes; we were now mainly taught how to move with the horse. For example one had to move the upper part of the body forward or backward, if the horse climbed up or down a slope, so that our weight supported the proper pair of the horse's legs. This was seen by Tante Enole as the end of the old world order, where posture had meant everything and terrain was negligible. I found more ease and fun in riding the modern way,- and it was probably better for the horses.

As my greatuncle's horses got old and were disbanded, and as my grandfather lost interest in riding, we began to go to stables where horses were for rent. One such place was Paulsborn, which lay in the middle of the Grunewald forest.We went there by bicycle several times a week. The riding time was now measured by the hour, and we were never sure which of the horses we would get on a certain day. I liked the new arrangement with the horses less than the one before; but it still provided me with many happy memories of riding in pleasant company through the Grunewald; or we were trained for dressage in the ring.

On weekends we could go by streetcar into town to the public "Tattersall des Westens", where dressed-up people rode to the music of a band. For this occasion formal dress was required, and many ladies still rode side-saddle ~~position~~. I found the occasional"music-riding" and conversation from horse to horse very enjoyable.

In another chapter I report on the acquisition of Sankt Georgenhof by my mother; this farm in Southern Germany had been a place for horse breeding. After most of the breeding stock had been sold, a few pairs of horses were kept in the stables for pulling the coaches. I remember with nostalgia a black, relatively high horse called Iris, and its brown and black companion called Ekirnelia; both lived to a ripe old age, and I rode them, and drove them before the carriage, until the late 1950s many times.- The strange name Ekirnelia came from a custom by breeders, who tried to combine the mother's and father's name in the foal, so that the name identified its parentage.

Later my mother's younger brother stabled for several years his Arab brown mare in Sankt Georgenhof. She was bred to an Arab stallion in the nearby "Württembergischen Landesgestüt" in Marbach, and gave birth to a lovely foal called "Pumu". I would gladly give up some present comfort, if I could once again gallop with this mare "Scelene" over the meadows and along wooden paths on Schwäbische Alp.

Iris and Ekirnelia made a good pair for pulling a wagon, and when I returned from the war in 1945 (see chapter on "The End of the Second World War") I used them to bring grain to the mill and collect our flour. At that time there was no gasoline available, and one found nothing strange in driving overland for several hours to procure food.

One special instance remains clear in my mind, when I drove on a wintry day with a sledge and the two horses to the nearest railroad station to pick up a visiting friend. It was a drive of several hours, and after I arrived, I had to unhitch the horses, so they could be fed and watered. The friend had gone to sleep in the train and had missed the right station. I finally found him, and it was night when we started for ~~the way~~ home. We had packed straw into the bottom of the sleigh to keep the feet warm, we were wrapped in fur-bags up to the shoulders and wore woollen caps; ~~and~~ for inner warmth I had brought along a bottle of home-brewed appleschnaps, from which we took a swig from time to time. There was no other traffic on the snow-covered road, and we sat behind the trotting horses under the clear, star-spangled sky, snow banks on both sides, listening to the clop clop of the horses' hoofs and the rhythmic clang of the bells on the harnesses; whiffs of horse fragrance wafted into our cold noses. This drive through the winter night became an unforgettable highpoint of my life with horses. No motorcar has ever provided a similar experience for me.

All this was possible, because several years earlier I had received a thorough education for driving horses; I had actually taken an examination and received a certificate, which confirmed that I had learned to drive one, two or four horses,- from the coachbox or from horseback. As reported elsewhere (see chapter on "Labor and Military Service"), I joined the first military unit in Frankfurt an der Oder in 1937, as a volunteer for service in the horse stables. I had guessed at that time that the military might be more enjoyable if one could work with horses: clean their stables, feed and train them, and to be trained by them,- rather than lay cables for telephones or learn how to use machines for wireless transmission. The two latter activities were more prestigious and assumed to be less work, and all my acquaintances had opted for these. I am still glad that I opted in favor of horses at that time.

Sascha, Frankfurt an der Oder, 1938.

Our horses at work in the military service, 1938

In the beginning of this new career I made a minor mistake: when the drill sergeant asked whether I had any previous experience with horses, I answered "yes; for many years I had been frequently on horse back, riding through the Grunewald." I received promptly the nickname "the Sunday-Rider from Grunewald", which was to indicate a genteel and somewhat snobbish softness of my horsy past. However, I outlived this name very soon, and became a full member of the group of soldiers who spent two thirds of their time cleaning and feeding horses and using them for riding and driving. Never before or later in my life have I been in such close and constant contact with horses, and I enjoyed every day of it. There was a great advantage over the experience with the rented horses in Paulsborn; I was put in special charge of one couple of horses, whose care and training was my full responsibility.

Two such horses are still well remembered; they must be long dead by now. I am convinced that I would recognize them immediately, if they would cross my path again. Their names were Pascha and Nestor, and while they made a well-matched team, they were quite different in looks and temper one from the other.

Nestor was the more quiet and gentle animal, well-proportioned, with a dark-brown body and black tail and mane; he was inconspicuous among other horses. Pascha, in contrast, was a striking beauty, lighter brown than Nestor, with a white nose and four white pastern joints. His head was beautifully carved, and he held it vertical on a gently curved neck; when he entered the riding ring, ~~his~~ sight of him would take everybody's breath away. Nestor was the one who was easier to ride, because he moved in smooth paces, while Pascha was more of a dancer, who was in the habit of lifting his feet higher than necessary in trotting around the ring.

When we pulled the small military cart, from which the telephone cables were laid, 2 to 3 pairs of horses were assigned to each cart. The rider would always sit on the left horse, and he would hold the reins for the right horse, to guide it along. Pascha, Nestor and I were mostly assigned as the hindmost pair, because my two horses were rather heavy. On maneuvers in the vast training grounds outside Frankfurt an der Oder we would sit all day long on horse-back; at night we slept outside, next to our horses. It was a wonderful experience.

There must have been around 80 horses in the long stable, where we worked every day. I knew them all, and I always had a few favorites, even if they were not my special responsibility. I will never forget a horse named "Peter", a gelding from the well-known East Prussian stud farm Trakehnen, whom I admired above all. He was meant to be ridden by an officer and as such he was far above my reach. But there were occasions when he had to be exercised by a little stable boy like myself, and I never missed that opportunity. Riding Peter, or even watching somebody else put him through his paces, was an experience I would never tire of.

After one year in this "horse paradise", I was assigned to a medical military unit, because I became classified as a future doctor of medicine. There were again opportunities to chose the military unit, in which one wanted to serve. I always selected the one with horses. This gave me an opportunity to be near the animals, and the medical orderly who accompanied such a squadron had to go on horseback too. When German troops invaded Poland in the fall of 1939 and France in 1940, I participated on horseback. Later on in the war the use of horses was more and more phased out. To ride a horse had become only a relaxing occupation for moments of free time,- no longer a daily routine. However, I still grabbed at every opportunity to ride; and I remember many such occasions.

After the war there was neither time nor opportunity to ride. Very few horses were around any more, and my beginning career in teaching and research at universities claimed all my time. However, a strong inclination to be near horses remained with me; in the late 1950s and early 1960s there arose a new opportunity to ride at least vicariously,- we at last had a chance to keep one or two horses,- or ponies,- for my growing children, first in Syracuse, New York, than in Knightdale, North Carolina. This is the story:

When we emigrated to America in 1956, we bought a sizable old house in the village of Manlius, outside Syracuse, with about one acre of land. The backyard bordered on agricultural land, which a few years later was put up for sale. We bought a piece of land adjoining ours, part of which could be used as pasture and part for growing trees.

As luck had it, we and our two still very young daughters, were good friends with the neighbors, who had children the same age. Behind their house stood an old barn, which could be used as a stable and for storing hay. When I talked to the neighbors, the Davisons, they turned out to be enthusiastic about getting horses for the children. It was around 1960 when we all went out together to look at nearby horses and ponies, which were for sale. We came back with two animals, a pregnant, lightbrown mare with dark mane, which was named Susie, and a darker pony for the Davison girls.

Susie, who was between a large pony and a small horse, was called a Welsh pony, but was not pure bred. She turned out to be excellent for riding. Our older daughter, Elise, became quickly a devoted horse woman. When a foal was born, all children sat on the fence of the enclosure to watch the event. I enjoyed now from horses from a distance: we went to meetings of the Pony Club, worried about feed, care and veterinarians. It became an important part of our lives.

Just a few miles South of Manlius, where we lived, were the lovely hills of Pompey. They were the Northern rim of a mountainous ridge, from which the plains stretched toward the "Great Lakes". We acquired a piece of land on the Northern slopes of those hills, and we began to dream to build a house up there, where the view was open across many miles to the North; in the foreground was the city of Syracuse, spread out as on a map, and on clear days one could just recognize beyond Onondaga Lake the shimmer of large Lake Eerie. The small flock of horses and a donkey (see earlier in this chapter) was brought up there in spring in an expedition, which resembled an Alpaufzug in Switzerland; in fall they were all brought back to the barn behind the Davison house. All participants in these events have still fond memories of those expeditions.

When we moved in 1966 from Syracuse in the Northern part of the United States to Southern Raleigh, I took the horse Susie and our donkey Paul along in a trailer,- together with dogs and goats, house plants and paintings. We stopped over night outside Philadelphia, where friends had procured a fenced pasture, which belonged to Bryn Mawr College. All animals were unloaded for the night and reloaded the next morning. Only the donkey refused to enter the trailer again, and we struggled for at least an hour until he decided to come along.

Any stop for food or gas along the way was greeted by the locals with much curiosity. They heard the goats bleet, the dog bark, or even occasionally the piercing hee-haw of the donkey.-On our new Knightdale farm stables had been built in anticipation of the arrival of the animals. The neighbor, Mr. Wilder, had as a surprise spread bedding of dry leaves throughout the box stalls. Everybody, and especially I and my accompanying scientist-friend, was very relieved when the animals had been safely led into their new stables.

There is a last, very brief encounter with quite another aspect of a life, where horses interact with men. In the 1960s I had been invited to lecture in a college in Saratoga Springs, a place better known by its race course than by its educational institutions. I found the small town in Upstate New York to contain large mansions, which belonged to wealthy families from New York City and elsewhere, which were only occupied during the racing season. The college faculty, however, was interested in horse racing all year round, and at the dinner, which the president gave in my honor, the talk revolved exclusively around horses. It turned out that many members of the faculty owned horses or at least shares in race horses and were obviously heavily involved in betting. It provided me with a short glimpse into another role, which horses play in human lives; but it was only a fleeting impression.

This ends the story of my relationship with horses. I still enjoy to see a horse show; or I like even more to observe beautiful and high-bred horses gallop across a pasture. But there is neither the necessary strength nor nimbleness left in me to interact closely with them. Horses in general have gone in my life-time from being indispensable helpers- to becoming only a hobby for the few, who can afford them and are enthusiastic enough to keep them. The images of my favorite horses remain with me, but only in dreams and phantasy. And when my older daughter reports on the pleasures of riding, I understand her feelings well.

The story now returns from dreams about horses to life in Grunewald around 1930. At that time my bedroom began to contain more than fish. I had branched out into reptiles and amphibia. For example turtles, with their slow and unaggressive way of life, appealed to me.

I found support for my view of turtles in "Grandville's Bilder aus dem Staats= und Familienleben der Thiere" (Political and Family life of Animals"), a French 19th century political satire. In this profusely illustrated book, each animal species represented particular human strengths or weaknesses: greed, vanity, restlessness, gentleness...It was a gift from my father, who must have selected it because he liked it, and its theme fascinated me for a long time and shaped my thinking about animals.

In Alexander Platz, in the very middle of the city of Berlin, there was a shop located on the top of a multi-story apartment house. The shop consisted of many long greenhouses, each kept at a different temperature, containing rare reptilia and amphibia, often newly imported. It was a magical place.

There were of course always new species of turtles. Water turtles I had in large number because of their liveliness, but there were many others, like box turtles and Greek land turtles. For a long time five Greek land turtles were my traveling companions, kept in a box and let out to graze whenever the car stopped in a suitable place (see chapter "Travels"). They ranged in size from Nikolaus (the largest and presumably oldest) through Klaus, Nikoläuschen, Kläuschen und Läuschen,- the latter a tiny young animal.

Nikoläuschen ran a way one day when we were staying in Sankt Georgenhof. I was unhappy about leaving without him, but he just could not be found. A day after our arrival home in Berlin, a telegram from Georgenhof announced,"Nikoläuschen found in the Glasthal!" (Glass Valley), and in a few days more Nikoläuschen himself arrived, waddling cheerfully out into my waiting hands. I can still see in my mind's eye the print of this telegram of fifty years ago, and I am sure that I would still recognize Nikoläuschen.

As can be imagined, feeding and caring for the animals became more time-consuming and complex as the little zoo grew. I spent one or two hours every afternoon in these tasks. School friends who were interested and whom I liked best were invited to witness the feeding, and were even allowed to take a hand in it.

My first efforts at breeding birds were more successful than I could wish, too much of a good thing. I bought some Zebra Finches, brightly-colored little African birds, supplied them with various natural fibers like coconut hair, and watched as a couple wove a covered nest in a corner of a large cage. It was not possible to look into the nest, but the long absence of either male or female at any time indicated that one of them was sitting on eggs.

One morning I awoke to a high-pitched sound I had not heard before, the peep-peep of baby birds. It was very exciting, and I fastened a rope across my bedroom to cordon off the birds so the maids would not disturb them when they came to clean.

In a very short time the young birds were nearly the size of their parents, and were cruelly pushed out of the nest. The reason soon became apparent: There was already a new set of eggs, and room was needed. The cage began to be crowded, so I gave some birds to special friends, and a couple to our chauffeur. With the next sitting I began to experience some difficulty in making gifts of birds, and before long, although they were rare and beautiful birds, it became impossible to find takers for the surplus. Further breeding had to be stopped. I now notice with some amusement that all the pet stores have Zebra Finches.

Berlin was a city particularly friendly to animals, if that is to be judged by the animal pet stores to be found at many street corners. When I visited the city long after the end of the war, most of the monuments I had known as a child had been destroyed, but I found off Kufürstendamm as many little stores selling birds, fish and other animals as I had seen in my youth.

I have already described our regular trips with my father to the Berlin Zoo. There I first saw a species of animal that I again encountered much later on a different continent, recognized, and then bred for 30 years. The zoo's director, Professor Heck and his son were very enterprising; in addition to exhibiting rare and exotic animals, they brought faraway peoples and their customs into Berlin. In the late twenties, there was an exhibit in which Africans with widely extended lips (Lippenneger),- extended by the practice of inserting disks in the lips,- sat in front of thatched huts weaving baskets, painting and making pots. To render the scene as authentic as possible, Nubian goats played with children in the midst of chickens and pigs. That was my first encounter with that very special breed of goats with their long pendulous ears and low fronts. It may sound silly, but I immediately fell in love with that breed; it was love ~~on~~ at first sight!

A great shift in time and place occurred before we met again. The place was Upstate New York, at the State Fair in Syracuse, where I lived after emigrating in 1956 with my family to the United States. Thirty years had passed, but I immediately recognized the animals as the breed I had last seen in the African village in the Berlin zoo. They were being shown by a woman who was the wife of a physician; she was extolling their milk for its contribution to the health of her Dalmatian dogs. I was not attracted to the dogs, but the goats fascinated me again. I lived in a countryish setting where it was possible to consider breeding large animals. The woman, Mrs. Durant, had no goats to sell, but she thought that there might be extra kids the following Spring.

Throughout the winter of 1956, while I built a shelter and enclosure in my backyard, I telephoned for news of the goats. Finally word came that enough young goats had been born to allow me to have two of them. My wife and I drove four hours to the goat farm, and there we found the herd as beautiful and friendly as hoped for.

But I found that one of the goats intended for us had a misshapen ear. Though we were assured that it was not a genetic trait and would not appear in her offspring, I declined sadly but firmly to accept it,- sadly because my dreams of breeding Anglo-Nubians, so close to reality, were to be postponed. I was then and am still surprised at my willingness to seem unkind and unreasonable, but my firmness was based on my intention to breed goats for a long time to come, and to begin with the best animals possible. In any case, my refusal was not taken to be unreasonable. We departed for lunch, promising to return to negotiate again. When we got back to the farm, we were offered a different goat, and so in good time we happily set off with the two animals in the back of our four-door Chevrolet.

From the very start of the trip, they sat peacefully on the back seat ruminating. We stopped for tea in the center of a small Upstate town, leaving the goats in the car with the windows slightly open for air. When we left the restaurant half an hour later we found assembled around the automobile a crowd that was being entertained by our goats. They had stuck their heads out of the window and soon were in communication with passersby. This was our first experience of what became familiar later, the mutual attraction of people and these lovely and unusual animals.

Schwärzi und Bräuni had lived with us some time before they showed signs of longing for male companionship; so we put them in the car again and drove to a stud farm in Fabius, a small community South of Syracuse. Mr. Harris was an experienced farmer and animal lover, and he soon had them bred with a buck we had chosen for them. He also provided us with a baby donkey that lived out its life of twenty-seven years with us. These visits with goats were repeated often over the next ten years until we were sufficiently prepared to keep bucks of our own. We never had more than three, but now people came to us to breed their goats.-There were also goat shows at Fabius in which we entered our animals and won prizes; our children and those of the neighbors had fun showing the animals.

I continued to search for a pure-bred, strong and good-looking young male to serve as permanent buck. I contacted many breeders, and finally found a woman in Shenandoah Valley (we had moved to North Carolina by this time) who seemed to have animals I wanted to examine. She agreed to drive half the distance to meet us.

She brought along several handsome animals of different coloration, but the moment I saw Patrick and his reddish-brown coat, I knew that he was what I wanted for the future of my herd. I have always regarded the certainty with which an animal is selected as one of the innate characteristics of a true breeder. In any case, we bought Patrick then and there, and he supplied us with beautiful and vigorous offspring for many years.

When we moved to the South, it became possible to keep the bucks widely separated from the does. This proved to be a simple measure to keep the milk free from unpleasant odors. So for nearly thirty years, we had a supply of fresh goat milk, and I had the goats as company for walks across the countryside. Each goat had a leather collar. I trained them early to walk with me, some on a leash, the others just walking beside us. Even as the herd grew, I found it sufficient to lead only two or three to keep all the others with me. These walks became the subject for a journal article I published entitled "Walking with Goats". Visiting friends were treated with particular distinction when they were permitted to come for a walk with all of us.

Goats are not grazers, like sheep. They are browsers, nibbling briefly on shrubs and herbs as they find them. I came to know their favorite plants, and so participate in the search for them. ~~At times~~ Once when travelling, ~~for instance~~ on a train in Italy, I became excited when I saw an abundant supply of my goats' favorite food, and leaned out the window perhaps as eagerly as they would have done.

Gradually the breeding of goats became of more than passing interest; after my retirement it became a profession- along with cheesemaking (to be described later). But fairly early ~~along~~, in the late 1960s, there was a trip of special interest.

The descendants of Bräuni und Schwärzi had become too inbred, and we were looking for a new female goat. I had heard that Mrs. Carl Sandburg, the widow of the poet and writer, would be moving from her farm near Asheville, selling all her goats. She had bred Nubian goats with the highest milk production ever recorded. I called, and she assured me that she would keep a nice female until we could come to get it.

So Inge, my younger daughter Mary, and a Swiss banker friend who was visiting us set off for the three-hour drive to Asheville. We toured the grandiose Biltmore house owned by the Vanderbilts, spent the night in a hotel, and the next morning followed Mrs. Sandburg's instructions to Connemara.

The house was set beautifully between old trees on a slope overlooking a valley in the mountains of Western North Carolina. It had a long history going back to the Indian wars. In the basement were holes in the wall through which one could shoot at attackers. Carl Sandburg was already celebrated,- had won the Nobel prize,- when he moved his family there from Wisconsin. Now his daughters and Mrs. Sandburg, who was originally from Luxembourg, were to move away, and the house was to become a national monument.

Mrs. Sandburg introduced us to her two daughters, who lived permanently with her, and showed us around the house. We were greatly impressed with its simplicity (very much in contrast to Biltmore house) as well as its beauty. On the white-washed walls hung large examples of the work of her brother Edward Steichen the well-known photographer. The furniture was simple, functional, though old and partially threadbare. Old wooden boxes served as chairs and tables. Everywhere there were books and mementoes of her husband's life. It was as elegant as it was simple and light; I understand it has been preserved much as it was then when it was still a private residence.

We felt quite at home. The white-haired Mrs. Sandburg immediately became fond of Mary and sat with her on the sofa and read stories to her.

The goat, when we finally came to see her, was a strong and gentle animal. While still at Connemara we decided to change her registered name from "Chikaming's Bellflower" to "Sandy". Like all our goats, Sandy climbed without complaint into the back of our car, where she sat down next to the immaculately dressed banker; on the long drive home she settled down peacefully with her head in his lap. He had never experienced anything like this, and as he was a kind and gentle person, himself, he was charmed by the animal. For years after, his letters from Bern mentioned the episode as the high point of his trip to America, and he always sent special greetings to Sandy.

Sandy occupies a special place in my memory as well. There was not only the story of her acquisition, but of her first difficulties in bearing young, together with a pseudo-pregnancy, her later production of the finest kids, and finally her death in old age (ten years for Nubian goats) after an enchanted life in which she brought much pleasure.

By singling out this animal, I do not intend to belittle any of the about 100 others that lived with our family at one time or another over thirty years. They cannot all be described, the beautiful does and bucks, the great milk producers, except to say that they were all remarkable animals and good company. There remain just a few things to say about the last goat years, before the goats disappeared from my life.

When I retired from professional work in 1980, I thought of doing something enjoyable for which I had not previously had time. We had lived for about 15 years on the farm in Knightdale. During that time I had shifted the farm program away from tobacco to the production of feed and bedding for animals. I had been breeding goats for 25 years, but beyond selling a few young animals, had not made that a business. I thought of using the milk for cheesemaking, and selling the cheese. By feeding the goats mostly with home-grown hay, I could minimize the amount of pesticide residues in the milk and produce a kind of model food.

There is a good bit of goat-cheese literature, mostly in French, and the literature had to be studied. There are many different ways to make cheese, and there are several hundred different end products. They can be reduced to a few basic categories running from soft, white, short-lived cheeses to hard cheeses with rinds. The latter are easy to store, and do not require immediate sale. Applying my science training, I experimented with various production methods, and established procedures for a reliable yield of good quality.

We had an opportunity for a taste (preference) test at the wedding of my younger daughter Mary in the Spring of 1981. The wedding took place at the Knightdale farm. Twelve cheeses were laid out on a long board, together with bread, knives, paper, pencil and a poster with this invitation:

"Pete's Cheese, made from fresh, certified, raw goat's milk. Please taste as many as possible and list on the ballot the numbers of the three you like best, then put ballot into box."

When the ballots of the more than 130 guests were counted, the results were clear: two cheeses were preferred above all others. Both were hard cheeses, made with the Cheddar method. These were the cheeses I chose to make for sale, and for several years they could be bought in Raleigh or picked up at our farm.

The end of the goat years came rather suddenly, but painlessly. In 1986 we decided to leave the farm and move into town. I had long before declared that I would give up farming when I was unable to lift a bale of hay or a sack of feed. The time had arrived.

Over the years, breeders over a wide area had learned about or seen my goats. I had never advertised; people just called when they needed a goat, some cheese, or milk. If I had anything that could be sold, I did not have to wait long for a call. So I was not surprised when one Saturday morning in 1986 two young men from the North Carolina coast called saying that they wanted to buy a goat. I told them that I had some for sale, and they arrived a few hours later. They looked at the herd of about 15 animals, and decided that they wanted to buy all. To help persuade me to sell, they said that I could visit the animals whenever I desired.

These men, whom I liked, seemed worthy new owners and breeders of my goats. I agreed to sell, the check was written, the goats were loaded onto a truck and I watched them disappear down the long driveway back to the road, never to be seen by me again.

The event was so sudden and unplanned that the same evening I walked with my milking bucket to the stables, as I had done for so long. When I found them empty, I realized once more what happiness it had been to live with those beautiful and gentle animals all those years.

-Before I finish my report on animals that became integral parts of our day-to-day existence, I must describe another group that enriched our lives for twenty years. The story begins with the purchase of a Guanaco in 1967.

I must first explain that a Guanaco is one of four species of South American animals related to the camel. Two species have been domesticated: the Llama as a beast of burden, and the Alpacca as a producer of fine wool. The third is the antelope-like Vicunha, and the last, probably the ancestor of the domestic animals, is the Guanaco, a large red-brown animal with a delicate grey head and split hooves. All of these animals could live in the North Carolina climate, and so it could also be supposed that they could be bred there.

One day we went to Asheboro, a drive of about an hour to the West, to buy some fancy ducks for our pond. Mr. Garner, a truck driver and lover of animals, also had a female Guanaco that he wanted to sell. The animal intrigued us, and Inge offered it to me as a Christmas present. I accepted it with enthusiasm.

Our plan was to bring the Guanaco home in a horse trailer and stable it provisionally with the goats. Later we could provide a large enclosure in the woods where it could run, jump and hide under close-to-natural conditions. As will be seen, our plans failed to consider the idiosyncrasies of this wild animal.

A horse-breeding surgeon living near us lent us his horse-trailer. At Asheboro, Mr. Garner acknowledged that he had with some difficulty enticed the shy animal into a barn and closed the door. We could look into the barn through a gap in the wall. The Guanaco, a large animal, lay flat on the floor, hiding its head in a small cardboard box, as close as it could come to concealing itself. This made me immediately like it very much.

It was an easy matter to roll the Guanaco onto a tarpaulin and drag it into the trailer, the head still in the box. It remained motionless on the floor all the way back to Knightdale. We backed the trailer up to the goat pen, and dragged the tarpaulin and the Guanaco into the pen. Surrounded by interested goats, it got up from its position in typical camel fashion, first backend then front, until it stood in full elegance before us, its head a little higher than ours. This turned out to be the last peaceful moment for a week.

The Guanaco stepped nimbly back from the fence; without visible effort it sailed over the five-foot fence in one graceful bound and galloped into the woods. We followed, offered a pail with feed, readying a rope for a lasso. No success. At best we could come close, but then the Guanaco would trot off with a few light paces. When darkness fell we had to abandon the chase.

During the evening we considered various measures for retrieval, assuming that the Guanaco would survive the night in its strange surroundings, without being shot (for instance). Inge suggested that we call the local radio station. The idea ws that they were to announce that a Llama (we had provided that name rather than the unfamiliar "Guanaco") was loose East of Raleigh, that it was a gentle, harmless, vegetarian creature, and that a reward was offered for its capture. The announcer did not get it entirely correct, but managed to imply that the animal must belong to some rather strange people. Who else would have a Llama!

For a solid week there was a daily newspaper account of the search for the Guanaco. It provided excitement for a wide audience. Many people telephoned, claiming to have sighted the animal. A woman reported watching it feed from the trough with her pigs,- she lived miles away, on the other side of the city of Raleigh. When the Guanaco finally was discovered, it was grazing in a field near our woods, probably where it had been, or not much farther away, all week.

On the seventh day after the escape I received a telephone call from Angiers, a small community South of Raleigh. It is, for reasons unknown to me, the home of several professional ropers, men who lasso animals such as cattle when they have to be retrieved after a summer's freedom on islands of the Outer Banks. The caller asked if he, as a professional, was qualified for the reward. I assured him that he was. Several hours later he called again and said:"Dr. Witt, I will bring you your Llama now!"

A little later a strange caravan came along our half-mile driveway. In front was a truck with dogs and (as we soon found out) the Guanaco sitting in the back. It was a Saturday, Mary and I were alone at home, and we observed, trailing behind the truck, people on horseback, on bicycles, on motorcycles and other sorts of transportation. The Guanaco was led into a covered boxstall from which there was no escape. The reward was handed to the roper in front of all these witnesses, among whom were a newspaper reporter and a photographer. The photograph in the newspaper clipping showed Inge and I looking over a wall at the Guanaco lying in its stall; the legend read:"Dr. and Mrs. Witt look with pride at their recaptured Llama." Having been front-page news for a week, the prominence of the final report was deserved. My notoriety lasted long; ten years later, Raleigh residents identified me as the man with the runaway Llama; and when I submitted the budget proposal for mental health research to the North Carolina legislature, I was again recognized as the person with the notorious Llama. I have always wondered, but can probably never find out, whether identification of me with the Llama had anything to do with the final approval of the budget I submitted.

A year later Mr. Garner offered, as a special opportunity, a pregnant Guanaco-Llama. Inge bought it. A few months later ~~there~~ was born a dark-brown male ~~looking~~ threequarters Llama and one quarter Guanaco. When it had grown, it mated with our original Guanaco, and year after year beautiful young were produced. We soon had a herd of black, brown, white and spotted Llamas. It was a special pleasure to have them come forward to feed every morning and night.

When the time came to give up the Llama/Guanacos, I discovered that their value had increased greatly. They had been "discovered" as pets. I read that Henry Ford III. had a Llama in his New York apartment, for which he had a special bathroom. They were useful for carrying loads for tourists and others in mountainous regions, ~~while~~ they could feed from vegetation along the paths. There were Llama rental stations in the Rocky and Blue Ridge Mountains. But there was a scarcity of Llamas in the country. Because of hoof-and-mouth disease, importation of South American animals was restricted.

To take care that my animals not be too inbred, I had made exchanges with other breeders, and I slowly developed a sizeable herd. Year after year dealers and private animal fanciers made increasingly high bids for my extra animals. When the day finally came for the departure of the herd, (once again, to the care of a dealer whom I particularly liked), each animal climbed peacefully into the back of the truck, and I was left standing with a check for several thousand dollars.

In the twenty years that the Llama/Guanacos had lived on the farm, they had shared a wooded enclosure of about two and a half acres with many other animals, some that could be bred successfully, others not.

One of the successes was my herd of European mountain sheep, or Moufflons. I began with five, acquired from Mr. Garner. We had to wait several weeks until he could round them up. Every spring each female produced one baby animal, and soon there was a thriving herd in the woods. They were good for the woods; they did not touch the bark of the trees, rather fertilized them, and the trees thrived to form a beautiful backdrop for all the animals. The abundance of sheep meant that rams could be exchanged for breeding, and the surplus animals sold.

The capture of the animals to be sold was not an easy matter: Moufflons are extremely shy, they run fast and they jump high. It was a case for the reappearance of the professional ropers of Angiers, the capturers of the Guanaco. My secretary would call the fire station in Angiers, where the ropers would appear sooner or later and get my message. Sometimes ~~the~~ a roper would come with his family, and two or three generations worked together as an efficient team. The animals to be sold were pointed out, and soon the rope was in the right place around the right animal as it raced between the trees.

I was less successful with some other species, as far as breeding was concerned. The American ostrich, Rhea Americana, once sat on some eggs, and a few hatchlings appeared but did not survive. The same was true for the Australian emu. Their grey or dark green eggs were good for eating, or blown out, good Christmas or wedding presents. Once, at a dinner ~~for which the guests were to provide some of the food,~~ I carried a plate of hard-boiled, sliced Rhea eggs. Each egg was equivalent to about 12 chicken eggs. I deliberately stayed nearby to observe the reaction to these oversized slices. Many of the guests came up, took a slice and walked away without comment or visible reaction. But finally one was struck by the absurdity of an egg of such size, and stepped back wondering aloud. ~~Others gathered around the table and joined the speculation.~~ I, the proud provider of the egg, now provided the explanation as well.

I had no luck with the breeding of Kangaroos. I had been offered three animals at a blood-research institute where I had lectured, and of course I was interested. We were at the wedding of a godson in Europe when a cable arrived to say that a baby Kangaroo had been born. It had been sighted- (by my mother-in-law, who had stayed home,)- looking out of it's mother's pouch. But it was not raised successfully.

In one way the whole Kangaroo-experiment was inadvisable. Their hopping, because of its unfamiliar motion, alarmed all the other animals and the whole enclosure was often wild with frantically racing creatures. It taught me the lesson that animals with very different characteristics might not get on well with each other.

A six foot high fence surrounded the animal enclosure. Only once did it fail to keep the animals inside. One evening when I went out to do the evening feeding I found all of them playing happily in the courtyard next to the house. My heart stood still for a moment: no one was home to help me recapture them, even if it were clear how this was to be done. In my mind's eye I foresaw another newspaper campaign, reporting now on many escaped exotic creatures. I decided to behave as always,- after all I was as much a creature of habit as the animals: I carried the feeding pail to the gate, opened the latch and walked into the enclosure. All the animals followed me in. While they were busy with their feed, I closed the gate and hurriedly repaired their escape route, a stretch of fence that had been flattened by a falling tree.

re-word

To many people it does not ~~seems not~~ surprising that one gets as fond of animals as I got of many of the ones I described. However, almost as a postscript, I must comment on animals which developmentally are much more remote from humans than horses or Llamas ~~or so~~. I was associated with them as a matter of a scientific career, but I also got very fond of them.

At the end of lectures about the web-building of spiders, I have frequently been asked whether I really liked those creatures. Fear and abhorrence is after all a widely-known phenomenon; it even has its own name: Arachnophobia. I have answered without hesitation:"I have come to like spiders as a class of animals more and more over the years; and I remember fondly individual spiders who I came to know during my laboratory research".

Over the years a number of mostly eccentric people have devoted their lives to the study of spiders. There is for instance the German count Keyserling who wrote a several volume definitive work, his magnum opus, on American spiders-- without ever leaving his castle in Silesia: his knowledge was gained from dead animals mailed to him by collectors.

In a similar vein, I once heard one of the foremost American spider experts exclaim:"But I have never seen a live specimen of this species!"

I do not use the word eccentric in a pejorative sense; over the years I have had occasion to attend many meetings of arachnological societies, national and international, small and large, and have found particularly nice people coming together through their common interest in spiders, be it classification, morphology, behavior or physiology. In such company one is likely to to hear stories about the value of spiders: for instance for the scientist who was freed from captivity when he learned to predict the weather from the behavior of spiders in his cell. That prediction permitted Napoleon to cross a frozen river for successful attack on a particular day. The prisoner was promptly released.- And it is sometimes recalled that during the British blockade following the French revolution, spider "silk" was gathered in sufficient quantities to fabricate substitutes for silk stockings.

Acquaintance with the spiders themselves provides opportunities to observe individuality of animals. Originally I had written names on box frames of my laboratory spiders, one name to a frame because of the animals' intolerance for sharing a box. The names were then replaced by numbers encoding origin, species, and birthdate. Sometimes there would be an escape from a cage, and morning would reveal a large beautiful web built across a corner of the laboratory. It was not necessary to examine the spider sitting in the center of the web; one look would suffice to declare, "D63 has got out of its frame again!" The web pattern identified the individual builder.

It is a long way from recognizing such individuality in construction, to understanding how the recognition occurs. It may not be unlike the process of recognizing a person by his face or manner of moving: we are unable to say how it is done. The geometric orb web of Araneus diadematus (the cross spider) is a complex pattern. Recognition of a familiar web is as if there were a rapid analysis of details like regularity, size, proportions, and the analysis were then compared with some inner standard pattern learned from visuual inspection of many previous webs.

This pattern recognition, the survey and selection of a great number of details, is a rapid function of the brain; we can attempt to duplicate it awkwardly with a computer programmed to compare a few measures. Those few, with the help of cluster analysis and other statistical procedures, sometimes allow us to objectively identify differences and similarities in webs. When that is done, we find confirmation of the impression that there is an individual pattern, varying slightly from day to day but retaining characteristics and distinguishimg one spider from another. The face changes over years but retains its individuality.

There even seem to be family resemblances, at least in webs of first and second cousins of our female spiders. The females alone reliably construct a web almost every day, providing a rich enough record upon which to build acquaintance. I became acquainted. And even for an animal so remote from man, I dare say that I came to count individual spiders among animals I knew and loved.

This closes an incomplete report on the many animals that made my life rich and enjoyable. I started with one aquarium of guppies, and now, sixty years later, I am left with one dog, my companion on walks twice a day. It is an Australian Blue Heeler, bred to work and obey. We enjoy each other's company very much, as I have enjoyed the company of so many other animals.

Appeals for money for the rescue of whales and other endangered species seem to me sometimes to strike a note of hysteria. Respect and love for other creatures certainly makes the world a better place in which to live, and I believe that Man, particularly successful in propagating his species, should now be concerned about the extent to which he has multiplied at the expense of the number and variety of others. But many times we can do very little to save an endangered species.

Father and mother Hinzels in Wannsee, 1945.

The End of the Second World War.

There are periods of time that remain particularly clear in memory; these periods are usually distinguished by events far from routine. For me, the end of the Second World War was such a period.

Our houses in Grunewald had been destroyed by bombs (see chapter on War), and the room that I had taken with friends nearby was in a part of the city that was under daily attack. After that I had lived for several months in a rented room, until I was taken in by a particularly nice family in Wannsee in the spring of 1945; this was during the last weeks of war. Wannsee lay to the West, apart from the city of Berlin, but with train and bus connections that still provided easy access to the city.

The father and mother of the Hussels family were physicians, thoughtful and good managers of their daily lives, liberal and humane in their view of Germany. The mother was half Jewish. I had fallen in love with the older daughter and considered to propose marriage to her after the war. On my recommendation, the two Hussels daughters had moved to Southern Germany to live with my mother and family in Sankt Georgenhof. There they were presumably safe, far from the approaching Russian army.

My military unit had been overrun by the Russians while I was on leave to finish my final examinations in the medical school at the University of Berlin. My military papers had been lost. I decided to get lost too,- a step that, if discovered, would have lead to certain death, probably by hanging from the closest lamppost. Such was the desperate situation in which Hitler's government found itself at the end of the war.

I burned my uniform in the furnace of the Hussels' house and put on civilian pre-war clothes, which I had brought with me from the ruins of Grunewald.

What I had done was not unique or even unusual. More and more German soldiers had decided to abandon the sinking ship and become civilians. On the one hand was the danger of being hanged on a Berlin lamppost, and on the other the prospect of being a prisoner of war in Russia. As we learned later, prisoners either were lost in Russia or were released only several years after the war. Of course I hoped that I could avoid both of these unpleasant possibilities. As much as this action interfered with my strong inclination toward orderliness and observance of law, the events of those years had taught me that there were times when risks had to be taken. As it turned out, I made the right move.

The Hussels had a one-family house that had been built in the 1920s. It lay in a large garden and had a flat roof with which I necessarily became well acquainted. Because houses were being searched for escaped soldiers, we had arranged a warning signal that could be given at the approach of danger; I would climb onto the roof and stay until our all-clear was given. The house was searched by

military patrols several times without success; the searchers never thought of the roof.

I had just finished medical school in December of 1944, and now I began to put my newly acquired knowledge to use. My war experience with the wounded in army hospitals and in the field also came to my aide (see chapter on War). There was the added advantage for me that a practicing physician would hardly be asked for his papers. The Hussels had taken possession of an empty villa (it had belonged to the Reclam family, well-known Berlin publishers) and converted it into a field hospital, where the victims of aerial bombardment and fire were treated. In the basement were improvised operating rooms where extensive first aid was given, and wounds were sterilized, bandaged and sutured. The upper floors served as sick rooms and for recovery, as much as that was possible under the circumstances. There was hardly any paper work, no administration to speak of, no organization beyond a system that insured that every patient who needed it got as much help and care as we could provide. Out of necessity we improvised all the time; if one compares it to a hospital in peace time, it was miraculous that this funtioned efficiently at all.

When I visited Germany about twenty years after the war, I learned that the building was still a hospital, but that it had by then been provided with all the materials and equipment that we at the earlier time had lacked.

Of course our work went on even during the bombing raids. I served as physician, as nurse, and as assistant to the older doctors. In this crisis, I was glad to have chosen the medical profession, to be able to help rather than to harm. It was one of those times when one was so much needed, that sleep, comfort and the rest of the world were forgotten. The last days of the war passed for me in detachment from "great" events and, in a way, in high elation at being able to be of such service. I did something rather than sit around and wait for a hit from the air.

Everybody in Berlin hoped that the Americans, who were to the West and quite close, would arrive before the Russians came from the East. We observed that the Americans stopped at the Elbe, but we were unaware that an agreement had been reached with Stalin to leave Berlin to the Russians.

It was generally believed that the American conquerors would behave with more consideration toward the conquered than would the Russians. This expectation was later found to be true, even if there were exceptions, as I will point out.

After an extensive shelling of Berlin from the East, the Russians arrived in the city; about a day and a half later they were West of the city, at our hospital/villa in Wannsee.

The bridge over the water passage connecting the small and the large Wannsee had not been blown up, and the Russians easily crossed it. There were foot soldiers, armored cars and, to our surprise, many little horse-drawn

carriages, called Panje-Wagen, loaded with dishevelled men. Stories were told of their lack of experience with implements of Western civilization: a soldier was reported to have washed himself in the basin of a toilet. There was probably some satisfaction in painting the victors as below us, the vanquished, at least in civilized manners. My busy post in the basement provided no view of these events.

As I remember it, when the first Russian soldier appeared at the Wannsee villa I was asleep, between operations. I had been hiding from the authorities for several weeks by this time, fearing discovery and execution. As the first Russian entered the basement, I awoke and recognized what had happened. I felt an enormous relief. Spontaneously, without caution, I embraced the soldier. My companions told me afterwards that they feared for my life at that moment. But the soldier did not interpret my action as an attack, and we all started to laugh in shared happiness. It also was the end of what had been 12 years of Hitler's regime of steadily increasing horrors.

In the following days and weeks the Russian occupation proved to be a mixed blessing. Soldiers were everywhere, going where they pleased. Once they even entered the operating room, poking their fingers at wounds and bandages, requiring explanations of what we did. I remember that once I slapped a Russian's hand when it approached a sterile area. After a moment's hesitation, he understood, withdrew his hand and left the operating room. This departure surprised everybody, but I felt that his action showed respect for something that was beyond solution by a show of power. In a matter so essential, we could understand each other across the barrier of language.

There is rarely a moment for modern civilized man when he lives without rules and regulations, when laws are not enforced by police or other public servants. Berlin and its 4 1/2 million inhabitants went through such a period in the spring of 1945.

The government had just collapsed. Strangers from the East, who spoke a different language, were in power. There was no communication between different parts of the country. Hitler, the autocrat who never delegated authority, had just removed himself through suicide. In the years following, I had a special opportunity to learn details of his final days (see later chapter), but in the spring of 1945 we knew nothing of these events.

Each of us was on his own and did what he believed to be right or advantageous at the moment. Some people took advantage of the situation and went wild, but as far as I was able to observe, for most people life went on as before. They followed rules that were no longer enforced from without, in one sense no longer binding. Let me give a few examples.

Wannsee was a Berlin suburb where many government officials lived. These government workers had been in the habit of leaving their houses for the city at the same hour every morning, carrying a briefcase in one hand. Punctually, at the end of the working day, the railway brought them home from the city. During the first weeks of the occupation of Berlin, I was surprised to see people--most people--leaving their homes at the usual time in the accustomed manner, and returning just as punctually every evening. The inner city was at that time a field of rubble; buildings had been destroyed or burned; government offices had been closed. I tried to guess what the commuters did during the day. Did they sit out their working hours on the ruins and piles of earth? Did they clear rubble? Did they search? A lot of time was spent simply commuting, but even so the whole middle of the day was left. I never found out what they did, but I suspect that for many the performance of daily routines persisted even when there was no longer meaning or content to the routines. I could even observe this practice of abiding by law and habit in myself and my associates.

(need for routine in chaos)

There was a large government air raid shelter in Wannsee, now open and accessible to everybody. It held supplies for the eventuality that the government had to flee from the center of the city. We discovered that paper money had been stored there. In the general disaster it had been forgotten. We shovelled it into bags asnd carried it away to the hospital, to be used to buy food and other necessities for patient care. As far as I know the money was never given back or even accounted for, but none of us had conceived of the idea of taking any money for ourselves. We had simply taken it for the hospital, but like the Berlin commuters we remained, as far as our personal needs were concerned, lawabiding and honest. This money kept its value for several more years.

in case

It was a time when one could choose to make one's own rules, and if sufficiently powerful and established, to govern others by those rules. Taking the law into one's own hands could be done benevolently or selfishly.

During my eight years in the labor and military service I had received a regular salary in addition to board and shelter, enabling me for the first time in my life to save a substantial amount of money. At the end of the war my savings amounted to more than 15,000 Marks, a tidy sum at that time. As the Russians approached Berlin, I became concerned about the money and gladly accepted an offer from my sister's husband to transfer it to his personal account in Southern Germany. He lived on our farm, established himself as the family banker, and saw to the payment of the daily bills of my mother, grandmother and a great number of aunts and cousins. Under the circumstances--he was not only my brother-in-law, but a first and second cousin to my mother--and quite apart from the question of whether the old currency would have any value after the war, transfer of my money seemed of little risk.

I never saw the money again. In good time it had been delivered and had been added to the large amount that my brother-in-law administered for the whole family; we of the younger generation referred to this jokingly as the "family pot". He decided that he would support each one according to need rather than according to original contribution. At the end of the war, he decreed that although my studies could be supported, I no longer had any right to a larger sum. Perhaps he did not realize that he profited indirectly from his procedure, since his wife and children were heirs to an enlarged "family pot", to which he had contributed nothing. Whether he did or did not recognize that fact, it struck me as an arbitrary and illegal procedure by the banker-bookkeeper to use the state of temporary lawlessness to dispense his own brand of justice. After that I strived to become financially independent.

With the end of the war, my work in Berlin had become less urgent, and I was restless. I still did not know what had become of my closest relatives and friends, most of whom had been staying at my mother's farm. Were they still alive?

There was another factor working to drive me from Berlin and the Russian occupation zone in Germany. I found it very difficult to live under the Russians: one could never predict what they were going to do next. The same people would be especially friendly one day, embracing me and inviting me to dinner, and the next day they would be most threatening. There seemed always the possibility of being transported to Siberia, leaving forever or at least for a very long time all that was familiar.

One particular experience made this fear prominent. I have told of Schwester Anna (see Childhood Environment), the old nurse who played an important part in my growing up. She now lived in retirement in a single room in the center of the city. I visited her regularly to find out what she needed, bringing food and other supplies. The bus service had been reinstated, and one morning on the open road between Wannsee and Berlin, the bus in which I rode to Schwester Anna was stopped by a Russian commando. All passengers were asked to alight and show their papers. They then were directed to mount a large military truck. When my turn came, I showed my papers and used what little Russian I had to convince them that I was a physician on a mission to reach a patient. I had learned the word "wratch"; that word, a few gestures, and the papers proved sufficient. I was not required to go to the truck. I walked back to Wannsee as quickly as possible, feeling very shaky and glad to have escaped transportation into the unknown. During the next few days, when it became apparent that people who had been on the bus were not coming home, I decided to leave Berlin and its Russian occupation as soon as possible.

A report of one more adventure may round off the many-facetted picture Berlin offered after the war, but serve also as another illustration of the preservation of ordinary habits in extraordinary times. Among the inhabitants of Wannsee were many musicians, professional and amateur, who decided that it would be a nice distraction for all of us to hear a good concert from time to time. The concerts took place in the elegant hall of a small house, which the banker Jacob Goldschmid had built for his girl friend. It had a large central hall, which extended through two floors, with doors into bed= and other rooms. It had been abandoned during the war, but stood beautifully furnished ready for just such an event as a concert. As in times of peace, and as we were accustomed, everybody shed his working attire and dressed up like for a concert in "normal" times. Most of us knew each other by then pretty well, and we conducted a conversation reminiscent of a peaceful tea party.

On the particular afternoon in question we sat listening to Mozart. It was a beautiful summer day, and the green lawn bordered by flowers stretched behind the window down to the lake. Suddenly through the picture window behind the musicians we could all see a uniformed Russian soldier approaching. When he reached the window, he lifted his rifle and shattered the glass. The music stopped; we all froze. The soldier stepped slowly through the destroyed window, crossed the room with its now silent crowd, and walked out through the backdoor of the house. In due time, we recovered and the concert continued. These concerts with their elegant audiences in a devastated and hungry city had always appeared rather anachronistic to me. But this scene, which I will never forget, epitomized for me the persistence of old habits in the presence of chaos.

Finally I made my decision and boarded one of the trains that left the city each morning. That is to say, I found a comfortable place on the roof of a passenger car. I carried a briefcase with some papers bearing my photograph, the place and date of my birth; I hoped that they would establish that I was an ordinary citizen. My military credentials had been burned, and passports no longer existed.

As the train neared the Elbe river, which formed the border between the Russian zone and the American/British zone of occupation, I climbed down and waited for the dark. Before I had a chance to slip across the river I was discovered by a Russian military patrol and thrown into prison. This was really a windowless dugout in the ground. After two days I was released, promising to return to Berlin by railroad. I realize now that efforts to prevent Germans from fleeing to the West, which played such a prominent role later, had already begun as early as that time.

My friends in Berlin were glad to see me back, but I still felt restless and looked for opportunities to escape. My longing to know the fate of my family drove me to another attempt. Rumor had it that a more Southerly course from Berlin--in the direction of Göttingen--was more promising.

As well as I can recall, I crossed the border into the West on the night of the 11th of August 1945. We know now that the second atom bomb was dropped on Nagasaki on August 9;- Japan surrendered shortly thereafter. I suspect now that there was probably a celebration going on at the guards, because I experienced nothing but a few shots, none of which hit me.

I had been exceptionally lucky in choosing to escape then and there. However, the passage was across a waterfall, which was not all that easy. The water of the small river ran across a horizontal tree trunk, and I was able to hold on to the trunk while I climbed across. Except for a complete soaking, which did not matter too much on a summer night, no harm had come to me, and I was now in the Western zone of occupied Germany.

There was still a considerable distance btween the place I crossed the border and Sankt Georgenhof. We had no public transportation, but there were freight trains. Though they were the only means of transportation, it was forbidden for passengers to use them. Usually one climbed on board when a train had slowed and no one was looking. A brotherhood of train-travelers had developed, but I was still an outsider and failed to communicate properly. In a Bavarian town, probably Augsburg, I was quite unexpectedly commanded to dismount. Everybody else had quietly left the train as we approached Augsburg, but I rode contentedly into the city.

I was promptly taken into custody by an American patrol that had the task to enforce the arbitrary local rules. The treatment was all but friendly. But I had no reason to be alarmed until I found myself standing with other "criminals" in the market place of the city, on exhibit, surrounded by soldiers pointing their guns at us, required to stand upright and motionless, with no idea of how long we would be kept there. We were apparently used as examples of the consequences of crime and law-breaking, however arbitrary and unpublished the laws. It felt a little like return to the height of Nazi tyranny.

I was told later, but was unable to verify what I was told, that the commander of the American troops in the town was Jewish, and that he used this opportunity to avenge Hitler's mistreatment of Jews. Perhaps this story was only invented to stir antagonism, but if it is true, it would be ironic that I would be one of the people chosen for vengeance.

In any case, I stood under guard for a long, unpleasant period of time. I carefully assessed my situation, and used a moment of apparent laxness in the guards to make my break for freedom. This bit of daring was probably an act of very desperation on my part, and it could have gone badly ~~wrong~~, if shooting had started. As it happened, I was pursued, and several times came close to being caught. Now, more than forty years later, I still have nightmares of pursuit by soldiers. In one near-capture, I hid between a cargo of tree trunks on a freight train. A soldier discovered me there. The face looking down on me was frightening: I had placed myself outside the law,- if there was any. Luck had it that he was still far enough away to permit my escape before he could descend.

Again I ran, this time down the slope of a railroad dam. As I did I saw a car coming along the road below the dam. As I approached, the car slowed, stopped, and several hands helped me to crawl in. We drove away quickly, leaving the soldier and the town behind. It still seems to me as if a miracle had suddenly happened.

It turned out that the people in the car were members of an international relief organization, engaged in helping victims of the war. I will always remember their friendly words, the chocolate, and the comfortable seat in the car, contrasting vividly with the situation just a few minutes earlier. It was like an escape in a fairy tale. Again I was forced to observe that in times of crisis both the best and the worst in people becomes apparent.

This is an opportunity to propose a hypothesis based on my observation of peoples' behavior in difficult situations before, during, and after the war. It seems to me that in normal times people are rarely called upon to make weighty decisions on good or bad, right or wrong. They may live out a long life without ever finding out what they themselves would do in times of danger. In the Germany of the 1930s and 1940s nearly everybody had to make such decisions, and that not only once, but again and again.

Must one, for instance, acquiesce in the isolation and mass-killing of Jews, Communists, mental patients, members of minority groups? Did one not have to stand up, risk comfort, risk life? And thereby also endanger relatives, friends? Might one not prefer to look away and deny any knowledge of evil happenings?- Or at least look away sometimes?

Most people are not really prepared to confront such questions. Nor do they wish to take risks. They persuade themselves that they have good reasons to postpone decisions. Maybe the evil helps to prevent greater evils in the future. There may be another opportunity to help later. Maybe no one will ever find out what they knew.

Very few people, pursuing their daily lives, want to be thrown in to the limelight, have their routine upset, risk anything, risk everything. Those who do stand and risk, to fight for right against wrong, are the heroes. They are themselves frequently surprised at what they do, at finding that they have more courage than they ever suspected.

I cannot find it right to condemn all those who never become heroes, those who close their eyes or look away. They do not belong in the category into which they are frequently put, into the same category as those who tortured, killed, and gave the orders to torture and kill. I see and hear journalists questioning now old people about why they did not stand up for right things in the past. The questions sound to me smug and self-righteous.

One wants to believe that one's friends or idols behaved heroically in critical times. But I do not find it in me to judge everybody who did not show himself to be a hero when the opportunity arose. Man is in my opinion made mainly for normal and peaceful life; most men are not ready for heroic decisions. They are just normal, average citizens and want to be left in peace. And if that is so, it is possible that in other circumstances, those who become monster-like might go to respected graves without doing anything monstrous.

The story of my adventures at the end of the Second World War is close to its end. After leaving the car with the charitable people, I walked across the countryside for several days. Most of the time I was in the company of others similarly in search or on their way home to relatives. We shared food and shelter, and we told each other our stories. Those who needed help in walking, received it from the others. As some would reach their destination and leave, others would join. I particularly recall a nun, in a situation similar to that of the rest of us, and with the same worldly worries. A few years later my younger brother would become a Benedictine monk, a fact as far away from my expectations as anything could be at the time.

I finally parted from the group only a few hours away from home. Only then did I find out that Sankt Georgenhof was in the French occupation zone, and that this zone could be entered and left without special controls. The French occupation force, and particularly its commander General de Lattre de Tassigny, were well known to my relatives; that had resulted in special treatment. So when I climbed from the upper Danube valley into the hills of Schwäbische Alp near Zwiefalten, I could discern the buildings of our farm, still well-preserved. More than thirty members of my family and friends were living there as my mother's permanent guests, and I was received with great joy. My mother had not heard from either of her sons for many months. It took many more months before my younger brother turned up too. As we learned later, he was at the time of my reunion with the family an American prisoner of war in Northern France.

After all I had gone through, I was not prepared for the normalcy of life on the farm. I had watched the destruction of Berlin. I had dealt with people who were sick, hungry, without warm clothes and almost without hope of ever living normally again. The looks and behavior of my relatives was most surprising. A great deal was made about proper dress for different times of day, including changing for dinner. The bell rang for meals, and we all assembled, expecting always several courses to be served by maids in uniform. The food was not exactly what it had been in peacetime, but it was ample and good.

Saukt Georgenhof; on the right, outside this picture, one other barn and the main house.

An indication of the ample resources of food at Sankt Georgenhof was the availability of mushrooms. I remember that I went into the woods with my mother to hunt for mushrooms. In an hour we had a sufficient number for a dinner for over thirty people. The delicious fragrance and taste are still in my memory.

One went for walks in the woods, read interesting books in different languages, had what we called in jest "educated conversations". My cousins and I criticized the way life at the farm was unaffected by the war, but as I now look back to that time, we may have been quite unjust. A striking contrast then existed between life there and life in the majority of German households, but there was really no significant change from the way it had been when we were growing up. It was as it had always been; time had just stood still.

A small sign of the reaction of the protected family to the events around was a strange behavior which one greataunt manifested: Every day after dinner she would take one or two slices of bread from the table and vanish with this into her upstairs bedroom; she murmured something about hunger at night. As a matter of fact she stowed this bread away for imagined emergencies under her mattress. When she died later, an enormous supply of slices of bread hard as stone was found in her bed.

There had been in my absence ~~also~~ one intrusion of the war into the daily life at Sankt Georgenhof, which was recounted for many years afterwards at the slightest provocation. One day a group of French soldiers of Moroccan origin had appeared, obviously with the intention of looting. They had gone through the bedrooms, raked the jewelry into bags, and one curly black-haired soldier had used a greataunt's comb to straighten his fatty hair. The owner of the comb never forgave him. The Moroccans stood the local men against a fence opposite a row of soldiers with rifles, as if they were to be executed. But nothing happened.- To everybody's surprise a few days later a messenger from the local French military governor appeared, and returned everything that had been taken with an apology. It had been a horrible experience for those concerned; but we younger people, who came from the devastated outside world, saw in it more fun than horror. Looking back now I find that we were rather unkind.

Only a look at the history of Sankt Georgenhof can explain how all this had come about, and why this happened. After the First World War the owner of a textile factory in the nearby town of Reutlingen had bought the old farm. It was located on a barren high plateau, the Schwäbische Alp, known for its rough climate and its loneliness--there were not even tourists. The new owner had commissioned the contemporary architect Bonatz, well-known for the ultramodern Stuttgart railroad station, to build a kind of

country estate that would not only be a farm, but a place to bring guests for weekend hunts.

The soil and the climate were also favorable for horse breeding, and Mr. Schradin, the industrialist, had started to develop a kind of medium-sized horse that could be used ~~for~~ both, for riding and for pulling light loads. It had been bred by crossing Arab stallions and heavy South German horses, and was called "Württembergisches Warmblut". It was hoped that the animal would be much in demand, and indeed at the beginning of the Second World War communication units in the German Army (in which I served, see chapter on wartime) needed such a horse. But by that time breeding at Sankt Georgenhof had been terminated.

My mother had bought the farm in the late 1920s on the advice of her brother Robert von Mendelssohn and of my stepfather, Bernhard Waurick (see chapter "Wäuchen"), who still had vivid memories of the inflation and deprivations resulting from the First World War. My stepfather always expected another catastrophee, and he wanted to protect us as much as possible. In Berlin Wäuchen, as we children called him, had piled up cans of sardines as supplies for difficult periods, and in Sankt Georgenhof there was nearly all that was needed to keep a large family going for a long time. At the time the farm was acquired, there were still over 100 horses in the stables, a beautiful herd of Allgäu cows, and many pigs and chickens. The fields and pastures supported a mixed economy, including a dairy, a butchery and a bakery. Electricity was generated and stored, independent from public facilities.

Sankt Georgenhof lay in its own valley out of sight of any other human habitation. Two private roads led to the nearest villages, Tigerfeld and Aichstetten, but it took nearly an hour to walk to either of them. At the end of the Second World War the signs on these roads were turned round, so that hardly anybody found the way from the main road to the farm. There was also a footpath through a long valley, called Glasthal; it led to Ehrenfels, the castle of our closest single neighbor, Graf Normann. -40 years later his grandson married my younger sister's daughter.

When we visited Sankt Georgenhof for the first time, the old administrator drove us around in state in a carriage drawn by two horses. The buildings of the farm, fourteen in all, were grouped around several courtyards in the middle of the property. There was the main house, contemporary and elegant; the overseer's house, the oldest and a very charming building; facilities for farm workers; stables and barns. All of the buildings had very large, long roofs that looked very beautiful against the green of the pastures, and gave the complex a uniform style. The roofs were designed to collect rain. Because there were no wells in the porous soil at the elevation of Sankt Georgenhof, water was pumped from the far away Danube Valley past several villages to the farm. In time of drought, most of the water was drawn off by the villagers; the farm then depended on the cistern containing the rainwater collected from all the roofs.

Wäuchen had installed his brother as supervisor of Sankt Georgenhof, and through his management the farm turned from a country estate for hunting into a self-sufficient enterprise. When the Second World War started, the farm was ready to receive my mother and her family, not only my younger sister with husband and children (the older sister was married in New York), but also many relatives who converged from all directions. At one time I counted 36 family members in residence. My mother, always peaceful and self-effacing, had moved into a little room near the entrance to the main house, where,- she confided,- she had at least privacy in a room of her own. Recently I talked to a friend, who had frequently visited Sankt Georgenhof after the war. He had the impression that my mother was one of the guests in the house of an aunt, who had asserted herself as the organizer of the household. In a later chapter I intend to report some of the difficult relationships in this crowded community.

Everything had conspired to create a closed society untouched by the events at the end of the war-- a society that seemed an impossible anachronism to an outsider like me, who had just gone through the destruction of Berlin. The fact was that we outsiders had changed, and that this society had not. It was as incongruous as everything in that period after the Second World War. After a brief stay on the farm, I moved to the near university city of Tübingen, where I continued my career, that had been interrupted by the events at the end of the Second World War.